

October - December 2017

# ARMOR OF GOD

CONTENDING FOR THE FAITH

## Remodeling Our Marriages

Obedience to God • Tithing and Giving • Christian Maturity

## “Without faith it is impossible to please Him...”

In Hebrews 11:6, we are told: 'but without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

'The just shall live by faith,' as Paul quotes Habakkuk (Romans 1:17, Habakkuk 2:4). Why? Why must we live by faith? Why is it important? Why can't we “just live”? Why can't we just live a life that is pleasing to God, without faith?

This is but one verse, but this one verse can make a whole world of difference in our lives. Let us attempt to understand this statement and see what lessons we can learn from it.

The writer of Hebrews clearly tells us 'faith' is necessary to please God. He also tells us it is the 'only way' to please God. By inference, we are also being told that one of our 'prime directive'—our goal, our objective—is to please God.

This being the case, to fulfil this objective, we need to have a good understanding of what is faith. “Now faith is the substance [hypostasis, assurance, confidence, firm trust] of things hoped for, the evidence [elegechos, proof, conviction] of things not seen.” (Hebrews 11:1). Faith comes from the Greek word Pistis, which can be translated into “belief, believe, moral conviction, persuasion, assurance, trust,” according to Strong's Greek Dictionary. By its definition, if we are to please God, the condition is that “we must strongly believe that we are going to receive what we are hoping for, even though we do not yet see it.” Simply, we completely place our 'trust in God, to believe in His promises.' Faith, therefore, is absolute confidence and trust in God, knowing He has the power and the intention to keep His promises.

It seems simple enough. God makes a promise, we believe in it. However, the simplicity fades when we begin to entertain ideas, or come across arguments that question the existence of God, or the reliability of God's written promises. And there's a whole world of those ideas and questions, including the day-to-day happenings in our very own lives, that make us doubt God's presence! It is one thing to believe in the words and promises of a friend we can actually see (and remind him of his promises from time to time), it is quite another to believe in the words and promises of One we can't actually see, or hear.

God did leave a trail of evidence concerning His existence, and proof of the reliability of His promises (the promises given to and faithfully kept, and fulfilled, proofs and evidence, to individuals such as Abraham, Isaac, Israel, David, the Apostles). And given the conviction, the sacrifices, the hardships these men were willing to go through, to keep their end of their covenant with God, there is not much room for doubt of the presence, participation and

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**Publisher:** Rene D. Corpuz

**Editor-in-Chief:** Elino S. Mellomida

**Writer:** Winston S. Co

**Contributing Writers:** Bill Watson

Ferdie Padilla

**Layout:** Cornelius Mellomida

### PHILIPPINES

Church of God International, P.O. Box 2450  
MCPO Makati City, Metro Manila 1264 Philippines  
Phone: (632) 995-0294 • Fax: (632) 995-0577  
Website: <http://www.cgiphils.org>  
E-mail: [cgiphils@yahoo.com](mailto:cgiphils@yahoo.com)  
Mobile: (63917) 811-6365

### UNITED STATES

Church of God International  
P.O. Box 2525 Tyler, TX 75710  
Phone: (903) 939-2929  
Website: <http://www.cgi.org>  
E-mail: [info@cgi.org](mailto:info@cgi.org)

### AUSTRALIA

Church of God International  
P.O. Box 171 Boonah, QLD 4310  
Phone: 011-61-7-5463-2949  
E-mail: [h-thaupt@bigpond.com](mailto:h-thaupt@bigpond.com)

### CANADA

Church of God International, 1299 Oxford St. East  
P.O. Box 33034 London, Ontario N5Y 5L4  
Phone: (519) 741-0455  
Website: <http://www.cgicanada.org>  
E-mail: [johncoish@rogers.com](mailto:johncoish@rogers.com)

### JAMAICA

Church of God International,  
P.O. Box 776 Kingston 19 Jamaica  
Phone: 1-876-925-2260

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# Remodeling Our Marriages

by Bill Watson

Christian marriages and “the family” are under a lot of pressure today. There are a variety of sources feeding the tensions that challenge our relationships with our mates and children. Though remaining vigilant is central to the vitality of any marriage—are there any other “keys” we could consider that would insure our success?

Without a doubt, marriage is the most important “team” of any nation. It goes without saying, what condition the *family* is in, so goes the neighborhood, the national culture, and by extension, the world. Families, secured by the lifelong monogamous commitment it takes to dedicate a *man* and a *woman* to the institution of *marriage*, for better or worse, is the most assured way of developing a family in the way God originally *intended* and *designed* it to be.

However, especially in today's Western culture, many have forgotten what is fundamental to a successful marriage. This lack of attention to these fundamentals, as for *any* team, is a recipe for disaster! It doesn't matter what sport, activity, game, or relationship you might participate in—forget the fundamentals, and you will *handicap* your ability to accomplish the successful results you're hoping for.

So what are some of the *fundamentals* that are so important to keep in mind when aspiring for a happy and joyful marriage, which are also conducive for creating an environment that results in wholesome, well behaved, and emotionally stable children?

For the sake of this article, we're going to focus on just *four areas* that need watchful attention and require an active and positive approach in attending the demands these areas have. Be forewarned that it doesn't come easily! It often takes hard work, vigilance, and

resourcefulness, with a lot of patience that sometimes is inconvenient for the moment—but if we “soldier on,” usually we will be better for it, and our relationships become stronger because of it.

## The Four Points to Consider

Regardless of the performance mandates, most teams recognize there are *specific behavioral basics* required that are embedded in the mutual understanding of the relationship each has toward the demands of the game and its rules. Marriage is no different. There are requirements that are outgrowths of a few broad foundational points to keep in mind—and if we keep them in mind, our behavioral basics should conform toward supporting and constructing a conducive setting for a blissful marriage.

There are four major foundational points, or concepts, which we should use toward the development of our marital environment that will improve our assurance of success. They are built around four Greek words prominently used throughout the New Testament.

They are: *philia*, *agape*, *eros*, and *pisteuo*. Each one goes to underscore what our outlook and intent should be toward our mates.

Taking each one for what they mean will illustrate what should be kept in mind when interacting with our mates. Their meaning presents us with an outlook—a “template”—to work from, which can help us steer our behavior.

For instance, *philia* essentially means *friendship*. Our mate should be our friend. With this in mind, we should be able to comprehend that if we intend to maintain a friendship with our mate what our behavior should be—it's that simple! Obviously, all the basic detailed

behavioral actions on our part should go to serve this ultimate goal. So, if we understand our mate is our friend, our behavior should illustrate and support that objective.

Clearly, we need to just keep this in mind: How do you make friends and maintain that friendship? That's fundamental for what you need to do with your mate!



The next one is *agape*, which essentially means sacrificial love, but with emotional affection. A common English translation for this Greek word is “charity.” Why do you suppose that is? Very simply: It's a word indicative of sacrifice—and that isn't usually done without affection for the one(s) you're with. Affectionate love and care, with a *willingness to sacrifice*, even when it's *not convenient*—that is a “point,” if kept in mind, that will go a long way in maintaining the behavioral basics of kindness and selfless service.

*Eros* is next. Clearly, this is an important point of these four concepts to build a strong and vibrant marriage around. The affection that *agape* portrays is maximized in the erotic and intimate time only the two of you share as enclosed in an exclusive monogamous relationship. This is special, specific to only the two of you. It is the one time “oneness” is revealed in all its glory on the human level and from which children are born. It is the parallel means that God is doing *spiritually*, with the church, through the impregnation of the Holy Spirit via baptism. Yes, the bed is undefiled in marriage (Hebrews 13:4)—don't minimize its cohesive importance (1 Corinthians 7:3–5) because it's the very symbol of the *intimate*, picturesque and *personal* relationship God has with His church (Ephesians 5:22–33). It is the

ultimate sign of what God's salvific plan is all about—the reproduction of Himself—thereby adding to His family! Therein lies the reason marriage, on the human level, is a sacred and holy institution defined only by God and His relationship with the church. Anything outside that imagery is not a true definition of marriage.

The last of these fundamental concepts is *pisteuo*. Essentially, this word is all about the level of *commitment* that will allow for the perseverance necessary to accomplish the construction of a helpful ambience for weathering the storms of life. It will also provide the patience to produce the resourcefulness necessary when confronting the challenges that jeopardize the peace and unity of the “family team.” Without this *cohesion*, the cultural character of your family team may not be able to stand unaffected by the disruptions of life that blow your way.

However, if indeed you are friends (*philia*) that embrace sacrificial love (*agape*) by means of the strengthening and cohesion that comes from the intimate time spent together (*eros*) that is secured by a *bond of trust*, which only comes from a boundless commitment (*pisteuo*)—your marriage will stand throughout all the challenges that come your way.

### So What's Next

Obviously, there are a lot of details that need consideration when attempting to identify the metrics associated with the four fundamentals mentioned above. And it's important we recognize there are behavioral actions, effort, and energy to expend, which are necessary for achieving the right results. As a matter of fact, statistics prove if we are *active participants in our Christian faith*, we have a good chance of reducing the risk of divorce by 25 to 50 percent. This is a stunning statistic!

But, it must not go unnoticed: We must *work* at our marital and parental relationships if we want the yielded benefits for our families. A “well oiled” team is always communicating emotionally, mentally, and spiritually; and in the context of marriage with your mates, sexually. We must invest in ourselves, and marriage is an *investment* of ourselves with each other for the yielded benefits of our families.

Keep in mind these few points while working toward

the implementation of the four fundamentals within our marriages, mentioned previously. They are as follows:

1) **Understand we are all sinners.** All have sinned. So be understanding, empathetic, and patient with each other (1 Peter 3:8). Give each other the benefit of the doubt!

2) **Treat each other with respect and honor** (1 Peter 3:5–7). Recognize each has a role to play, and commit to those roles selflessly—not selfishly—serving toward helping each to maximize the gifts you have for the benefit of the family. The sooner you learn to work within the “manners of love” (1 Corinthians 13:4–13), the sooner you will be able to achieve and maintain the unity and peace so critical for developing the environment all will enjoy as a place that only *home* can be!

3) **Learn to be forgiving** (Hebrews 12:14–15). Recognize arguments and disagreements will occur—no doubt; it comes with the marital territory. You will not be able to avoid it, especially when



children are involved. Admittedly, children can be a source of stress and tension, especially as they become teenagers. So, it's important—get “suited up” and “clothe” yourself with forgiveness, lest you allow a bad situation to become worse (Ephesians 4:31–32; Mark 11:25–26). Learn to be tolerantly patient, but without compromise. Everyone is accountable to each other—that is a key “actualization” everyone in the family needs to accept, understand, and be responsible for, concerning the expectation upon them!

4) **Be helpful and positively reinforcing.** Remember, true love and concern is not about self, but rather the circumstances and condition of the greater whole. This isn't always easy, since we are basically selfish in nature. But we must learn to value the opinions of others and try to understand their point of view. It's important we are truthful and honest with each other as we attempt to work through the issues that come our way. Notice Proverbs 10:12 mentions “love covers.” That means to cut each other slack—give some space—don't negatively obsess about the contentions we face. Instead, look out for each other's welfare more than self (1 Corinthians 10:24; Philippians 2:3–4). Commit to working toward a solution, rather than obsessing over the contention or conflict.

5) **Make prayer an important habit of your team's lifestyle.** Remember the old saying, “A family that prays together stays together”? Well, it's very true! Prayer should be a *significant* part of a family team's diet (1 Peter 3:7; Matthew 18:18–20). Don't underestimate the value and power of family prayer—it can be a very effective tool in the course of your relationship with each other. Children should be included so they, too, can learn the value and benefit of talking with God and have opportunity to experience the miracles of answered prayer!

### The Problem and Solution

There is no question the *family* and *fatherhood* is under attack! There are too many single mother families suffering from the lack of any father figures. Compound this with parents too young to have children—and we have a volatile situation. This is made worse by the statistical fact there are far too many dysfunctional and abusive family environments having been created by addictions, modern technologies, financial weakness, unemployment, or just the lack of maturity of being equipped to handle the emotional stresses and educational needs of family life. That, sadly, should be no surprise to any of us. That is what feeds some of the reasons for the family break-ups and marital divorces currently experienced!

We must learn to *cherish our families!* Invest our time and effort, energy and concerns to the success of the



family.

And if we cherish them, we will take our time picking our mates, considering our compatibility and differences so that we go into these relationships with our eyes “wide open”—well prepared for the life we want to share with this person. After all, picking a mate is the second most important decision we'll ever make in our lives next to baptism. Why? Because it has *long term* reaching effects on our personal lives that could impact decades of our time and quality of life, health, and peace of mind, not to mention the lives of our children that may come from our marriages. So, pick your mates wisely—take your time. Be sure there is *fundamental agreement* on those things which are important to you, especially when it comes to your relationship with God (2 Corinthians 6:14–18)! Be careful not to underestimate the importance of this, especially when children are involved. The advice Paul



provides is a legitimate consideration and not without good reason.

Remember, marriages are the “gardens of our lives,” and they do take effort to maintain the “output and input” quality we get from them. Never undervalue the amount of work and dedicated *mental* and *emotional* effort a marriage requires—because if you do, it is a sure recipe for *failure*. Without a doubt, a marriage that is *well maintained* by figuratively “watering” and “weeding” with a balanced amount of attention that is focused on the four fundamentals, will go a long way to assuring you of many happy years together and, God willing, children that will make you proud they are yours. Ω

***“Without faith it is impossible to please Him...” (continued from page 2)***

trustworthiness of God in their lives! They are the evidence of God. They are the foundation of our faith, belief, and trust in God. They took their chance with God, and they were 'partially rewarded,' the rest of God's promises still to be kept and fulfilled. We are essentially being asked by God to do the same, to take that chance and 'trust in Him.'

Given the reliability and faithfulness God has shown to Abraham, Isaac, Israel, the prophets, it is evident that God is worthy of our trust and confidence. God has consistently proven Himself true and faithful. And God requires us to show the same, to prove ourselves true and faithful, to be willing to make the necessary sacrifices, to 'leave all and follow.' In return, Jesus promised:

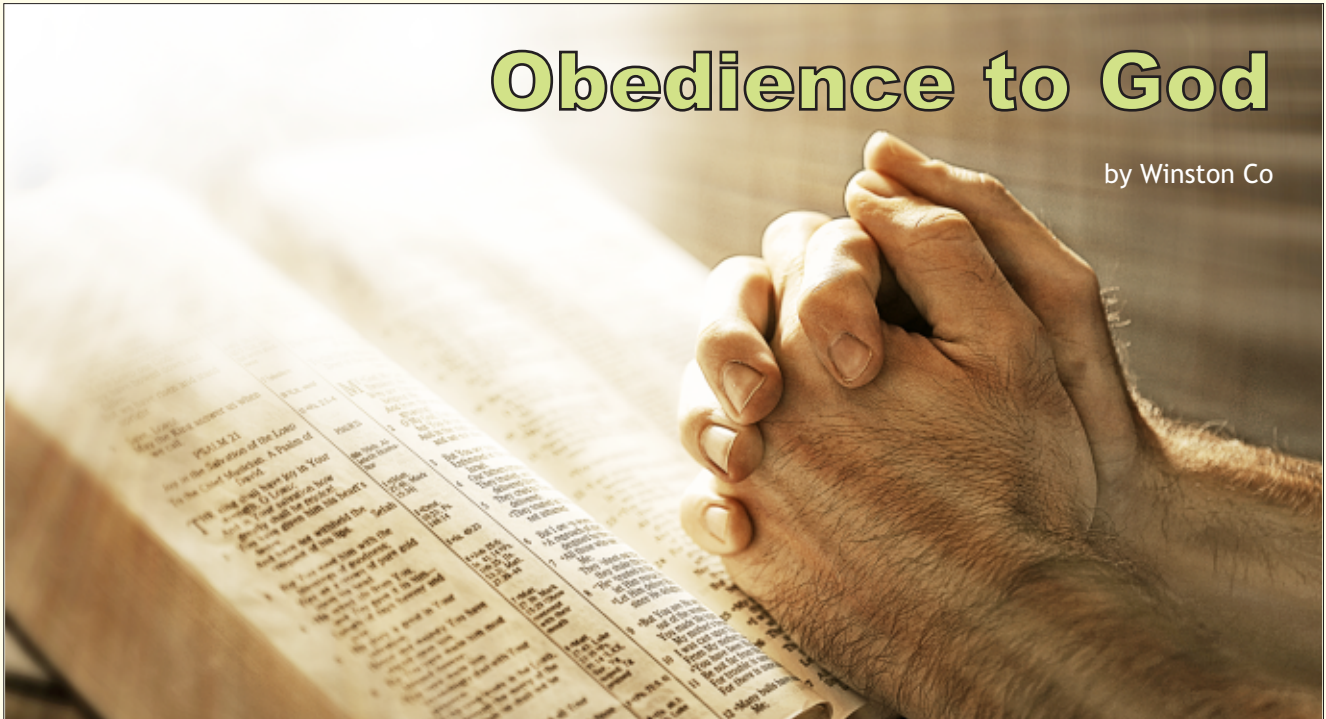
“assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel's, who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time—houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions—and in the age to come, eternal life...” (Mark 10:29-30).

Yes, we should 'live by faith.' Let us trust and believe in God. We “must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.” If we do, we will receive our rewards at the appointed time. May God speed that day!

**Rene Corpuz**

# Obedience to God

by Winston Co



**G**od is loving. He is merciful, full of compassion and mercy. He wants all to come to repentance and be saved. The greatest command is to love God with all our heart, being and might. Obedience stands at the very heart of our expression of love towards our Heavenly Father. The prophet Samuel speaks out the heart of God when he said to King Saul these words.

*"Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the Lord?"*

*To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams.*

*For rebellion is like the sin of divination, and arrogance like the evil of idolatry.*

*Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, he has rejected you as king." (1 Samuel 15:22-23)*

## The Theme

"To obey is better than sacrifice and to heed is better than the fat of rams." This is not only the recurring theme of the Bible, rather it is the desire of God for His people. This is what God likes in all of us. Consider the following verses:

Psalm 40:6, *"Sacrifice and offering you did not desire—but my ears you have opened—burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not require."*

Proverbs 21:3, *"To do what is right and just is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice."*

Hosea 6:6, *"For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings."*

David knew this. He learned it the hard way. He wrote in Psalm 51:16-17, *"You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise."*

God does not find pleasure in sacrifices and offerings. Instead, He finds more pleasure in a pure, sincere and obedient heart. I am sure that God will not be happy with a sinner who offers a hundred rams because of his hundred sins. Rather He will be pleased with the one who is righteous and obedient and who does not sin.

## Forgiveness

The whole sacrificial system, particularly the

sacrifice of Christ, was put in place because of sin and predicated upon its forgiveness. Christ sacrifice was an off shot of man's disobedience. It is a remedy to deal with the effect of sin. Hebrews 9:22, *"In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness."*

Hebrews 10:5-10 says the sacrificial system was put in place because of sin and disobedience.

Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said: "Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. Then I said, 'Here I am—it is written about me in the scroll—I have come to do your will, my God.'" (But, sacrifices and offerings are not what God wants. God wants an obedient heart. The prime example of obedience is in Christ. He came to do the Father's will by offering Himself for the sins of humanity.)

First he said, "Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them"—though they were offered in accordance with the law. Then he said, "Here I am, I have come to do your will." He sets aside the first to establish the second.

And by that will (by the obedience of Christ), we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

## Disobedience

Obedience is a simple word. It means to hear, to listen and to obey. Obedience comes with faith in a close and trusting relationship with God. On the other hand disobedience means failure or refusal to listen or to obey. The Bible describes such act of disobedience as being stubborn, rebellious and stiff-necked.

Psalms 78:8, *"They would not be like their ancestors— a stubborn and rebellious generation, whose hearts were not loyal to God, whose spirits were not faithful to him."*

Exodus 32:8-10, *"I have seen these people," the Lord said to Moses, "and they are a stiff-necked*

*people."*

Let us try to take a look at each of them.

### 1. Stubbornness is a behavior.

The word "stubborn" comes from the root word "stub." A "stub" is the stump of a tree. When a tree is cut down what remains is the short part of the trunk that is left. Picture the rigidity, hardness and stiffness of the stub that is fixed to the ground. Contrast that rigidity and harness to the graceful sway of a tree in the wind.

You have heard of the saying as stubborn as a mule. If the mule does not want to move, no one can move it. For a mule to be of service and usefulness, it has to be willing to be led. To be bridled.

That is what stubbornness conveys—someone whose behavior is hardheaded, immovable, intractable and persistent to set his own ways. In short, stubbornness is unwillingness to listen, to be taught or to be led.

***"To obey is better than sacrifice and to heed is better than the fat of rams."***

### 2. Rebellion is defiance to authority.

Rebelliousness is attitudinal. It is an attitude or a mindset of insubordination. Rebelliousness is a disposition to dissention, disloyalty, seditious and to be unruly.

**3. Stiff-necked means hard-of-neck.** We all have an idea of what a stiff-neck is. It is the stiffening of the neck muscle due to improper posture. We can get a stiff neck from our sleep. A stiff neck is debilitating. You cannot move your head, it affects your vision and even your mobility. You cannot do any driving. It is almost impossible to turn your head to look at the mirrors and see moving cars. In short, it hampers your ability to do what you ought to do.



The ox is the most useful animal. They are primarily used to plow the fields. A farmer would put a yoke upon the neck of the ox. The yoke is to keep the ox on its course. If an ox was hard to control it was deemed to be “hard of neck” or stiff-necked. Thus, the term was used by God to describe the intractable character of people. Refusing God's guidance by remaining resolute of their pre-set ways.

### Obedience

What God wants is obedience. Once, we have made the resolve to obey God our sins will be forgiven. Obedience allows and gives us the confidence to enter into a renewed relationship with God the Father and Jesus Christ.

Hebrews 10:19-25 says:

*Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.*

### Summation

Let us resolve to be obedient to God. Accept the sacrifice of Christ and move towards a new relationship with God. When we go through the water of baptism, we promise God to be obedient to Him. We need to hold on and live by this commitment.

Micah 6:6-8 says:

*With what shall I come before the Lord and bow down before the exalted God?*

*Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old?*

*Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of olive oil?*

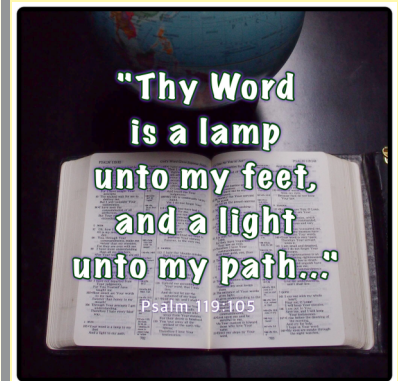
*Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?*

*He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you?*

*To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.*

Obedience is better than sacrifice. Obedience brings us into a closer and intimate relationship with our Heavenly Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

**AG**



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by Eli Mellomida

If you faithfully “pay” your tithe do you consider yourself a cheerful giver? Is tithing classified as giving and giving as tithing? Are they one and the same? After all everyone knows that the act of turning over money to a church is considered contribution, donation or tithe and offerings; thus giving, right? But is giving really the same as tithing?

Questions of this nature are seldom asked by the tithe giver. In normal circumstances, the tithe payer who expects to be blessed materially and spiritually simply remits the tithe knowing that he/she has dutifully participated in the advancement of whatever mission the church may try to accomplish. Church members knew that financial contribution is the only means by which the operation of the church is made possible. The givers also knew deep in their hearts that by “sacrificing” a tenth of their substance in the form of tithes, they are in a way advocating Jesus' principle when He said “where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Luke 12:34).

So again, is there a dividing line that separates tithing from giving? While tithing and giving may appear inseparable, they have separate purposes in the manner in which they are being regulated. There is disparity not only on their usage, but on the intent on why it is given.

### Tithing is...

Tithing is *tenthing*; it is allocating a tenth part of what one produces out of the fruit of his labours and remit it to God's church. It is very difficult to find a Bible scholar who believe tithing is not biblical. Abraham and Jacob tithed (Genesis 14:20; 28:22); and the scriptures (old and new) uphold the tithing law (Malachi 3:10; Matthew 23:23). Leviticus 27:30 says, “And all the

tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land or of the fruit of the tree, is the LORD's. It is holy to the LORD.” Further, “And concerning the tithe of the herd or the flock, of whatever passes under the rod, the tenth one shall be holy to the LORD” (Leviticus 27:32).

In the New Testament Jesus did not reprimand the “meticulous” tithe paying Pharisees for tithing. His scathing rebuke dwelt on their apparent neglect of the “weightier matters of the law which are judgment, mercy and faith and NOT to leave the other (tithing) undone” (Matthew 23:23).

Jesus paralleled tithing with taxation. The biblical emphasis on the subject can be construed by the fact that all three writers of the gospel did not fail to record it. The dialogue which centred on tax matters between Jesus and His detractors are recorded in Matthew 22:15-22; Mark 12:13-17; Luke 20:19-26. Of course, we understand that the motive behind the question raised by the Pharisees is to put Jesus on the spot and build a case against Him (Matthew 12:15).

For brevity, let's just read Matthew's account.

Matthew 22:16-21, “And they sent to Him their disciples with the Herodians, saying, “Teacher, we know that You are true, and teach the way of God in truth; nor do You care about anyone, for You do not regard the person of men. Tell us, therefore, what do You think? Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?” But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, “Why do you test Me, you hypocrites? Show Me the tax money.” So they brought Him a denarius. And He said to them, “Whose image and inscription is this?” They said to Him, “Caesar's.” And He said to them, “*Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's (tax), and to God the things (tithe?) that are God's.*” (NKJV)

Take note that the item being questioned here is taxation—money collected from the people of which Christians are not exempted (Romans 13: 5-7).

While there is no direct mention of tithing in this account, the obvious inference of Jesus' statement is taxation - an “imposed entitlement” by the ruling entity which at that time was Caesar. Thus, if Caesar had the fortitude to collect tax money even from a foreign country which the Romans held as a vassal state, is God less deserving of tithe money when He owns everything and mankind are only stewards who keep utilizing all its resources for themselves? Bear in mind that the tithing law was never abolished, as some tried to teach the opposite to sway followers and in turn “ask” more than what is biblically lawful.

### **Tithing, a Done Deal**

Like taxation, tithing is a done deal. What then is the difference between God and Caesar; or for that matter the government? For a true follower of God, there is no need for a collector before one sends the tithe. Collection has the connotation of demanding payments. God's instruction is to “Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse...” (Malachi 3:10). Out of one's willingness to abide by the instruction, he simply sends the tithe voluntarily.

Now consider. If the government automatically deducts the tax from our salaries, we don't really mind, right? Besides, what can you do? Your employer already deducted it from your paycheck and turns it over to the Internal Revenue. And because of its regularity, we are no longer mindful of the deductions. It becomes automatic and you don't bear any grudge, except maybe when you hear government officials pocketing tax money. But that's about it, your gripes will only translate into murmurings—unfortunately to your own hurt. Whether you have a heavy heart against the deductions, you can't do anything about it. It's a *done deal*. We just “pray” they'll rightfully spent the taxes for the benefit of the citizens.

Like taxes therefore, the tithe is a done deal. The only difference with tithing is that God's agents do not institute mandatory guidelines to collect tithe money from the membership. There are no strictly imposed policies foisted on God's people to send in the tithe. Just as keeping God's commandments is deemed an

individual responsibility before God, the Christian has a choice to obey or “think twice” before tithing.

However, accountability is placed on the individual Christian who knew that “we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad (2 Corinthians 5:10). Paul added: So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God (Romans 14:12); who will render to every man according to his deeds (Romans 2:6); for the Lord shall judge his people (Hebrews 10:30).

Paying tithe sounds like a burden in the human point of view. But if we “arithmetically” figure out the commandment in the light of the following passages, the perceived burden of 'losing your money' somehow whittles down; notice:

**1 Chronicles 29:13-14**, "But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from you (God), and we have given you (God) only what comes from your hand.

Exodus 9:29, ...so you may know that the earth is the LORD's.

**2 Kings 19:15**, And Hezekiah prayed to the LORD: "O LORD, God of Israel, enthroned between the cherubim, you alone are God over all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth.

**Jeremiah 27:5**, With my great power and outstretched arm I made the earth and its people and the animals that are on it, and I give it to anyone I please.

**Isaiah 66:1**, This is what the LORD says: "Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool.

**Nehemiah 9:6**, You alone are the LORD. You made the heavens, even the highest heavens, and all their starry host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them. You give life to everything, and the multitudes of heaven worship you.

**Psalms 89:11**, The heavens are yours, and yours also the earth; you founded the world and all that is in it.

**Haggai 2:8**, 'The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine,' says the LORD of hosts.

**Acts 7:49-50**, 'Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me? Says the Lord. Or where will my resting place. Has not my hand made all these things?'

**Revelation 4:11**, "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created



all things, and by your will they were created and have their being."

All these passages contain fundamental messages telling us that God created all things, owns everything and sustains all of them; and humanity are the sole beneficiaries to all of these. Thus, the tithe payers are in a win-win situation because even if God owns everything, they get 90% of the equation. That's aside from the incentives in the form material and spiritual blessings that one reaps out of obedience (Malachi 3:10-12).

### **Giving**

In 2 Corinthians 9, Paul made an appeal to the Corinthian church to help another congregation who direly needed immediate rescue from possible starvation. He told them: There is no need for me to write to you about this service to the saints. For I know your eagerness to help, and I have been boasting about it to the Macedonians, telling them that since last year you in Achaia were ready to give; and your enthusiasm has stirred most of them to action. But I am sending the brothers in order that our boasting about you in this matter should not prove hollow, but that you may be ready, as I said you would be. For if any Macedonians come with me and find you unprepared, we—not to say anything about you—would be ashamed of having been so confident. I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to visit you in advance and finish the arrangements for the generous gift you had promised. Then it will be ready as a generous gift, not as one grudgingly given. Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver (2 Corinthians 9:1-7).

This was a heartrending plea for relief on account of the brethren's acute need. The proceeds of this solicitation were meant to alleviate the crises God's people were facing at that time. It was not tithe money. The usage alone tells us that the beneficiaries are the people of the church. Giving to them was not tithing. Tithing is a fixed amount. Giving has no limit; to repeat Paul's statement "each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver". Giving is

primarily directed to fellow human beings especially to those who are of the household of faith (Ephesians 4:28).

In Luke 21:1-4 Jesus gave a hint that figures do not necessarily reflect one's attitude in giving. Whether the recipient of the money in this incident is the temple treasury, the important question that may be raised, and the lessons that can be learned is: Which is of greater import, the amount or the dictates of the heart? Notice: As he looked up, Jesus saw the rich putting their gifts into the temple treasury. He also saw a poor widow put in two very small copper coins. "I tell you the truth," he said, "this poor widow has put in more than all the others. All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on."

It does not hurt so much if you have enough or even extra and share your resources. You still have enough left to keep you going. What is exceptionally amazing is when one shares what he barely has—while he himself cannot even afford to satisfy his own need. Very few if any would rather go to that extreme. Undoubtedly, an act like this will go viral if posted in Facebook. Yet, someone did it somehow in a way strikingly unbelievable!

### **The Ultimate Giver**

But is that not what God the Father did? Is He not the originator of the "way of giving"? The famous verse said so: "For God so loved the world that he gave his ONE and ONLY SON, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). God had only ONE Son who is not even a created Being, who exist with Him since timeless times (John 1:1). Then He choose to put to risk the life of that Son, and finally allowed Him to be brutally killed so that mankind will have another chance to restore relationship with Him. That kind of giving is unthinkable for the human mind to contemplate. That is why God wants us to learn the art of giving because it is His character, His way of life and the embodiment of His persona. Being then His future sons and daughters in His kingdom, He wants us to emulate, imitate, adopt and imbibe within our character frame this particular nature.

On a lighter note, giving, sharing and being generous is

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# Christian Maturity

by Ferdie Padilla

All of us are familiar with the concept of becoming mature. From babyhood, a person grows. He matures physically. So he grows into childhood, then to adolescence and finally to adulthood. Along with physical maturity comes emotional and mental maturity. But perhaps, there is one area of our lives that we should all be more concerned about with respect to growing up and maturing. We may well go on to physical, emotional, mental maturity but if this one area is where we do not grow up or mature, then we will be definitely in trouble. And sadly, this is one area where many do not mature or grow. And this area I am referring to is the spiritual aspect of our lives. And I would like to specifically refer to Christian maturity (because that's we are, Christians) and I think the spiritual aspect of it and its significance are not lost on us. And hence, we all realize the need for us to grow and mature on this area.

## Foundation for Spiritual Growth

But to start us on this spiritual growth process, we definitely must come to the knowledge of the truth. And the truth, as we all know, is contained in the Holy Bible. And that book points us to the ultimate Truth that is Christ Himself. He described Himself in John 14:6, "Jesus answered, 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.'" That is important, because our journey to spiritual maturity begins and ends with Christ. Now, in this article, we will touch on a little bit further on what this Christian maturity is all about. Admittedly it will not be all encompassing. So this will be a discussion in general about Christian maturity. There will be no pinpointed definition of it but rather a discussion that would give us a better idea of what it is and perhaps a better appreciation of the subject. And I think that you would agree with me that Christian maturity starts with having the right knowledge of the truth and of Christ. We can read an interesting statement in Hebrews 6:1-2, "Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about

Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment." Let us notice what these verses are saying. It enumerates some of the things that we come to know as part of true Christian core doctrines: repentance, faith in God, baptism and laying on of hands, the resurrection and judgment. And there is also mention of "elementary teachings about Christ." And in this particular instance, the writer is admonishing us to "go on to maturity", to go beyond the basic knowledge about Christ and all other doctrines we cling on to. He is not saying we should throw them away as indeed, there is a warning in the succeeding verses of falling away from this truth (but that's another story). What the writer is suggesting is that from this knowledge of Christ and of the truth, we move forward to maturity. There must be a progression. But it should be very clear to us that the foundation for this maturity stems from these basic knowledge. We cannot avoid the fact that it starts there.

## Moving Up

But some people cannot go beyond the knowledge part. Or perhaps they would think to themselves that since they now have this knowledge, then they are already alright, that they can now be saved. We may know about the Sabbath. We may know about the food laws. We may know about the tithing laws. And in all of these, we may be fairly convinced that these are all true, correct and makes sense compared to the traditional Christian beliefs and teachings out there. Well, that's fine. But it's not really going to help us in the Christian maturity process. We have to act on them. We have to observe them. We have to do them. Well, alright, we are now acting on them. We faithfully keep the weekly and annual Sabbaths based on what we know. We now give our tithes and keep the second tithe as well, based on what we know. We are so conscious of what we eat, careful to avoid all those unclean meat, again based on

what we know. Are we then considered mature? We have made progress. We are now moving up. But, we may be surprised, we are not yet and cannot be considered mature. Not yet anyway. How can that be? Let us explore further.

We may all observe the Sabbaths (in the sense that we are all attending the services; we are physically present) but would that be enough? In fact, we may be physically present but mentally, emotionally and spiritually we can be absent. We may give of our tithes faithfully, to the last centavo or so. We may even have a better appreciation of the truth than others. Surprisingly, these scenarios where we know and act on what we know but still fall short of the expected maturity are not new. There has been a precedent. Christ indicted a group of people during His time and pointed out to them the futility of their outward show of being right with God. They are devout Jews, observing the Sabbaths, giving tithes of even the tiniest seed they have. And yet Christ found them wanting. Let's look at one instance in Matthew 23:23, "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former." What is Christ saying? Along with practicing the letter of the law, we should also echo in our lives the intent of the law—"the more important matters of the law" like justice, mercy and faithfulness. There has to be something solid inside of us that should be manifest more than the motion of going thru the letter of the law. And that is called character. Our character shows the level of maturity we have achieved.

### **Progression to Maturity**

Becoming mature however does not happen in a vacuum. There has to be an environment where we develop maturity. We don't learn mercy, faithfulness, justice unless we go out in the real world, experience them ourselves. And that is what this life offers us. What are the things we encounter? How do we react to them? What do our relationships offer? What we do and what we don't do would give us the opportunity to showcase our level of Christian maturity. It is shown in how we react to adverse situations. It is manifested in how we

control our tempers. It is how we take an insult. It is displayed in how careful we are not to descend to the level of our adversaries. It is how we overcome temptation. It is how we withstand trials. It is how we cope with pain and disappointment. It is shown in how we appreciate things. Some can't let go of very little material things. Maturity is looking beyond the apparent. It is seeing what really matters in life – today and beyond. Maturity is also shown when we have the willingness to change when we are rebuked and corrected for something wrong we have done or for habits or attitudes that are harmful to others and us. Some don't want to change because they say "that's what they are" and want people and God to accept them as they are even if it is clear that "what they are"—meaning the way they act selfishly or that defines their character—is actually wrong. Now, please don't get me wrong, I am not talking about those things that set and define our individualities (ex. our food preferences, clothing preferences) only those things that are harmful to us and to others (ex. ego, vanity, pride, unwillingness to change for the better). Maturity is also shown in how we accept responsibility for our actions. It means we do not blame others and/or circumstances. We take ownership of our own actions and its consequences. It cannot be that all are wrong except us. In other words, the human experience provides the needed time and events for us to grow up, to attain to the maturity God expects from us. And how we react to whatever we encounter in life should be based on biblical teachings. Based on the biblical truth that we know, how have we applied them and in the process developed Godly character?

The Bible talks so much about things we take for granted or perhaps don't pay so much attention to. The Bible talks about love, mercy, forgiveness, caring for one another, faith, hope, gentleness and a host of other things that are attributes of God Himself. Have we not wondered why? I believe that it does so for a good reason. Aside from making sure our relationships work, these things are also parameters by which we can measure ourselves how far we have matured. These are qualities that help define Christian maturity. And how far we have attained to the intent of God in measuring up to these qualities would tell us how "mature" we are. As an exercise, we should "put ourselves" into verses



describing the attributes of God and ask, “How have I displayed this in my life? To what extent have I acted this way?” To make it more concrete, I suggest we start with Galatians 5:22-23, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.” Then we can ask ourselves, have we been any of these? I am certain that a person patient with others is a little bit more mature simply because he is trying to understand the other person. Have we been faithful to our spouses and to God? Have we been at peace with others? And if we take also into consideration 1 Corinthians 13, we get an idea of what things we ought to measure ourselves against. We are mature spiritually, not because of our knowledge, but because we are trying to build Godly character based on this knowledge. What, after all, is the importance of having the right knowledge? It is to lead us into knowing the truth and from there its right application. We come to know this as wisdom. It is in the process of applying the things that we learn where we have the opportunity to develop into the mature Christian God expects us to be—eventually to be like His Son and Him.

## Conclusion

Having said that, let us go to Ephesians 4:11-13, “It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the

whole measure of the fullness of Christ.” Now, I'd like us to focus on Verse 13 because it contains an enlightening thought and pretty much summarizes what we all have talked about so far. The passage begins with enumerating some of the different services God ordained. And it says they are for the edification or building up of the church, the purpose of which is to unite all of us in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and (notice) become mature. To what end is this maturity? It is the attainment “to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.” Notice that it says whole measure not partial—whole or complete measure of the fullness of Christ. In other words, we can be considered mature in every way if we act in every way just like Christ. And we know the actions of Christ. It is always based on love.

Now, we know this is a very tall order, but not impossible. I think that we all know, it is pretty obvious that we are not yet mature in all aspects of Christian behavior, not yet anyway. And that is what we are all striving for. It only means we have our work cut out for us. It only means we have to go on with the life God called us to live. It only means we have to keep on applying the truth that we know every day, thereby developing Godly character. So we should not at all be discouraged because I am pretty sure we have made progress on some things that we should improve on and have become more mature. Eventually, we know we will reach this level of maturity Christ and the Father expects us to have. Why are we confident of this? Because we know, we will eventually be born into God's Divine Family. So let us all continue growing and become mature Christians. **AG**

## *Tithing and Giving (continued from page 12)*

a universal law that produce positive results on the part of the giver. Listen to Jesus: Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again (Luke 6:38). Then King Solomon: Cast your bread upon the waters, for after many days you will find it again (Ecclesiastes 11:1).

Tithing and giving are two different “items” explicitly defined in the word of God. Tithing is primarily intended to provide the wherewithal for the work of preaching the gospel to the world as a warning and a witness before the coming of Christ who will set up His kingdom here on this earth (Revelation 11:15; 5:10). Above all, it is honouring the God who freely gave us all things (Proverbs 3:9; Romans 8:32). Giving allows His followers to develop the character and the way of life that God the Father possesses. It is the nature that God wants His children to acquire so that they can be at one with Him for eternity as Jesus desired it to be in His personal prayer (John 17:20-21). **AG**



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6th Floor, Peaksun Bldg.  
Princeton St.,  
Mandaluyong City  
Saturdays, 2 p.m.

#### **Naga**

New Crown Hotel  
Elias Angeles cor.  
P. Burgos St.,  
2nd-5th Saturdays  
10 a.m.

#### **Iloilo City**

Iloilo Midtown Hotel  
Yulo St.  
Saturdays, 2 p.m.

#### **Alabang**

Crimson Hotel,  
Entrata Urban Complex,  
Filinvest City, 2609 Civic Drive,  
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#### **Malolos**

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Convention Center  
Malolos City  
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#### **Cebu**

Rajah Park Hotel  
Fuente Osmeña Circle  
1st Saturday of the Month  
9 a.m. - 12 n.n.

#### **Mindanao**

Alzon's Palace, Maranding  
Lala, Lanao del Norte  
Saturdays 10 a.m.

Brgy. Kiara, Don Carlos, Bukidnon  
1st & 3rd Saturday of the Month  
10 a.m.