

## LESSON 8

# THE CHRISTIAN MEANING OF GIVING

"The greatest joy I have in receiving this money from the church is that I have something to give back to the church." Missionary O. D. Martin, Jr. of Brazil quoted a widow whose sole living was the ten dollars a month she received from the church. This was, of course, an inadequate living, even in Brazil. However, as urgent as was her need for food, the widow's first joy was her opportunity to give. Each month as she received the money, she took one dollar and gave it to her church. Martin observed, "For her, giving was being Christian, and being a Christian was her life."

Christian giving is a way of life learned from God through Jesus Christ. God is a giving God and His followers are giving people. Christian giving is centred in the Lordship of Jesus Christ and involves the giving of self and of possessions.

"It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). This statement by Jesus is simple, yet it touches every area of life. God is a giving God; Christ is a giving Saviour. The followers of Christ are to be giving people. Giving is to express their love and reflect their likeness to God.

This and the two following lessons explore Christian giving. These lessons will examine the meaning of giving, biblical teachings about giving, and the giving life. In the biblical approach to giving, the giving of money is more than a matter of supporting the church. Unless giving is seen in its fuller meaning, the great excitement for the Christian is missing.

Some basic characteristics mark the Christian giver.

1. He is motivated to give by the example of God's giving and by his love for Christ.
2. He is guided by the principle of proportionate giving, using the tithe as a beginning model to assure his growth in giving.
3. He is committed to continuing growth in his giving as God prospers him.
4. He is cheerful to direct his gifts to serve God's purposes.
5. He channels his gifts through the shared fellowship of the church.
6. He gives with joy and gratitude.
7. He gives, anticipating that his gifts will be used of God to achieve divine purposes.

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Are the following statements true or false?

1. Christian giving is centred in the church. \_\_\_\_\_
2. Christian giving refers only to the giving of one's possessions. \_\_\_\_\_

(1. false; 2. false)

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Giving of money is more than a matter of \_\_\_\_\_ the \_\_\_\_\_.

(supporting, church)

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## Giving Is God's Principle for the Universe

### All creation is built on giving.

Giving is the principle that sustains the universe. It all began with God who gives. "The earth is one great picture of giving. The sun gives its rays. The earth gives its fruit. The animal world produces its own kind. The earth does not lose by giving; it gains."<sup>5</sup>

Jesus said, "For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it" (Mark 8:35, RSV). Life is giving, it depends on giving, and its purpose is expressed in giving.

The tragedy of receiving and not giving is illustrated in the Dead Sea. Here the water of the Jordan River flows in but stops. It becomes salty and can sustain no life. It is dead. By contrast, the Sea of Galilee is a fresh water lake that sustains life; it receives and it gives.

### God is the supreme giver.

Giving is not something God requires of man in order to exact revenue from him, like a tax. Giving is the nature of God. He has the capacity to give beyond man's greatest imagination. God gives "to all life, and breath, and all things" (Acts 17:25). Paul asked the Corinthians, "What have you that you did not receive?" (1 Cor. 4:7, RSV).

### Christ is God's supreme gift.

Christian giving does not spring from the Old Testament law of giving but from the supreme self-giving of God through Jesus Christ. "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son" (John 3:16, RSV). God takes the initiative by first giving, then sets the whole concept of a giving life for the Christian.

The Cross is God giving Himself to His creatures. In this self-giving He identifies with their needs and hopes. The wonder of the grace of God is brought to focus in Jesus. The hope of all creation—man and the material order—is grounded in God's giving love. "If there is any necessity in the creative act, it arises out of the desire of God to share His love with beings who shall freely respond in that love. Creation springs out of the divine self-giving as much as does redemption."<sup>2</sup>

### Man Learns Giving from God

#### God gives and man responds.

God gives His love and man responds by returning His love. Man learns giving from God. Man must learn this secret of relationship to God. Man does not earn his way into God's goodness. God freely gives His love. Man's failure to understand God is related to his notion that he can earn God's love. Instead, giving is the key to understanding God. God freely gives, and what He asks of man is that he too freely give.

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*Is the following statement true or false?*

*Giving is the principle that sustains the universe.*

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*(true)*

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*Christian giving springs from the supreme self-giving of God through \_\_\_\_\_.*

*(Jesus, Christ)*

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*Is the following statement true or false?*

*Some men feel that they can earn God's love.*

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*(true)*

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God starts the great giving principle, and His people are to continue.

And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that you may always have enough of everything and may provide in abundance for every good work. . . . He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your resources and increase the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way for great generosity, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God (2 Cor. 9:8-11, RSV).

### **Man's giving reflects what God has done for him.**

Giving flows from the individual's understanding of what God has done for him in Christ. Christ explains this spirit of response as He describes the woman who came to Simon's house and anointed his feet with oil. "Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little" (Luke 7:47, RSV). The woman saw herself in great need and recognized how much God had done for her. "She loved much" tells how she responded to God. She loved much and her gift demonstrated it. One's giving reveals what God means to him.

Christian giving is a love response to God. It demonstrates that Jesus Christ is Lord of life. It is responding to worthy goals for life that grow out of one's relationship to Jesus. It is acknowledging that the supreme purpose of all material things is to glorify God and to serve man. It is an excitement about being linked with God in His great purposes.

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*Christian giving is a \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ to God.*

*(love, response)*

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### **Giving is a response to Christ as Lord.**

A new church was needed in a new area, but funds were not available. At an association meeting where the need for the new church was being discussed, one minister expressed the conviction that God has given His people the means to support His work. A few days later a couple who attended the association meeting visited the minister. They had been saving their money to build a new house. They said, "We now realize that our old house is adequate." They had decided to give the money they had saved so that property could be bought for the new church. Years later they were able to build the new house. For them, giving to others came before giving to self.

Giving is measured by how much one is willing to submit to Christ's Lordship. The believer's commitment is not to some impersonal policy or rule. It is a personal loyalty to Him who gives His love for all men. His experience in salvation brings forgiveness of sin and establishes Christ as Lord of life. The Lordship involves all of life, including one's possessions.

“In Christ” was Paul’s favourite expression to describe the believer’s relationship to Christ. This is a life in which Christ is Lord and the believer is a partner with God. It is a changed life that responds to the Spirit of God. The Spirit-filled life is evidenced in the believer’s use of his possessions. The early Christians, responding to the glow of the Spirit of God in their lives, gave freely (Acts 2:4). The greatest biblical demonstration of the Spirit-filled life was the giving response of these early followers as they showed their love for God’s people.

For one to be in Christ is to have a new nature—a nature that responds to divine leadership. The Christian can be appealed to and will respond in love. This makes giving an inherent expression of the believer’s life. In responding to Christ, Zacchaeus expressed the meaning of the giving life, “Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have defrauded any one of anything I restore it fourfold” (Luke 19:8, RSV). The giving life is a matter of personal relationship to Christ. It flows from a Christ-centred life in which control has been transferred from self to Christ. Giving becomes the very nature of the Christian’s life.

“A man who takes his Christian discipleship lightly is not likely to be a good steward.”<sup>3</sup> Eric C. Rust identifies the close tie between discipleship and stewardship. If a Christian is asked to give himself without giving his money, his discipleship is greatly inferior to what God meant it to be. If he gives his money without self-giving, his stewardship is cheapened.

### Jesus Teaches Giving

Jesus, God’s gift to man, demonstrated the meaning of giving. He teaches giving both by example and by instruction. Frequently students of the Scriptures have neglected this element of Jesus’ teaching ministry. Some feel that since He said little about tithing, He said little about giving. This is not the case. Still others have felt that He was too idealistic in His teachings on giving. Of course Jesus was idealistic on giving, but at the same time He was practical. Jesus is the best source of understanding and information on giving for the Christian.

### Jesus commends greatness in giving.

Jesus set the tone for the believer’s life as He declared, “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35). “God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Cor. 9:7, RSV) because that is the kind of giver God is.

Jesus lavished praise on the widow who gave “everything she had, her whole living” (see Mark 12:41–44, RSV). This was the highest commendation He gave to anyone. His story of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:30–37) suggests the importance He placed on unselfish giving. He commended the selfless gift of the woman who anointed His feet with oil. Of her, He said: “She has done a beautiful

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One evidence of the Spirit-filled life is in the believer’s use of \_\_\_\_\_

(his, possessions)

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The giving life is a matter of \_\_\_\_\_ to Christ.

(personal, relationship)

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thing to me. . . . wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her' " (Matt. 26:10-13, RSV).

Jesus spoke of giving freely, "Freely ye have received, freely give" (Matt. 10:8). He said that the quality of the gift is measured not only by the size but by how much one has left after he gives (Mark 12:41-44). He stressed self-giving as a love response.

Jesus said to His followers, " 'Give to him who begs from you, and do not refuse him who would borrow from you' " (Matt. 5:42, RSV). " 'He who has two coats, let him share with him who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise' " (Luke 3:11, RSV). He added a further note of giving greatness: " 'Give, and it will be given to you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For the measure you give will be the measure you get back' " (Luke 6:38, RSV).

There is no limit to the claim Jesus makes on His followers. " 'He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he who loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me' " (Matt. 10:37, RSV).

### Jesus condemns wrong attitudes.

When men give for the wrong motives, Christ's censure is sharp. Giving to be seen of men, or for self-praise, drew His rebuke (Matt. 6:1). He rebuked the giving of the religious leaders who would follow the detail of the law but ignore justice, mercy, and faith (Matt. 23:23; Luke 11:42). He condemned the arrogance of one who boasted, " 'I give tithes of all that I get' " (Luke 18:12, RSV). Those that would avoid their responsibility to their family by claiming that their possessions are "given to God" (Matt. 15:5-7), He called hypocrites.

Giving that is pleasing to God must reflect a love response. Christ's appeals are based on this same high ideal. His causes need support, but He does not ask for it at the cost of a man's evil or boastful attitude. It is not an appeal for money at any cost. Jesus does not seek giving that sees the end as justifying any means to get it.

### Jesus gives guidance for the giver.

Jesus had much to say that guides the believer in understanding the grace of giving. Here are some of His calls for giving.

1. Give to care for the poor (Matt. 6:1-4; 19:16-29; Luke 11:41; 12:33).
2. Give in the second-mile spirit of doing more than is required (Matt. 5:40-42).
3. Give away those possessions that are barriers to faith in God (Matt. 19:16-22; Mark 10:17-31; Luke 18:9-30).

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*Is the following statement true or false?*

*Jesus said that the quality of the gift is measured not only by the size but by how much one has left after giving.*

*(true)*

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*A gift that pleases God must reflect a \_\_\_\_\_*

*(love, response)*

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4. Give to show loving care to those who have been wronged (Luke 19:1–9).
5. Give in acts of childlike service (Matt. 25:35–46; Mark 9:41).
6. Give to lay up treasures in Heaven (Matt. 6:19–20).
7. Give as one who is right with his fellow Christians (Matt. 5:23).
8. Give to support the ministry of the gospel (Luke 10:7–8).

### **Christian Giving Is Self-Giving**

#### **It is a love response.**

Christian giving is man's response to God for what God has done for him in Jesus Christ. Above all else, God desires man's voluntary love. This explains the biblical emphasis on love giving. Few biblical truths are more difficult for Christians to accept and practise. Some leaders doubt that love will get the job done. They feel that they must augment love with a law requirement. Some persons prefer a law requirement to love giving. A set requirement allows them to feel, "I have measured up," or, "I have met the requirements." By contrast, the demands of love are such that the Christian keeps on finding ways to give self and possessions in service.

Love giving is not a cheap "way out" in stewardship. It is Christ's way. It is what God expects. When one uses love giving as an excuse for less, he is saying something about his relationship to Christ. Love is not negative. Love always seeks a way to express itself. Compassion seeks ways to show a loving concern to people in need. Conviction links the believer to Christ in a partnership in redemption. Christian love seeks ways to go to the whole world with the gospel.

#### **Christian giving is growing in giving.**

Growth in giving is the key to Christian giving. The believer searches for ways to reflect his love for Christ and His work. The Christian life anticipates a continuing growth or maturing in the faith. This underscores the need for developing the grace of giving.

Love is truly the "more excellent way." Cultivated, it will carry the Christian giver far beyond any law requirement. Paul affirmed this. "The point is this: he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must do as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Cor. 9:6, 7, RSV). Love is daring; it is costly self-giving.

One of the great hindrances to growth in giving is the

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*Love-giving is difficult for Christians to \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.*

*(accept, practise)*

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desire to get wealth. Again, Paul sounded the warning. "Those who desire to be rich fall into temptation" (see 1 Tim. 6:9-11, RSV). The Christian life finds its greatest problems in times of prosperity. But prosperity also offers the Christian added opportunities to enlarge his service to Christ. Unfortunately, the very nature of prosperity tempts the believer towards selfishness. It tempts him at the following points, each of which strikes at his giving-life.

1. Prosperity tends to create a desire for more and more material possessions which threaten to rival God's place in one's life.
2. Prosperity challenges one's commitment to Christ by causing a false sense of security in things.
3. Prosperity confuses the purpose of wealth by causing one to say, "God meant it for me."
4. Prosperity endangers the Christian's witness.
5. Prosperity deceives the Christian, for he buys more and more for self and misses the increased capacity to serve God.

Another hindrance to growth in giving is poverty. Some Christians contend they are "too poor" to give to God. One minister even stated that poor people cannot give because they have no money. Just as selfishness can hinder the prosperous from giving, selfishness can also rob the poor of the joy of growing in giving.

### **Giving reflects character.**

One does not step out of character to give. His giving life is a reflection of his true self. Giving is always a problem for one whose character has not been shaped by the will of God. Selfish pursuits cause men to clash with God's purposes. There is no area of the Christian life where these conflicts are sharper than at the point of giving.

How one gives reflects what he is. An occasional act may go contrary to the individual's character, but his giving pattern remains a true reflection. The widow (Mark 12:41-44), whose giving Jesus praised, gave with abundance because of the abundant nature of her love.

### **Giving is an acknowledgement of one's stewardship.**

By their practice, many people define Christian giving as an occasional breaking of a crumb from their prosperity and tossing it ceremoniously towards God. Whatever one's practice of giving, whether sowing "sparingly" or "bountifully" (2 Cor. 9:6), he indicates how seriously he regards his stewardship. Christian stewardship properly interpreted calls for one to give with the realization that he gives from a sacred trust. This acknowledges that all he possesses belongs to God and is entrusted to him.

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*Is the following statement true or false?*

*The desire to get wealth is a great hindrance to growth.*

*(true)*

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*Strike out the incorrect word.*

*Prosperity tempts the Christian at few, many points.*

*(few)*

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*Whether one gives "sparingly" or "bountifully" reflects how seriously he regards \_\_\_\_\_*

*(his, stewardship)*

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## Christian Giving Honours God

### It is giving as unto God.

Christian giving is a man in love with God doing what love wants to do. He is captured by the love of God. His giving is self-giving as well as money-giving, so that his human and material resources serve God and man. Money giving has been one of man's valid ways of showing honour to God.

In Old Testament days it was expected that each man would respond to God with a gift. " 'Three times a year all your males shall appear before the Lord your God at the place which he will choose. . . . They shall not appear before the Lord empty-handed; every man shall give as he is able' " (Deut. 16:16–17, RSV). Upon Israel's arrival in the Promised Land, they were instructed to take of their first fruits and " 'set it down before the Lord your God' " (Deut. 26:10, RSV). The gift to God was to represent a "cost" to the giver. David refused a gift to be used for his sacrifice by saying, " 'No, but I will buy it of you for a price; I will not offer burnt offerings to the Lord my God which cost me nothing' " (2 Sam. 24:24, RSV).

### It serves God's purposes among men.

Man gives to God. The gift serves God's purposes among men. This is illustrated in the relief offering sponsored by Paul for the needy Christians of Jerusalem. He encouraged the Corinthians, "Under the test of this service, you will glorify God by your obedience in acknowledging the gospel of Christ, and by the generosity of your contribution for them and for all others" (2 Cor. 9:13, RSV). Key words in this appeal to giving are "glorify God," "your obedience," and "for others." First, their gifts would honour God, for their purpose was to help in the work of Christ. Second, their gift would help their own spiritual growth. It is called an "obedience," an "acknowledgement." Both ideas include the acceptance of one's responsible stewardship role. Third, it serves man's need.

Much of the New Testament teaching on the meaning of giving is recorded by Paul in connection with this appeal for a great love offering. It will be helpful to all Christians to study the highlights of this early Christian appeal for giving.

1. The individual's gift is to begin with self-giving (2 Cor. 8:5; 12:14).
2. The gift is to be a personal response to God—voluntary, not forced (2 Cor. 8:5,7).
3. The believer is to reflect a response to the grace of God working in his life (2 Cor. 8:9).
4. The example of Christ's giving is to be the guide for the Christian (2 Cor. 8:9, 14).

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Give a definition of Christian giving. \_\_\_\_\_

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(Compare your answer with the text.)

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Is the following statement true or false?

Paul taught that Christian gifts benefit only the receiver.

(false)

5. The giver is to show a concern for human needs (2 Cor. 8:14).
6. The giver is to express thanksgiving to God (2 Cor. 9:12).
7. The gift is to be a concrete proof of love (2 Cor. 8:8, 24).
8. The giver is to be cheerful (2 Cor. 9:7).
9. The gift should be proportionate to God's blessings of material possessions (1 Cor. 16:2; 2 Cor. 8:12).
10. The giving should be systematic and regular (1 Cor. 16:1-3).

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Jack Taylor, "The Why and Wherefore of Things," *Resource Unlimited*, ed. William L. Hendricks (Nashville: The Stewardship Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1972), p. 47. Used by permission.

<sup>2</sup>Eric C. Rust, "A Theology of Stewardship," *Review and Expositor*, LXX, No. 2 (Spring 1973), 163-64. Used by permission.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 169. Used by permission.

## Home Study Exercise

**Basic activity** (Levels 1, 2, and 3). Read the study guide text and answer the following questions.

1. Where is Christian giving centred? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. What principle of God sustains the universe? Where did this principle begin? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. Does the author feel that Christian giving comes from the Old Testament law of giving? From where does Christian giving come? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. What is one reason for man's failure to understand God? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. Give one way in which the Spirit-filled life is evidenced. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. In Jesus' teaching on giving, what measure did He suggest? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

7. What type of giving is pleasing to God? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. What is one of the great hindrances to growth in Christian giving? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
9. List five ways in which prosperity tempts the believer towards selfishness.  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
10. In what way can poverty hinder growth in Christian giving? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
11. How does the author define Christian giving? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
12. What three good things did Paul suggest that generous gifts would accomplish (2 Cor. 9:13)?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
13. Read pages 149-156 in *God's Miraculous Plan of Economy*.
14. Prepare a sermon or a Bible lesson on one of the following subjects:
  - "Giving: A Christian Responsibility"
  - "The Gift Without The Giver Is Bare"
  - "The Law of the Harvest"

**Supplementary activity** (Levels 2 and 3). After reading pages 149-156 in *God's Miraculous Plan of Economy*, do the following.

1. Write a paper of at least one page on the following subject: "You Reap What You Sow." Give Scripture references.
2. In what ways is the giving of money more than a matter of supporting the church? (Consult the study guide text.)
3. What teachings does Paul give in his writings concerning giving? (Consult the study guide text.)
4. Using Lesson 8 of the textbook and pages 149-156 of Taylor's book as a background, write an answer to these questions:
  - a. At what places in these readings do the members of my church or mission fail to practise the principles taught?
  - b. Do you agree with the author's viewpoints? Defend your position.
  - c. What can I do to help my church or mission put these teachings into practise?

### **Advanced activity** (Level 3).

1. Make a list of the Scripture references in the four Gospels that give Jesus' teachings on giving. Study these passages and write out your conclusion from this study. Be prepared to share this activity with your seminar group.
2. Prepare an answer to this proposition: *If* all the members of my church or mission practised the principles taught in the study guide and Taylor's book, we would . . .
3. Write a paper of at least one page on this subject: "You Can Give Without Loving, But You Cannot Love Without Giving!"

### **Seminar Discussion**

1. Discuss some basic characteristics that mark the Christian giver. How do these differ from the worldly giver?
2. Discuss the importance of self-giving as well as money giving.
3. Discuss the excuses used by some Christians for failing or refusing to give.
4. Discuss the sermons or Bible lessons prepared in answer to number 14 of Basic activity.
5. If you have Level 3 students, ask them to share Scriptures on Jesus' teachings about giving as recorded in the four Gospels. Discuss any problems in understanding these teachings.
6. Discuss this statement: "You can give without loving, but you cannot love without giving!" (If you have Level 3 students, ask them to share their paper on this subject.)