

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

Today we're going to take two whole chapters. 2 Corinthians 8 & 9. I want to speak to you on the theme of the Ministry of Giving. Normally my messages will have anywhere between one and 3 or 4 main points. But I'm going to warn you in advance, that although it won't take me an eternity to preach this message, that I have 10 points.

Giving is a sensitive subject isn't it? Giving to the Lord's work. There are those in the body of Christ who believe that we ought never to mention any need within the body. If we're aware on the leadership level we pray and if it's the Lord's will the need is supplied. If it's not, it's not.

Then there are others on the opposite extreme who will use every trick in the book to manipulate people to give. They in effect become discredit to the name of Christ through the fundraising techniques that are used.

There are people the middle of the road who say we ought to pay but yet it's also biblical to ask.

It's interesting that as you look at the two instances in scripture especially in the New Testament where offerings are being received, one of them Acts 2 & 4 deals with the spontaneous offering in the Jerusalem church where after the Day of Pentecost they spontaneously sell their homes and their assets and have all things in common. There appears not to be any sort of fund drive initiated by the leadership. It seems to happen as an overflow of the great love that God has put in the hearts of these Spirit filled believers. We might look back upon that in perspective and see how good the Spirit was in giving them that inspiration for the time shortly came when all their property was confiscated anyway and at least they got to enjoy it by giving it away.

The other occasion was that passage in 2 Corinthians 8 & 9. The references to this offering extend also over to 1 Corinthians 16 where the plans for the offering were set approximately 12 months earlier than the setting of 2 Corinthians 8 & 9. The offering is also referred to in Romans 15 and the book of Galatians. It was an offering that was being taken throughout the churches that Paul founded on his first missionary's journeys. An offering taken to assist in the relief of the saints in Jerusalem, in Judea. It was an offering, which was very clearly established by the leadership. That is the apostle Paul. I think it's very clear to see if you look at 2 Corinthians 8 that persons had made a pledge or faith promise at an earlier point toward giving toward this offering. There were persons involved in the collection of the offering. So it was a rather well advertised need throughout the body.

Now the time has come, some months after the initial pledge, that the time has come for the offering to actually be received and it be taken to Jerusalem. That is Paul's concern as he writes 2 Corinthians 8 & 9.

Remember as we open these 2 chapters that Paul is not addressing the matter of support for the local church. He's not addressing the matter of the tithe. Neither is he speaking even about meeting the needs of the saints within the local body. It is assumed that all these things were already going on at Corinth. The particular offering that is being raised is an offering to meet the needs at another place.

THE MINISTRY OF GIVING

The Christian and Money

In that respect I think it is very similar to the kind of missionary giving that we engage in here in this church and also the giving that you and we participate in in terms of meeting the needs of persons that are in very destitute areas outside of our community, other places. We attempt to provide for the needs of our own as they occur. But we're also involved in meeting needs away from us over and above our normal giving to support the work of God in our own areas.

So Paul is concerned about some principles of giving that relate to this matter. I think our giving like all other aspects of our Christian living ought to flow out of a biblical basis. So Paul is giving us really in these two chapters ten principles that relate to our over and above tithing giving. I think they relate to our tithe as well. They're timeless principles.

The first principle that is struck clearly for us. Verse 1. The true motive of our giving is always to be the grace of God. "And now brothers we want you to know about the grace of God. About the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches."

To give you a geographical setting the Macedonian churches were north of the Corinthian churches. Or the churches in the province of Achaia. It'd be like Paul writing to the southern Californians and talking to them about what the northern Californians were doing.

I want to talk to you first of all about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. The offering that these friends in the north are giving is out of the sense of the grace of God. If you were to put on a scale of importance from 1 to 10 the reasons we ought to give. Certainly the best reason, the number 10, ought to be that we give because of what God has done for us. Because of the grace of God. Not because somebody has manipulated us. Not because we've been coerced. Not because we're doing it out of a sense of duty. But because of what God has done for us. So the Christian response is always the response that flows out of freedom.

In the New Testament giving is not legislated. The Macedonians gave because their hearts were moved by the grace of God. It well might be said that if we've never had a sense that God has done anything for us then it ought to also be said that probably we are not good candidates to give anything to God's work. Those who give who do not give from a sense of "God has done something in my life!" really start off by missing the whole joy and reason for giving.

Giving is first of all the response to the grace of God in our life.

A second principle that Paul shares in verses 2 through 5 is that the example of others is a legitimate inspiration for our own giving.

In this principle he sites five different things that the northern Grecian Christians have done to inspire the southern Grecian Christians. He said that after the severe test of affliction, out of a severe trial they have had overflowing joy. We don't know what this particular affliction or trial was. But we do know that whatever it was it did not keep them from the joy of giving. They did not wait to give until everything was going well. Nor did they give with a frown. Nor did they say, We need it just as much here as they do over there. We have to do what the Corinthians and the Macedonians did and that's not simply look at our own needs but look out upon the needs of others. So even in their affliction when they could have used the financing themselves they were finding the joy of giving to others.

THE MINISTRY OF GIVING

The Christian and Money

Paul also says in this matter of the Macedonian churches inspiring the southern churches, out of extreme poverty they had a wealth of liberality. It welled up in rich generosity.

Extreme poverty. They did not wait until they had enough to give. Nor did they simply measure liberality by the amount that they were giving. Liberality is always measured by proportion. They were poor but out of their poverty they had given liberally.

Not only that Paul tells us that in their inspirational example they had given not only according to their means or according to their ability but they had given beyond their means and beyond their ability. Inspiring in that it was sacrificial.

They gave not only according to their means, they gave beyond their means.

Again there is balance. Some people are foolish in giving and will do extravagant things and not take care of legitimate needs in their own family. The scripture is not telling us we are to let our children go hungry while we're giving so that someone can live an extravagant lifestyle. There is a sense of recognition of the legitimacy of inspiration of not only giving according to one's means but giving beyond them.

Paul also said that their inspiration was they gave out of free will. In fact it took no manipulation for the Macedonians to give. "They begged us earnestly for the favor." Paul says, "They went beyond anything we thought they would do. They gave themselves to the Lord, and to us."

Again, that's a great lesson in giving. Before we see what we give as going to someone else or somewhere else in the body of Christ we see that gift first of all as a being presented to the Lord. That's why at the close of the offering we bring the gifts forward in this church. It's symbolic that we first dedicate them to the Lord and then they are dispersed. Inspiration of others.

The industrialist R. G. LeTourneau spoke at our campus when I was in college. I'll never forget this great man of God standing up and sharing the stewardship of his life and how God had impressed upon him as he made money as he developed assets, that he should increase his proportion of giving to the Lord as God gave him assets. Prior to that time I had always took it for granted that ten percent belonged to the Lord and the other 90% was yours to do whatever you wanted. R. G. LeTourneau had the viewpoint that everything belongs to the Lord and he had come to maturity in his giving and his discipleship that 90% of whatever he earned was going to the Lord's work and he was living and living very well on the other 10%. A marvelous example.

W.A. Criswell has been an inspiration to me, something that I would like to do. He's pastored Dallas First Baptist for something like 35 years. A year or two ago he handed the church a check for all the salary they had ever paid him over the 35 years of pastoring. Why he was able to do that was he was a good investor and he was always investing a little bit. His investments paid off and he was able to come to the end of his ministry in that church and pay the church back every dime they had ever paid him.

I think that's inspiring to see what others are doing.

A third principle that the apostle gives is our concern for excellence should include our giving. Verses 6-7 "Just as you excel in everything – faith and speech and knowledge in complete

THE MINISTRY OF GIVING

The Christian and Money

earnestness and in your love for us see that you also excel in the grace of giving.” The Corinthian church was one that perhaps rightly had a sense of well being in terms of the spiritual gifts. Gifts of faith, gifts of knowledge, gifts of speech. The many gifts of the Spirit were in evidence in the congregation. There was an excellent sense of worship.

Paul says don't let your giving be anything less than the other spiritual traits that are in your congregation. “As you have all of these in excellence so also let your giving be excellent.”

The phrase “Jesus is king, and kings don't beg.” - there ought to be that kind of excellence in the church. When we receive an offering it's done with a dignity and with a realization that we are giving to the king of kings and Lord of lords. We need to both give in a style and proportion reflected of the Lord we whom we serve.

A fourth thing that the apostle Paul says about the ministry of giving is that our giving is to pattern after the example of Christ.

Verses 8-9. “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that though he was rich yet for your sakes he became poor so that you through his poverty might become rich.”

Barclay notes that there are four motivations people have when they give. Some give from a sense of duty. It's habit and it's plugged in. Others give from a sense of self-satisfaction. You see somebody in need and you give to them and you walk away and feel so good! You feel good that you did something about that. Others give out of a sense of prestige. Some recognition may be associated with giving the gift.

The real thing is to give out of love. That's the focus that is here in the emphasis on the Lord. “Though he was rich [referring to his existence in heaven] yet for your sake he became poor.”

To see how poor Jesus was in a financial way in his earthly existence you have to look at how many times he borrowed things. Once he borrowed some food to feed the multitude. Another time he borrowed a coin to give an illustration. When he needed an animal to ride into Jerusalem on, he borrowed a donkey. When he needed a place to be buried there even had to be a borrowed tomb. Though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor.

It is really out of our giving like the Lord we enrich others and we enrich the work of God.

A fifth principle of giving that the apostle has to share with us is that we should give what we can even if it is not what we desired.

Verses 10-12 “Here's my advice about what is best for you in this matter. Last year you were the first not only to give but also to have the desire to do so. Now finish the work so your eager willingness to do it maybe matched by your completion of it according to your means. For if the willingness is there the gift is acceptable according to what one has not according to what he does not have.”

I think that most likely the situation that Paul's referring to would be analogous to what we've done in this church with missionary faith promise commitments. Or when we've made commitments for the building fund. Sometimes when those commitments are being made we

THE MINISTRY OF GIVING

The Christian and Money

step out in faith. We may get just a little bit over our head. Maybe our faith is greater than our wisdom or maybe even greater than our resources. A few months down the line we begin looking at it, “Maybe I bit off more than I could chew. The time has come and what I’ve pledged is due. What am I going to do? I don’t have enough. I have some but I don’t have enough.”

That’s evidently what’s been happening with the Corinthians. They have some but they don’t have enough. Paul’s saying that’s ok. It’s not according to what you desire at this point. It’s what you have. Give what you have and that will be acceptable to God. With that he releases the Corinthians from giving under any sense of guilt or letting it weigh on their backs like some heavy millstone.

I might also add this matter of desire and giving what you have relates to the idea of withholding our giving. We say, I don’t have much to give so therefore I won’t give anything. But there’s a sense that the apostle’s admonishing us when we have to give, let’s give it – to the Lord, to his work, to his people.

Another principle, a sixth principle is that there should be equal sacrifice throughout the body. Verses 13-15. Especially quoting in verse 5 the Old Testament passage on the gathering of manna among the children of Israel. “He that gathered much did not have too much. He who gathered little did not have too little.” A sense of equality.

To the extent possible as we give all of us should carry a share of responsibility proportionate to what we are able to do.

I’ve learned this through our building fund giving here at the church. Before our Together We Build campaign came along if you’d have asked me what was the best way that people ought to give toward the building fund or any kind of fund in the church I’d have said, divide the need by the number of people. So if there’s a \$200,000 need and you have 200 people you’d say let’s everybody give a \$1000. The problem with that is it’s not biblical. Some people giving a \$1000 is like giving a penny. Other people it’s absolutely impossible. We’ve learned as we’ve gone through stewardship in this church. It’s not equal giving, it’s equal sacrifice.

Equal sacrifice in the body. That’s what Paul was calling for among the Corinthians.

Seventh important principle in the ministry of giving is that we need assurances that the offerings we give will be properly accounted for and administered.

That’s the whole focus of verses 16-24. Paul says he’s sending to collect this offering, to administer this offering, not only Titus but two brothers whom he does not name. One of which is most likely Luke – the brother who is “praised by all the churches for his service to the gospel.” Then one other person.

Paul exclusively says in verses 20-21 “We want to avoid any criticism in the way we administer this liberal gift. We are taking pains to do what is right. Not only in the eyes of the Lord but also in the eyes of men.” There’s a sense of accountability. We as Christians need to have a sense of giving that we are not simply giving out of emotional appeal. When you give to the

THE MINISTRY OF GIVING

The Christian and Money

Lord's work are the persons in charge of the ministries you are giving to accountable? Do they give an account? What about their personal lifestyle? Do you know anything about that?

The scriptures are calling us to recognize that the principle of accountability is vital in stewardship. That's one of the reasons we have the kind of controls in this local body we do. Out of a sense that whatever we do, the church of all places in this world, the church and spiritual organizations should be financially cleaner than a hound's tooth. There ought not to be any hidden funds, everything ought to be out and open and accounted for.

In our church fellowship all offerings are counted by more than one person. Every check must have two signatures. Just a guarantee and a safeguard so that no one person gets in a vulnerable kind of a way. Everything in this church that is in a financial way is open for anyone's consideration. Whether you're a member of this church or you're coming in as a reporter. If anyone wants to know anything about how this church handles money we have made it a practice of letting it know. The only thing a person can't know is if you ask what somebody else in the church gave. We recognize confidentiality before the Lord.

There needs to be a sense of accountability.

There is a lot of inequity in the kingdom that concerns me very much. Sometimes I see believers giving to projects that are really not doing very much in the kingdom of God while some of the most fundamental needs go begging because they're perhaps not represented by a person who knows how to motivate people to give. There is a sense in which we as individual Christians need to practice good stewardship and hold our offerings by those who receive them that they're accountable for them.

An eighth principle in giving in 2 Corinthians 8 & 9 is that our enthusiasm is catching. Verses 1-5. The Corinthians had stirred up the Macedonians originally. Just like Paul earlier was saying, the example of others was catching so now he comes back to the Corinthians in these verses and says, "Your enthusiasm in giving is catching. It was you who first stirred up the Macedonians to give." Paul says I don't want to be disappointed when I come and especially if some Macedonians came and your enthusiasm was no longer there.

Our spirit in giving reflects out to other people.

On the other hand if we don't have a spirit of giving and we have a lack of enthusiasm that is catching as well. There's nothing that can kill a worthy project deader than for us all to fold our arms when it is presented and not do anything.

A ninth principle that the apostle gives in verses 6-11 is that those who reap bountifully sow bountifully. Remember this whoever soweth sparingly will also reap sparingly. Whoever sows generously will also reap generously." The rest of the passage goes on to develop that theme.

Some have taken this scripture and distorted it as they do many other scriptures and simply begin to give God three dollars and "Lord, you said you'd return it thirty fold, sixty folks, a hundred fold." A contract. Guaranteed.

THE MINISTRY OF GIVING

The Christian and Money

I'm all for that if it would work. No. That's giving out of a strictly selfish motive. I've always felt that people who make that kind of guarantee should pay their employees a \$100 an hour. And give their employees something more than a minimum wage so their employees would have the chance to test out the gift of generosity, which they're asking others to do.

The Lord has many ways to give back to us though. That's the great thing. The Lord may give back to us financially. The Lord may give back to us spiritually. What I see the apostle Paul doing here is saying when you're sowing this gift God's going to bring it back to you in a spiritual harvest that will be to the glory of God. Look at how God took care of Paul financially after he raised all this offering. We'll see from scriptural example what this scripture actually means. When this offering had been giving the apostle Paul goes with it to Jerusalem. He has eight delegates with him from the churches he's founded. They bring the offering, present it to the church. Paul goes to the temple and he's arrested. Guess what? He gets two years free room and board. Then Paul gets to cruise the Mediterranean. No expense. He's even asking two people along with him for free. Prison ship bound for Rome. He gets to Rome and spends time in a house at his own expense. God provided for him. But more than that the harvest Paul had in those years spiritually was dynamic. Powerful.

When we sow we're going to enjoy a great reaping I become interested in what I'm investing in. When I'm investing in the Lord's work I become very interested in it and very glad to see a return.

It's a wonderful time of life when we come to the point and we're no longer asking how much should I give God. How much should I give myself? It's a great moment when we can say, All is the Lord's. What does he want me to live on? He wants me to be a hilarious giver. That's exactly what I want to be, a cheerful giver.

The tenth and last principle in this passage is found in verses 12-15. It is the principle that our giving should result in praise being given to God.

“This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of God's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. By the service by which you have proved yourself, men will praise God for the obedience, which accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ and your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else. In their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you because of the surpassing grace God has given you. Thanks be to God or his indescribable gift.”

Our giving will result in praise being given to God. Who's going to give the praise? The people are going to be praising the Lord that have received the gift. We're going to be praising the Lord for the harvest that is had.

Like the Macedonian and Achaian churches never knew, never met the saints in Jerusalem. But they gave even without knowing them that God's name might be praised and their needs might be met.

The president of a private Christian college wrote to his constituents about a year ago. He had sent out an appeal. Christian colleges like all growing organizations are continually in need of funds. He sent out an appeal. One of the constituents wrote him a critical letter about his appeal,

THE MINISTRY OF GIVING

The Christian and Money

criticizing him for even asking. He responds to the letter, the letter that had said, You are always asking for money. “You’re probably right. But let me tell you a personal story. I have a little boy, my first born. He was a delight to our hearts but he was costing me something. He needed clothing, shoes, food, special needs that I gladly provided for he was my son. Then one day he died. It was an experience that I hope you will never have. He does not cost me a dollar now. Every need is an unfailing sign of life and growth. Body, mind and soul have their needs and they must be met continually. A ministry that is constantly in need of funds is alive and growing and going somewhere. A dead ministry has no needs. And will not bother you.”

Whatever we give can never be compared to what God has given us – his indescribable gift. All true Christian giving flows out of the character of God who has lavished upon us his great love.

Our Father, thank you for these moments we’ve had to share around your word today. And the development of discipleship in our life through giving. There are persons here who have never known the joy of giving or the discipline of giving in their own life. May this be kind of a freeing day as we come face to face with your word and your nature. Lord, it’s your hearts desire to bless your work. To bless your people both here and in far distant places. I’m so glad that we can have a part in your word. So glad that you didn’t endow the church when you ascended into heaven with a permanent gift that would always pay the church expense so we’d never have to give anything. In giving and making sacrifices we discover some of the real delightful commitments and blessings of our Christian experience. Thank you for the privilege. For those here today and in financial need themselves we pray that you, the God of all grace and the God who owns everything will supply abundantly for their need. Even in the midst of their poverty we pray that rather than being turned in upon themselves they would find someday, maybe not financial but some way to reach out and become a giver in their own life. Bless them. Let them have the confidence that you are going to supply their needs. That you who see a sparrow fall to the ground are aware of their need and you’re going to meet it and bless them. Help us Lord in the giving of our time and the giving of our talent and the giving of our resources that your kingdom and your glory might come. We ask this through Christ Jesus our Lord who loves us. Amen.