

How to Give

2 Corinthians 9:1-15

30 March - 2008

Introduction

Someone has suggested that most people spend up to 50% of their time thinking about money. We are either thinking about what to do with the money we have, how to get more than what we have, or as is the case of late, how to get back the money that we are owed by others! Money is one of those things that we all think about a lot but are often afraid to talk about.

This is especially the case in most churches. I say 'most' because some churches and their leaders appear to be obsessed with money, specifically, how to get more of it. Therefore, for those of us uncomfortable with that obsession with money, we tend not to speak about.

This is a subject that I also naturally avoid. So I thought that I would look at what the scriptures say about money and giving before I have to be told and before there is any pressure to do some from the church treasurer!

I would also like to go on record at this point and say that should this message result in an increase in giving to the church I personally will not benefit from that. My living allowance/stipend is decided and set.

Explanation

So, as we think about money, and specifically giving to the church, we need to understand the fundamental principle that God is the giver of all good things. Even the money we have ultimately belongs to him. That is why we read from Deuteronomy 8:7-18, where Moses reminds the Israelite people that all the good stuff they have has been given them by God, and they should be careful of loving their *stuff* instead of the *Lord* who gave it to them.

In this passage in 2 Corinthians, the apostle Paul is writing to the Christians in that church with the same understanding in mind – our money belongs to God and we get to manage it. He trusts us to manage more of it or less of it according to our abilities. And, in that light, he speaks to them about giving money to the work of the church, in this instance, support for the poor Christians in Jerusalem.

There are some comments that he makes as he reminds them of the gift they promised him a year before, and that some of the church leaders are coming to pick up and take to Jerusalem. He doesn't want them to be caught off guard, put under pressure or embarrassed. So he teaches them *how* to give to the church. *How do I give to the church?*

1. Three wrong ways to give to the church

There are *wrong* ways of giving money to the church that you need to be aware of.

Firstly, we mustn't give because we feel *compelled* or that the money is *exacted* (5) from us. Paul was concerned that the folks in Corinth have time to prepare their gift so they would feel like the brothers coming to collect it were pressuring them to give. He mentions that idea again in v.7 (under compulsion).

Who here likes paying parking tickets or taxes? We dislike doing it because we feel we have no option but to do this. We pay grudgingly. If you feel the church is reaching out its greedy paws to grab your money or you are feeling pressured to give, then something is wrong.

Secondly, we mustn't give *meanly*. He says '*whoever sows sparingly reaps sparingly*' (6). In other words, if we give the least we possibly can, then that is wrong too. Note this is *not* about quantity but *quality*. In Mark 12 (v.41) Jesus saw a poor widow put in one penny and commended her above the richer donors because she gave generously.

Thirdly, and connected to the above, we must not give to the church *reluctantly*. Even without pressure from others or other interference we can be just plain reluctant to give. This may lead to dangerous actions on our part, as was the case with Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5 – the first people in the Bible to be slain in the Holy Spirit. They obviously didn't want to give their money to the church, and so pretended to give everything while holding some back.

2. Three right ways to give to the church

In contrast to the three wrong ways of giving we are told of three *right or good* reasons to give.

Firstly, any giving to the church must be willing. The word used (eulogia) means literally 'a blessing' or good word. Any amount of money or gift given as a blessing or willingly is a generous gift indeed. This was the attitude of King David at the end of his life when he prayed, "*But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able thus to offer willingly? For all things come from you, and of your own have we given you.*" (1 Chr.29)

Secondly, we must give to the church *generously* (6). Again Paul uses the picture of the farmer sowing his seed. So, to get a generous spiritual crop God encourages us to sow generously. Again, we are talking about quality, not quantity, as the widow Jesus saw, or the Mary with the expensive perfume (John12).

The *third* correct way to give is to give *deliberately* (7). So often we give spontaneously and without fore-thought and think that this is more spiritual. Paul however discourages this with the Corinthians. He wants them to have the gift ready (5) and '*as he has decided in his heart.*' Privately each one/family must sit down and prayerfully and carefully determine what we can give and then follow through on that decision.

This touches on the dreaded question of '*how much should I give?*' Probably a lot of these folks gave one tenth of their incomes to support the church's work, as I know most of you do. However, that isn't a command of Jesus, but rather an OT principle that we can use as a guide.

The point is that you plan – budget even – to support the church work. You don't just grab the parking money out of the ashtray of whatever you find in your wallet. Some people like to give by automatic payment each week. Some wait to the end of the month or year when they business accounts are in.

3. Four results of proper giving

What are the *results* of proper giving? There is much confusion and false teaching in this area today...always has been. The apostle spells out *four clear results* of right giving:

Firstly, God ‘*who is able to make all grace to abound towards you*’ will give you what is sufficient ‘*in all things at all times*’ (8). God’s generous to those who are generous is contentment (rich/poor). God will take care of your needs, giving you a spirit of contentment and deeper dependence on his good hand.

Secondly, God ‘*will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase your harvest of righteousness*’ (10). This doesn’t mean if you give heaps to the church you will get heaps in the bank account. Rather, as we give generously, God who supplies the money will make that money *we give* (seed) multiply and bring a rich harvest of righteousness – not money.

Thirdly, others will be served (12). The focus of this passage was the poor in Jerusalem. Whatever the focus, when we give properly, then others are helped and blessed, and *fourthly*, give God thanks and praise (12, 13). 1 Tim.5:17, 18.

4. One overall attitude in giving

What is to be the overall attitude? In v.7 Paul states, ‘*God loves a cheerful giver.*’ That Greek word ‘cheerful’ is the one we get ‘hilarious’ from. God through Malachi (1) warned the Israelites about giving to God and saying “*what a weariness/burden this is*” (13) and God says that “*I have no pleasure in you...and I will not accept an offering from your hand*” (1:10). God sees our hearts, not our cheque-books. He loves cheerful givers.

5. One over all reason to give

Finally, Paul rather than appealing to the great need or opportunities, finishes by exclaiming, “*Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!*” Why do you give money to the church? Not because the church needs it, not because you’ll get blessed, not even because you’ve got loads of money – but, because God has given you an indescribably precious gift (John 3:16). If you have been touched by God’s wonderful grace, then you will cheerful support with your finances God’s gospel work. Any other reason for giving is too pitiful.