

CHRISTIAN GIVING Part 1.

In a recent study called “Going Down To Egypt For Help,” the point was made that God forbids the Church to return to the world and its ways for help in dealing with things. One example presented was that we are not to approach the Church’s financial needs as a sort of fundraising exercise, utilizing the worldly methods of advertising through direct-mailing, or soliciting bequests from the sick and elderly. These are instances of what we shouldn’t do.

This study is an attempt to look at the other side of the issue of Christian giving in a Church based on New Testament principles. The question now becomes What should we do? What is required of us in this area? What does Scripture say and how literally should we take those words (i.e. when are they providing general guidance and when do they become specific direction)?

The most complete New Testament statement to be found on the subject is found in Paul’s Second Letter to the young Christian Church in Corinth, chapters 8 and 9. This reading is reproduced below:

- **Moreover brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia: that in great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality** (Gk *haplotēs* meaning ‘simplicity, sincerity, unaffectedness, as *manifested* in generous giving,’ - i.e. freely giving, not necessarily generous giving, but giving without ‘show’ or without desiring recognition, just as Jesus says in Matthew 6:1-2; “Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven. Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly I say to you, they have their reward.”). **For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing, imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints. And this they did, not as we had hoped (or ‘not because we had requested’), but first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God. So we urged Titus, that as he had begun, so he would also complete this grace in you as well. But as you abound in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all diligence, and in your love for us—see that you abound in this grace also.** (2 Cor 8:1-7). Here we read that the saints in a church in Achaia (southern Greece) were encouraged by Paul to follow the example of the churches in Macedonia (northern Greece) and *give simply and sincerely, according to their ability, and freely willing*. The gift was first to be given to the Lord in prayer, before being presented to the purpose or people for whom it was intended, “by the will of God.” The principle being expressed in this passage is the essential privacy of Christian giving—the matter is entirely between the believer and his Lord.
- **I speak not by commandment, but I am testing the sincerity of your love by the diligence of others. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich. And in this I give my advice: it is to your advantage not only to be doing what you began and were desiring to do a year ago; but now you also**

must complete the doing of it; that as there was a readiness to desire it, so there also may be a completion out of what you have. For if there is first a willing mind, it is accepted according to what one has, and not according to what he does not have. For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened; but by an equality, that *now at this time* your abundance may supply their lack, that their abundance may (at some possible time in the future) supply your lack—that there may be equality. As it is written (in Exodus 16:18): ‘He who gathered much (manna) had nothing left over, and he who gathered little had no lack.’ (2 Cor 8:8-15). In this paragraph, Paul states clearly that he is not making rules concerning Christian giving. He says he is *not speaking by commandment* but is *giving his advice* on the issue. While he believes members of the Church will benefit from their choice to minister to other churches in this way, those who are giving are not being urged to give beyond what they have to give in the first place. The Christian giver *gives out of what he has, not according to what he does not have*. In this paragraph Paul is stressing the voluntary nature of Christian giving.

- **But thanks be to God who puts the same earnest care for you into the heart of Titus. For he not only accepted the exhortation, but being more diligent, he went to you of his own accord. And we have sent with him the brother whose praise is in the gospel throughout all the churches, and not only that, but who was also chosen by the churches to travel with us with this gift which is administered by us to the glory of the Lord himself and to show your ready mind, avoiding this: that anyone should blame us in this lavish gift which is administered by us—providing honourable (or ‘obviously honest’) things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men. And we have sent with them our brother whom we have often proved diligent in many things, but now much more diligent, because of the great confidence which we have in you. If anyone inquires about Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker concerning you. Or if our brethren are inquired about, they are messengers (literally ‘apostles’ or ‘sent ones’) of the churches, the glory of Christ. Therefore show to them, and before the churches, the proof of your love and of our boasting on your behalf. (2 Cor 8:16-24). Here Paul is stating that it is incumbent upon us (i.e. we are required) to check the *bona fides* of those we entrust our Christian giving to. The person who carried the money was actually chosen by those who gave it, and the distribution of the monies was administered by someone that they trusted implicitly (i.e. Paul and his close associates). Note the amount of words the apostle devotes to assuring the Church in Corinth that Titus and those with him are genuine. In simple terms, Paul provides them with a reference of good character. All dealings with money must be readily transparent and ‘above board,’ and it is the responsibility of the givers to be sure that this is the case. The theme in this paragraph concerns probity (or the doing of things properly) in Christian giving.**
- **Now concerning the ministering to the saints, it is superfluous for me to write to you; for I know your willingness, about which I boast of you to the Macedonians, that Achaia was ready a year ago; and that your zeal has stirred up the majority. Yet I have sent the brethren, lest our boasting of you be in vain in this respect, that, as I said, you may be ready; lest if some Macedonians come with me and find you unprepared, we (not to mention you!) should be ashamed of this confident boasting. Therefore I thought it necessary to exhort the brethren to go to you ahead of time, and prepare your bountiful (Gk *eulogia* ‘a blessing’ not necessarily the amount) gift beforehand, which you had previously promised, that it may be ready as a matter of generosity and not as a grudging obligation. (2 Cor:1-5). This section**

is best viewed in connection with 1 Corinthians 16:1-4, which specifically deals with the matter of “being prepared” with your giving. **Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given *orders* to the churches of Galatia** (Gk *taxis* really means to arrange appropriately or draw up in due order, so this should read “as I have *arranged* with the churches of Galatia”), **so you *must* do also** (KJV is more accurate here; “even so do ye,” so verse 1 is actually a confirmation of the ‘voluntary’ nature of NT giving): **On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no (last-minute) collections when I come. And when I come, whomever you approve by your letters** (an interesting confirmation of ‘probity’ in NT giving) **I will send to bear your gift to Jerusalem. But if it is fitting that I go also, they will go with me.** In both these sections, Paul is introducing the concept of regularity in Christian giving. This consistent approach is not for the convenience of those who receive the gift, but rather to the benefit of those who do the giving.

- **But this I say: he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully** (Gk *ep'eulogiais* ‘with blessings’ not necessarily the amount) **will also reap bountifully.** **So let each one give as *he* purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity (compulsion). And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, having sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work.** As it is written (in Psalm 112:9): ‘He has dispersed abroad, He has given to the poor, His righteousness remains forever.’ Now may He who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food, supply and multiply the seed you have sown and increase the fruits of your righteousness, while you are enriched in everything for all liberality (Gk *haplotes* denotes ‘simplicity, sincerity, unaffectedness’ and does not describe the size of the gift—it is a reference to the genuineness underlying it), **which causes thanksgiving through us to God. For the administration of this service not only supplies the needs of the saints, but also is abounding through many thanksgivings to God,** whilst through the proof of this ministry, they glorify God for the obedience of your confession to the gospel of Christ, and for your liberal (Gk *haplotes* ‘simple, sincere, unaffected,’) **sharing with them and all men, and by their prayer for you, who long for you because of the exceeding grace of God in you. Thanks be to God for *His* indescribable gift!** (2 Cor 9:6-15). Paul concludes his advice and recommendations on the topic in this last paragraph, which teaches the responsibility of Christian giving. He reminds us that an essential part of Christian life is to give back to God a portion of our income, which we received from Him in the first place. He affirms God’s promise to supply us with all of our physical or material needs (“having sufficiency in all things”), and that part of this promise includes the provision of what we are required to return to Him (“an abundance for every good work”). Furthermore he says that our giving will not only meet the physical and material needs of those to whom we give it, but that it will also abound in spiritual benefits to God, to those who receive the gift, and to those who send it.

As in all things, including Christian giving, Christ has the pre-eminence. In acknowledging the principles of privacy or sincerity, the voluntary nature of Paul’s words, the need for probity or obvious honesty, the recommendation for regularity, or our responsibility to give, we are really only looking at the external realities, or the ‘workings-out’ of the issue. The apostle is expressing his sensible views and we should listen, because he was a man deeply impregnated with the love and wisdom of Christ. But (and as if to approve his divine leading in the matter) in no way do any of his principles contradict the central part of all of our obligations to the Lord, whether they be Christian giving, ministry and good works, or obedient and authoritative

prayer. In all of these situations, the Lord leads and we follow. Christian giving is like everything else. Each believer must approach the Shepherd who guides and provides, and settle on what is right for them-selves with Him. To read the chapters of 2 Cor 8 & 9 is to hear from a man who couldn't care less how much we give, but who does care a great deal about how close our walk is with the Lord, and whether our hearts are soft enough to receive the leading of his Holy Spirit—on every matter.