

The Gospel of Giving

by Randall F. Matheny

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. (John 3:16)" "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her... (Eph. 5:25)" "By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren (1 John 3:16)." "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 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. (2 Cor 8:9-12)"

Giving is central to the very essence of Christianity. God, the greatest giver, gave His only begotten Son. Jesus, the obedient Son (Heb. 5:8-9), gave His life (Jn. 15:13). In view of God's indescribable gift (2 Cor. 9:15), every Christian is to give liberally of himself and of his means so that the work of Christ and His church may go forward. The Christian recognizes that *"The earth is the Lord's, and all its fullness, The world and those who dwell therein (Psm. 24:1),"* and that there is nothing that man may accumulate, acquire, assemble or aspire to, that he can take full credit for of himself, or of which there is no need to thank God. In essence, when the Christian gives he is not giving for the advancement of some mere organization or group, he is giving for the advancement of God's glorious plan of salvation, he is giving back into the hand of God Himself. It is no wonder, then, that we find such statements descriptive of Christian giving: with liberality (2 Cor. 8:1-2), everyone, upon the first day of every week, as God has prospered him (1 Cor. 16:1-2), not sparingly or grudgingly (2 Cor. 9:6), but cheerfully and purposefully (2 Cor. 9:7). Perhaps one of the most profound statements in the Bible regarding God's expectation of His children in giving is recorded in the parable of the "rich fool" (Lk. 12:13-21), concluding with: *"But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided? So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."*

A Simple but Profound Principle

"Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth (1 John 3:16-18)." There is a very simple, but profound, principle at work in the preceding verses. The Lord Jesus gave His very best to extend redemption to lost and sinful mankind (Rom. 3:10, 23; 5:6-8), who, in the filth of sin, had nothing comparable to give in return, consequently, those who accept Jesus' gift in faithful obedience are expected to give of themselves in like manner as they have been given unto. Let us examine a few divine expectations regarding acceptable giving.

1. Christians are expected to give out of love (Jn. 13:15-16, 34-35; 15:13). Love is the greatest of all motives. Those who love their Lord and their fellowman are already persuaded that giving of themselves and of their means is simply the best way to express that love. They also

understand that the withholding of benevolence is an expression of disrespect for the Lord, disdain for those in need and disregard for the truth (1 Jn. 3:17-19).

2. Christians are expected to give liberally and cheerfully (2 Cor. 9:5-15; Mk. 12:41-44). Laying down earthly treasure for the Lord is one way of laying up spiritual treasure in heaven (Mat. 6:19-20). Giving of one's excess breeds self-righteousness, while giving of one's poverty (2 Cor. 8:2) breeds humility and dependence upon God. Giving brings gladness (Acts 20:35), but some of the most miserable people in history have been misers.

3. Christians are expected to systematically and purposefully support the work of the church (1 Cor. 16:1-2; 2 Cor. 8:10-15; 9:7; Gal. 6:6; Acts 2:44-45; 4:32-37). The church is the body of Christ, the greatest organization, with the greatest mission, in the world. Consequently, Christian giving is to be thoughtfully purposed and planned according to ability and systematically offered upon the first day of every week. Christians are to be knowledgeable of the work of the church and are to give sufficiently that the work may be accomplished.

Christians, of all people, ought to respect and understand the Divine principle of giving, for they know that God gives to the giver (2 Cor. 9:8-11; Lk. 6:38), and that it is impossible to "out-give" God. There ought to be no better "givers" in the world than members of the church of Christ.

Giving is A Divine Characteristic

"I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive' (Acts 20:35)." Most of us have heard the old saying about how to know when you have given enough: "Give until it hurts." A brief examination of the preceding verse has Paul agreeing with Jesus that a better measurement would be to "give until it feels good." This is a good summation of the Christian life: A life of giving self and means in the service of Christ abounds in joy! Giving is a Divine characteristic, an attribute of God that His children are to emulate. When was the last time that anyone saw a secure, joyful "skin flint?" People who have not learned to give cheerfully (2 Cor. 9:7) do not control their assets, but rather are controlled by them, rarely looking for opportunities to serve others (Lk. 18:22-23), but always looking for ways serve self (Lk. 12:15-21).

Let us consider the following Biblical guideposts as we prepare to "lay by in store." God requires each Christian whom He has prospered to give in proportion to his prosperity (1 Cor. 16:1-2). *"Let each..."* is a command by exhortation, which eliminates any thought of "option" from giving. Giving is a Divine must. Jehovah reminded Israel, *"And you shall remember the LORD your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth, that He may establish His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as it is this day (Deut. 8:18) ."* Liberal, cheerful giving begins with the realization that all man may possess has its ultimate origin in a giving God, and that He requires in return a portion of what He has bountifully given. Acceptable giving requires an awareness of how we have been prospered and how much we can purpose in our hearts to return to the Lord (2 Cor. 9:7) without causing unnecessary hardship on our families by failing in our responsibility to provide for our own (1 Tim. 5:8). A little time and effort in controlling our assets, budgeting, can help us work this out to the satisfaction of all our duties. *"...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 (2 Cor*

8:11-12).” When Christians “lay by in store upon the first day of the week” they are giving to the greatest of all causes, the ministry of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

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