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Teaching Letter

The Final Four Conditions



Part 5/6

God's Abundance

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So far in this series, *God's Abundance*, we have seen that God desires to provide for His people abundantly if they will meet His conditions. Scripture indicates that riches—along with power, wisdom, honor, glory, strength, and blessing—belong by eternal right to Jesus Christ. Yet on the cross He gave up those benefits to participate in a divine exchange. In that transaction, Jesus took the curse, which was due to mankind by divine justice, that we might receive the blessing, which was due to Jesus by His perfect obedience.

One of the particular curses which Jesus exhausted was the poverty curse outlined in Deuteronomy 28. On the cross, He was hungry, thirsty, naked, and in need of all things. That is a description of absolute poverty. Jesus totally exhausted the poverty curse that we might receive "the blessing of Abraham" (Galatians 3:13–14). And what is the blessing of Abraham? Genesis 24:1 says Abraham was blessed in "all things."

We saw from 2 Corinthians 9:8 and Ephesians 2:8–9 that there are three important principles governing the way we receive the abundance of God's grace, allowing us to be blessed in "all things." First, God's grace can never be earned. Second, it can only come through one channel—Jesus Christ. Third, the only way we can receive it is by faith.

Many Christians fail to see that God's grace includes financial and material provision—if we meet the conditions He has set forth for receiving it. However, we need to keep in mind the distinction we cited between trying to earn God's grace and meeting His conditions.

1. Motives and Attitudes

In the previous teaching letter, *Meeting the Conditions*, after discussing the basic principles, we asked the question, "What are God's conditions?" We discovered that there are five specific conditions for receiving God's abundance.

The first condition is that our motives and attitudes must be right; there are five aspects of this condition which we examined in the previous letter:

1. It is wrong to make wealth our God.
2. It is wrong to seek wealth by unethical means.
3. It is wrong to trust in wealth.

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4. It is wrong to use our wealth selfishly.
5. We should share materially with the poor.

In this letter, we are going to explore the remaining four conditions, starting with number two:

2. Faith is Essential

The second condition for receiving God's abundance is faith. We have already seen that abundance is a part of the provision made for us by the grace of God. Like every provision of grace, it can be received only by faith. However, we can never overemphasize the importance of faith. It is the primary, indispensable requirement for leading the Christian life. "But the righteous man shall live by faith" (Romans 1:17, nasb1995). Every area of righteous living must be based on faith. This applies as much to our finances as to any other area of our lives.

Furthermore, the opposite also is true. "Whatever is not from faith is sin" (Romans 14:23). When we handle our money in an unbelieving way, it will lead to results that are sinful: avarice, stinginess, and even withholding from God that which is His due. The entire matter of how we dispose of our money must be based on faith.

Faith acts in obedience to God's Word without waiting to see the promised reward. This, too, applies to our finances. Jesus says, "Give, and it will be given to you" (Luke 6:38). When we act in faith, we give first. Receiving follows in God's time. If we wait until we can "afford it," we are not giving in faith. When we see this truth from the perspective of faith, we can never be too poor to give. On the contrary, part of the remedy for poverty is to begin giving in faith. When the widow gave her last two mites to the Lord, Jesus praised her for it. He did not rebuke her for being "extravagant" or "unrealistic" (see Luke 21:1–4).

We have already mentioned that there are laws that govern the utilization of money that are similar to those that apply in the realm of agriculture. Paul brings this out in 2 Corinthians 9. Speaking to Christians about the way they should give their money to the work and to the people of the Lord, Paul says:

> But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. (2 Corinthians 9:6)

Paul here compares giving to "sowing," and receiving to "reaping." His point is that if we wish to reap, we must sow first. The example of the farmer enforces this point. Every time a farmer sows his field, he is exercising faith. He is believing that the seed he is planting in the field is going to come back multiplied. It is precisely the same with our giving as Christians. If we want to reap, we first have to sow. Furthermore, the measure in which we sow will determine the measure in which we reap. If we sow sparingly, we will reap sparingly. If we sow bountifully, we will reap bountifully.

We can take the example of the farmer one step further. Sowing is not random scattering wherever we happen to be. If we were to walk down Main Street, scattering seed right and left into the gutter, we would not reap much of a harvest. Yet some Christians give like that. On random impulses, without prayer or principle, they just throw their money anywhere. It is no small wonder that they do not reap the benefits promised in Scripture.

Contrary to that picture of random scattering, responsible sowing means we select the best soil, we make the best preparation, we choose the right time, and we sow the best seed. That is precisely how we should handle our finances —both individually and collectively. We should select the best investment for the extension of God's Kingdom, we should make prayerful preparation, we should carefully follow the principles laid down in God's Word, and we should give of our best. In short, we should do everything in our power to secure the maximum return on our investment.

In Malachi 3:8–12, we find a number of related principles that govern our financial dealings, with special reference to the giving of our tithes to God:

> "Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, 'In what way have we robbed You?' In tithes and offerings. You are cursed with a curse, for you have robbed Me, even this whole nation. Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house, and try [prove] Me now in this," says the Lord of hosts, "If I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you a blessing such that there will not be room enough to receive it. And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, so that he will not destroy the fruit of your ground, nor shall the vine fail to bear fruit for you in the field,"

> says the Lord of hosts; "And all nations will call you blessed."

The following points derived from this Scripture are significant:

- Unfruitfulness in handling our finances brings us under a curse. In fact, it is part of the curse from which Christ offers us deliverance.
- As always in Scripture, faith is essential. We are required to bring our tithes before we receive the promised blessings. God says, "Try Me now in this," i.e., by bringing our tithes. This passage offers us no other way in which to qualify for the blessing.
- The act of faith that God requires is in the material realm, and the blessing He promises is likewise in the material realm.

I have been in prayer meetings where Christians pray, "Lord, open the windows of heaven and pour out a blessing." It sounds good, but I always want to shake them and say, "Listen, the blessing doesn't come by praying. It comes by tithing!" We can pray forever, but if we don't tithe, we have no claim to the blessing.

3. Honor With Finances

A third condition for receiving God's abundance is that we honor both God and men by what we give. Romans 13:7 tells us, "Render therefore to all their due: ... honor to whom honor [is due]." One important way to render honor is by giving of our substance. Scripture reveals four different ways in which we should render honor. First, by our giving we honor God Himself.

> Honor the Lord with your possessions [substance], and with the first fruits of all your increase; so your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will overflow with new wine. (Proverbs 3:9–10)

First of all, we are required to give God His portion—the first fruits. If we do this, He has promised to bless and prosper that which we retain for ourselves. To put God consistently first in the allocation of our finances is one way in which we give Him the honor which is His due.

Second, by our giving we honor our parents. In Ephesians 6:2–4 Paul reminds us that this commandment is the first one that carries a promise with it.

> Honor your father and mother, ... that it may be well with you, and you may live long on the earth. (Ephesians 6:2–3)

This commandment to honor our parents carries financial obligations with it. In Matthew 15, the Pharisees were criticizing Jesus for not keeping the traditions of the elders. Jesus in turn accused them of keeping the traditions of the elders but breaking the commandments of God. He gave one specific example:

> For God commanded, saying, "Honor your father and your mother"; and,"He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death." But you say, "Whoever says to his father or mother, 'Whatever profit you might have received from me is a gift to God'—then he need not honor his father or mother" Thus you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition. (Matthew 15:4–6)

Notice how we are to honor our parents: by giving them of our substance. If our parents are in financial need and it is in our power to help them but we fail to do so, then we are not giving them the honor which is their due. Out of long experience in counseling and deliverance, I can say with assurance that people who do not honor their father and mother never have it well with them.

Third, by our giving we honor the servants of the Lord who minister to our needs. In Acts 27 and 28 we read how Paul and his company escaped from a shipwreck onto the island of Malta. In due course, Paul began to minister to the sick on the island and many of them were healed. Then, when the time came for Paul and his party to leave, the writer says that those who had been ministered to in this way "honored us in many ways; and when we departed, they provided such things as were necessary" (Acts 28:10). By supplying the financial and material needs of Paul and his party, these islanders rendered to them the honor that was due them for their ministry.

Fourth, by our giving we honor the elders who govern us in the church. Paul says:

> Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor. ... For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox while it

> treads out the grain", and "The laborer is worthy of his wages." (1 Timothy 5:17–18)

Clearly the honor that Paul has in mind is financial and material. The more faithful the elders are in their duties, the more careful we must be to see that they are remunerated in a way that expresses true honor.

We see, then, that we show honor by giving in four directions: to God, to our parents, to God's servants who minister to our needs, and to the elders who govern us in the church. It is significant that in English we often use the phrase, "to pay honor." If the honor we give to God or to man costs us nothing, we are not giving real honor.

4. Right Thinking, Speaking, Acting

The fourth condition for receiving God's abundance is right thinking, speaking, and acting. First of all, I want to put the emphasis on thinking. It is impossible to think wrong and live right. Likewise, if you think right, you will inevitably live right. Note the instructions given to Joshua when he was to lead God's people into their inheritance:

> This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. (Joshua 1:8)

To me, that is the most complete promise of prosperity and success that a person could ever wish to receive. What are the basic requirements to receive it? Meditate in the law of the Lord. Speak the law of the Lord. Obey the law of the Lord. What we think, what we say, and what we do determines what we experience. I sum that up as follows: think, speak, and act God's Word.

We see an even more all-embracing promise in Psalm 1. In the passage in Joshua the promise is spoken to one man. But in Psalm 1, the promise is given without restriction to any person who meets the conditions.

> Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful; but his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in His law he meditates day and night. He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper. (Psalm 1:1–3)

Please read those last five words carefully! There is no room for failure there. Everything such a man does will succeed. What are the conditions for that success? There are three negative conditions and two positive conditions.

The negative conditions, the actions we must not do, are stated in verse 1. We must not walk in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stand in the path of sinners, nor sit in the seat of the scornful. Notice in that process that there is a gradual slowing down—from walking to standing to sitting. If we begin to walk in the way of the ungodly, then we will stand, and finally we will sit. At all costs we must avoid that evil progression from walking to standing to sitting. Yet there are Christians who regularly accept the counsel of the ungodly in many areas of their lives. Then they wonder why they don't prosper. They are violating a primary negative requirement: we must not walk in the counsel of the ungodly.

Following the negative conditions, there are two positive requirements. First, the successful man delights in the law of the Lord; second, he meditates in it day and night. If I were to pick out one prescription in Scripture that is absolutely central to prosperity, it would be proper meditation. What fills and occupies our minds will actually determine our experience. On the basis of meeting those five conditions, the Bible says of any person, "Whatever he does shall prosper." Right now, as you read these words, determine that you will be such a person! Then go back over the conditions again. Read them again and then meditate on them until they become a part of you. When that takes place, it will be natural for you to act according to these conditions.

5. Let God Add

Here is the fifth and final condition: let God add—in His way and in His time. Don't grab for abundance! Let God add it. It should be the same in finance as in agriculture. We plant the seed, but God makes the harvest grow.

I remember years ago when I was in Ireland. I heard of a little boy of six whose parents gave him some potatoes to plant. He went out and planted his potatoes, and a week later he was out to see if they were growing. There was no sign of growth. Two weeks later he still saw nothing, so he dug them up to see if they were growing. In the end, he dug

them up three or four times, and they never did grow! Some Christians are like that. They plant their potatoes and then dig them up to see if they are growing. The essence of faith is that we let God do it. We meet the conditions, but God fulfills the promise.

Deuteronomy 28:2 says to those who meet God's conditions:

> And all these blessings shall come upon you, and overtake you.

I love that word overtake. We don't run after the blessings; they run after us. I can go to bed at night and ponder on what blessing will have caught up with me by the time I wake up in the morning! In the same way, Matthew 6:33 tells us, "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you." We don't seek the "things"; we seek the "kingdom." Then God adds all the "things" that we need.

By way of review, let's list again the conditions we have outlined for receiving God's abundance. First of all, our motives and attitudes must be right. Second, we must exercise faith. Third, we must honor God, our parents, God's ministers and our spiritual leaders, by giving. Fourth, we must practice right thinking, speaking and acting. Fifth, we must let God add in His way and in His time. If we meet these conditions, we can be certain that God's abundance will overtake us.

In my next, and final, letter on this theme, we will be taking a look at the purpose of God's abundance.

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