

THE GIFT OF GIVING
The Christian and Money
Dr. George O. Wood

We are told at the beginning of Romans 12 to present ourselves as a living sacrifice, to renew our mind and that each of us is to soberly estimate what God has given to us by way of gifts. “God has assigned a measure of faith to each of us. We all are members of the body but have differing functions. Having gifts differing according to the grace given to us let us use them. If prophecy in proportion to our faith. If service, in our serving. He who teaches in his teaching. He who exhorts in his exhortation,” which is where we left off last time and where we find ourselves today... “He who contributes with liberality.”

I set aside time for prayer and study especially in the selection of an overall book. I felt very impressed this year we should go through the book of Romans. But I did not set down and chart out in Romans exactly where we would be every Sunday. I had no idea. We’d just kind of go along and be where the Spirit would direct. But of all Sundays, following a Missions Conference and following a seminar on financial giving or stewardship to wind up preaching on “He who contributes with liberality,” is to me an amazing providence. You could call it coincidence or God-incidence.

In the seven gifts, which motivate the body to perfection – Romans 12 – which minister to needs, the gift of giving is listed. It has been our assumption in looking at each of these seven gifts that there are aspects of the gift which are practiced in each of our lives. There are times when we are called upon to prophecy. That is to discern among others what is right and wrong, what is God’s will. There are times when we are called upon to teach. There are times we are called upon to serve, there are times we are called upon to encourage. Even as there are times all of us are called upon to give. This passage of scripture does not mean that only some give and all the rest do their thing. But there is a kind of commonality in all of these gifts but in regard to the body some especially stand out as uniquely manifesting that gift of the Spirit. The gift of giving.

What is the gift of giving? We might look at the term that Paul uses in the original. It’s more than a simple verb in the English – to give. It’s literally translated perhaps “with to give” or “to give with.” The preposition “with” is attached to the verb that Paul uses to the word “give” to intensify its meaning. Therefore when one gives when having the gift of giving he or she is not just taking something and putting it into someone else’s possession. It carries the idea of imparting. It speaks of spending or investment of one’s own life as he or she communicates through giving.

A person therefore who is a giver, who has this quality, is very definitely a supportive type of person. It involves the giving of themselves, the investment of themselves in the recipient’s life.

Kind of a test that I thought is you can tell by and large a non supportive person by the fact that generally a non supportive person is one who never shares genuinely from his heart his material resources with others. At this Christmas time, see who it is that in their giving always what they give *just kills them* to give. They’ve had to give it out of a sense of duty. And you can be sure that they have not thought of what the recipient might really like but what they could just get by with. They generally give non-useful junk because they are not really motivated to minister to

THE GIFT OF GIVING

The Christian and Money

another person's needs or wants. But to simply satisfy their own need to get off the hook that they indeed had met some social requirement.

You watch that kind of person in your family and you'll generally find they're a non-supportive person. What do I mean by non-supportive? When someone gets in trouble in the family they do not go to that person for the emotional, financial, psychological, and spiritual help that is needed to get through that crisis. That person has consistently identified himself as a non-supportive individual.

However, a person who is continually in the act and process of giving and imparting of life becomes an individual who is very much leaned upon in the midst of any crisis. And is fun to be with as well.

This word for "giving" which Paul uses here in Romans 12:8 is used specifically five times in the New Testament. In its usage it can refer to the giving of material things and it can also refer to the giving of spiritual things. We need not relegate the gift of giving to something that is just physical. Luke 3:11 it is used to describe the giving of food and clothes. Romans 1:11 Paul uses it to describe the fact that when he comes to the Romans he wants to impart to them some spiritual gift. He uses it again in Romans 12:8.

Paul uses the term "give" this same verb once more in Ephesians 4:28 where he says "Let the thief no longer steal but rather let him labor doing honest work with his hands so that he may be able to give to those in need." A thief is a taker, right? Paul says let your attitude so change so that instead of being a taker you now become a giver, imparting from your life and your resources to others.

Paul tells the Thessalonians in 1 Thessalonians 2:8 "We were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God [the word "share" is the same word as "give"] but also our own selves because you have been very dear to us." So the idea of giving here is one of intensity.

As we have done consistently with these gifts is we have sought to look in scripture for a concrete example because that helps us focus in on how the gift is practiced. Perhaps of all the persons in scriptures other than our Lord Jesus that stands out as a giver we would have to maybe identify someone from the Old Testament – Abraham – as a person who was consistently marked by having this quality within his life – the gift of giving. There are four qualities in Abraham that I want to share briefly.

He is first of all the only person in scripture to be called "the friend of God." James 2:23 so identifies. This is not to say that other people weren't friends of God. But that phrase is specifically reserved by the New Testament writer to describe this Old Testament person Abraham. That phrase is suggestive of the kind of personality that Abraham had that God liked.

If you think of your circle of friends, you by and large, choose friends who have commonness with you. Who think somewhat the same way. Who act somewhat the same way. It's difficult to be friends with someone who is headed the opposite direction. As Amos says "Can two walk together except they be agreed."

THE GIFT OF GIVING

The Christian and Money

Here is Abraham called the friend of God walking together with the Lord. Since God is a God of giving and John 3:16 identifies him as a giving God “For God so loved the world that he gave his only son,” it’s not surprising therefore that Abraham who was willing to give his own son at God’s request should be in the heart of God known as the friend of God. It would be extremely difficult for the giving God to be friends with stingy and selfish people. One of the facets of conversion is he takes this self centeredness out of us and tells us that if anyone would come after him let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow him. “For whoever would save his life would lose it and whoever will lose his life for my sake and the gospels shall find it.”

So the Lord is at work eradicating this selfish nature within us and turning us into his people. Loving and generous people.

Even as it would be difficult for you to be a friend of a stingy and self-centered person requires an extra measure of grace to do so, so God makes himself friends with people like Abraham. The Lord Jesus in his own teaching contrasted some persons who really fell short of this qualification of being God’s friends. Two especially in the gospel of Luke.

The person known as the rich fool in 12:21, who said when he looked at his financial statement and he said, My storehouses are full. I’m going to tear them down and build bigger ones. The Lord said to him, “You fool. This night shall your soul be required of you.” The Lord in that story is not condemning as such the multiplication of his financial resources. But what he’s condemning is the sort of spirit that lived selfishly for what he could collect. And what he collected he could not himself use. He was not transferring it on. Jesus provides this epitaph by saying what his problem was. “So is he who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich towards God.”

Of course the Lord himself taught that one of the ways we are rich toward God is to consider the needs of others.

In the story of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16 remember this poor man laid daily at the rich man’s gate. Nowhere in the story are we told that this man mistreated Lazarus. He didn’t go out and kick him. In fact he didn’t send vicious watch dogs to go bite him; he sent tame dogs to lick his sores. We never read of any case of mistreatment of Lazarus. Just the fact that Luke tells us the rich man feasted sumptuously every day and dressed himself in purple and linen and the like and he thought that it was all right for him to exist in his world and Lazarus out in the street in his world without investing of himself at all in the needs and affairs of Lazarus’ life. So in hell he lifts up his eyes and sees Lazarus in Abraham’s bosom. Abraham reminds him when the rich man wants to come back to life he says [and I think this is key to explain his fate] “Son, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things.” Underline the word “received”. He never chose to share his good things or to give his good things. Therefore he could not be called the friend of God. But Abraham who was the friend of God of whom the opposite testimony was true, that he shared his good things, is seen as a model for us. Do you want to be a friend of God then begin seeking the Lord to eradicate if there is deep self-centeredness within you that keeps clutching and grasping. You may need to pray, “Release my hand from the fondling touch.”

Another quality in Abraham was that God entrusted him with assets. We needn’t think of giving as persons who give don’t have anything. Abraham had a lot and therefore had a lot to give.

THE GIFT OF GIVING

The Christian and Money

We're given contrasts in scripture. The widow with the two mites. She gave everything she had. But Abraham had great assets. We are told as Abraham is introduced to us on the pages of scripture, "Now Abraham was very rich in cattle and silver and in gold." Those were the criteria of wealth in his day and he had it.

Years later when we find his servant going off to find a wife for Isaac his son, the servant to Rebekah's father gives some idea of Abraham's wealth. This was years later. "The Lord has greatly blessed my master and he has become very great. He has given him flocks and herds, silver and gold, manservants and maidservants, camels and asses." When Abraham starts off following God he is rich. But he keeps following God, keeps being a giver and later in his life has more than what he began with.

But even though God entrusted him with these assets he never treated his wealth as something, which belonged to himself. He modeled what later comes into scripture – Deuteronomy 8:17-18 "Beware lest you say in your heart my power and the might of my hand has gotten me this wealth. You shall remember the Lord your God. For it is he who gives you the power to get wealth."

So Abraham was a person entrusted with assets and givers in order to give must also be entrusted by the Lord with assets. To the degree that you are faithful in handling those assets to that degree also will the Lord give you additional assets to contribute and to give and to use for his kingdom based on the principle to him who has more will be given.

To the degree that we treat our assets well and to the degree that we give and develop generosity in this gift, to that degree also the Lord is also able to discipline us in a good sense, cause us to be disciplined so that more and more we become creative and fruitful and expansive in demonstration of this gift. Certainly what is being said of giving is true of every other gift. As you exercise prophecy you become a prophet. As you exercise teaching, you teach better. It is as you serve that you serve more ably. It is as you give that you give better.

A third quality of Abraham is that he lived a surrendered life. That's not to say that Abraham was a perfect person. There are texts that show him as a great big failure. Not a surrendered life a kind of gutless life where a person just sort of becomes a dead fish in God's hands and whatever God wants he just flips the fish and it does it. Abraham had real timber and quality in his life. But he was a surrendering person.

Four key moments show him as a giver, surrendering himself to the Lord.

The first key moment is when the Lord moves him and Abraham surrenders his location. He is in Ur of the Chaldeans and the Lord says, "Get thee out to a country that I will show you." And Abraham is willing at the Lord's bidding. To surrender the security of his family, of his background, of his home, society and civilization and everything in order to become a pilgrim.

A second way in which he surrendered is in the story of Lot where he shows clearly he is a surrendering person who depends upon God as his source. Recall the situation. Lot's flocks and Abraham's flocks grew and increased and a dispute rose between the servants over the land which they were both tending. So Abraham took Lot aside and said to him, this land is big enough for both of us. You look around and see what you want. Even though for Abraham it

THE GIFT OF GIVING

The Christian and Money

meant taking the hill country, the more difficult territory, Abraham's confidence was such in God that he could give Lot freedom of choice to determine what he wanted. If Lot wanted to take the fattest land and the best circumstance that was fine. Because Abraham wasn't dependent on the land for his living. He had learned to depend upon God as his source. Lot says I'll take the well-watered plains and he got into a lot of trouble later. But because Abraham had God as his source and he had surrendered his life, God continued to prosper him.

And by the way, later Abraham had to even come and rescue Lot. He was a person who was willing to act on behalf of others when a legitimate need demonstrated itself.

Another aspect of Abraham as a surrenderer was he had no trouble with tithing in Genesis 14. We see this in relationship with Melchizedek.

Another area and I think the primary area of his life is in the yielding up of his son. Notice this principle operative in Abraham's life: to him who has more will be given. He starts out by changing his location. He's willing enough to give up prime land to Lot. Then he's willing to give the Lord a tenth.

Finally the key test that comes. I'm not sure that had Abraham's story begun with Genesis 1 with God calling him to offer up his son would he have been able. He did not yet have the spiritual strength to pick up those weights. But there comes a moment when the Lord puts him to the test and says to him to offer up his son. His faith is so outstanding. Genesis 22:8 notes it. As he's about ready to sink the knife into Isaac. "God will provide himself the lamb for a burnt offering my son." Abraham didn't realize how deeply these words were prophetic. He didn't say, God will provide a burnt offering. He says prophetically, "God will provide himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son." Thereby he not only indicated that God was able to meet that immediate need but prophetically he spoke beyond what he knew and looked toward that day when God would fill out the picture which he had asked Abraham to fulfill in the giving of his own son. God will provide the Lamb.

That kind of faith in God comes to the people of the Lord who gives. That literally they believe if they follow God's instructions God will take care of them. God will provide. He lived a lifetime with God as his source.

In this living the surrendered life a fourth quality developed in Abraham. Each act of surrender was followed by the blessing of the Lord. Each time he gave himself to the Lord in a new way the Lord came right back at him with more blessing than Abraham had previously experienced.

When he surrendered his location to the Lord, Genesis 12:7 says "The Lord prepared to Abraham and said, 'to your descendants I will give this land.'"

When he deferred to Lot the Lord blessed him and reminded him again of his great promises.

When he tithed the Lord again blessed him and said, "Fear not Abraham I am your shield. Your reward shall be very great."

When he offered up his son the Lord gave him the greatest blessings, "By myself I have sworn because you have done this and not withheld your son your only son, I will indeed bless you and

THE GIFT OF GIVING

The Christian and Money

I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven and as the sand, which is on the seashore. Your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies. By your descendants shall all the nations of the earth bless themselves because you have obeyed my voice.”

Abraham’s act of giving his life to the Lord and committing his resources to the Lord. We look at each of these four points where he changed his location, where he gave to Lot, where he tithed, where he gave his son, his motivation in giving was never to get. His motivation was always to obey the Lord and to please him. Abraham avoided – and I think we should avoid in giving – what I call heavenly slot machine mentality. That there’s some sort of a magic formula that works as sort of this bank with God. If we put enough of our coins into the slot and pull the right handle, more will come out to us. Just because a selfish person gives does not mean that in that act of giving they become unselfish. A selfish person may give in order to have more given to them and if the motivation for giving is a selfish one to start with then one violates the fundamental principle which the Lord has of giving of giving from a sincere heart. Giving expecting nothing in return. Giving because one loves the Lord.

But to those who enter in from this deep conviction of surrendering life to the Lord the Lord can’t help but give in return. There is that natural fatherhood within God, which reaches out to embrace us as we seek to please him.

Paul tells us to give liberally. “He who contributes, with liberality.” In the New Testament this word which is translated “liberality” means two different things and I think both meanings may be involved here in Romans 12:8.

One way it is used is to be translated literally. Several times in referring to the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians 8 & 9 three times it’s used to describe the great liberality of the Corinthian believers in giving of the needs of destitute saints. But the word also can be translated “to give simply.” Or “to give with simplicity or sincerity.” Same word used in Romans 12:8 is used in Ephesians 6:5 where we are told to obey with a sincere heart. Not a literal heart but a sincere heart. Jesus says, “the eye is the lamp of the whole body. If your eye is single [if it is sincere] your whole body will be full of light.” The picture underlying this idea of the single heart is that of a piece of cloth or other material which is neatly folded one time without a variety of complicated folds. Hence out of this one fold aspect comes the idea of simplicity. The English word “simplicity” comes from a Latin word “simplex” which means once to fold, to fold once – simplicity. No complications.

So simplicity in giving speaks of giving in a moral sense. Guileless, plain, pure, uncomplicated, not drawing attention to the act of giving or seeking any reward from it.

Abraham quietly simply gave up Isaac. The Father gave us the Son. Very simply the baby at Bethlehem, how more simply can the greatest gift ever be given. He gave simply and liberally.

So when we look at this gift of giving we recognize that all of us are called to give in certain measures. Some within our body will especially in a unique measure have the capacity to give and will also have the calling to be a giver. It’s going to be difficult to spot them in a public setting. Because unlike the role of teaching and prophecy the speaking gifts, the giver when they give are supposed to give with the left hand not knowing what the right hand is doing, in secret. It’s going to be difficult to recognize them.

THE GIFT OF GIVING

The Christian and Money

This person will become known in a quiet sort of way. These people are known for their great supportiveness and their life will be blessed.

We're challenged in the scriptures through Abraham's experience to become the friend of God. To use what assets that he has entrusted us with, to surrender our life to the Lord and experience his blessing. All of these are qualities of our Lord himself who as we're taking communion this morning reminds us once more of the fact that the essence of our faith is the gift of life he provided to us through the sacrifice of his Son.

Our loving Father, we come to you in this moment and we're confessing so much in faith today. We did not see you die on the cross, we did not see you suffer for us, we did not see you rise again from the dead. We have instead believed on the testimony of the witnesses to you and the inward dwelling of the Spirit who has brought us the good news that our sins are forgiven, that we have received through faith in you the gift of eternal life. Our lives are so radically altered and changed Lord through your coming. We praise you for what you're doing in our midst. We thank you Lord Jesus for the lives that came to confess you as Lord and Savior. We thank you Lord that you want to do this again today as we share communion. You want to present yourself as the gift of life and love to every heart here that's without you. You want to undertake to meet every need which we have. To convince us in a very special and real way of your goodness and love for us. That you're not willing that anybody should perish, that anybody should be a failure in life. That anyone should come unglued as a result of emotional pressures and depression. That anyone should have to cave in under the biting circumstances of life. Or that anyone should have to be drained of emotional resources not knowing how to handle a very difficult home situation. But you have come, the great giver of life and love to minister your presence to us in these moments. We ask now as we prepare to receive this communion that it will awaken in our heart great words of praise that we can in this moment bring to you. That you will kindle great responses to you. And that you will bless your people as we receive these emblems of your broken body and shed blood. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.