

Papers on Presbyterian Topics.

SYSTEMATIC GIVING

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Giving is to be regarded both as a duty and a grace—as an exercise in which God is glorified and the giver blessed. The design of this article is to notice briefly the rules and rewards of acceptable giving. Before proceeding I would remark that the doctrine of giving is one of those subjects that are brought out with greater prominence in the Old Testament than in the New. The duty is there more frequently referred to—its principles more fully illustrated, and its practice more forcibly urged. At the same time, it is to be considered altogether independently of any peculiar form which it assumed under the Levitical Dispensation. It belongs to the original constitution of the Church, and was practised long before the Jewish nation had an existence. Many of the formal regulations of the Jewish Church, however, are worthy of attention and imitation.

The whole word of God is of use to direct us in this matter, and looking in the light of its teachings, at the general principles which underlie giving, and which apply to it in every age of the church, I observe:—

(1) That all gifts should be brought to the place of worship, and presented there as a part, and an act of worship. This law is very explicitly and emphatically stated in Lev. xvii. 3, 4, 9; and Deut. xii. 5, 6. Giving, as worship, is indicated in the prediction respecting the Messiah; "To Him shall be given of the gold of Sheba, prayer shall be made for Him continually, and daily shall He be praised" Ps. lxxii. 15,—with regard to the order in which these three devotional exercises are here stated, it is worthy of note that giving is the first act of worship recorded in the word of God: Gen. iv. The same priority is also indicated in the command: "Bring an offering and come into His courts," 1 Chron. xvi. 29. So important, indeed, was this exercise that on some occasions unless the worshipper brought his offering, his worship was unacceptable, "*None shall appear before me empty.*" Many passages might be cited to illustrate this fact, that the act of giving symbolizes the same ideas that other modes of worship express in words.

It is only an intelligent and exclusively religious view of it that will lead men to "abound in this grace." So far as we can learn there existed no means of enforcing the payment of the tithes; but no man who had any religion or conscience would be guilty of wilful and habitual neglect. The sacredness of the ordinance was the strongest motive to its performance. The principle was plainly laid down; "Every devoted thing is most holy unto the Lord," Lev. xxvii; 26-30. When we say that giving should be a voluntary, spontaneous act, we do not mean that it is