
GIVING

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“How much owest thou unto my lord?” was asked by the unjust steward who on receiving an answer, wrote the amount down by half. (Luke 16: 5, 6.) How much do you owe your Lord? How much do I? Surely it is one hundred per cent: all that we have and are we owe to Him. We must not write it down. His words to us are, “Thou owest unto Me even thine own self.” (Philemon 19). The Macedonians acknowledged the truth of this and “first gave themselves unto the Lord” as an attempt to repay something of their debt to Him (2 Cor. 8: 5).

Unless we start there, any “giving” of our substance, time or ought else will lack an essential ingredient to make it an odour of a sweet smell unto God.

There is hardly a writer of the New Testament who does not touch upon this subject. Indeed, much more than merely touch it. **Paul** deals with it at length: The Lord Himself has much to say concerning it which has been recorded by the evangelists. **Luke** recounts its practice in his missionary record. The unknown writer to the Hebrews says “But to do good and to communicate forget not” (Heb. 13:16). **James** shows the utter hypocrisy of speaking words of comfort to the hungry and unclothed and yet not doing something about it. (James 2: 15, 16). In like manner **John** calls upon us not to “love in word and tongue but” to manifest it “in deed and truth” (1 John 3: 18). **Peter** also reminds us that we are stewards responsible to God and he exhorts us to be “good stewards faithfully dispensing to others what God has made a gift to us” (1 Peter 4: 10).

Neither in the Old Testament nor the New can we read far before we meet this topic. The willing offerers to God for the Tabernacle and its furnishings have been given a place of honour by **Moses** in his Pentateuch (Ex. 36: 5). The ready-heartedness of **David** in respect of the building of the temple is a lasting tribute to his praise

(1 Chron. 29). The wise man enjoins it in his Proverbs (Prov. 21 : 26), and the prophet urges the people of his apathetic times to "bring the whole tithe into the storehouse" and to "prove" God (Mal. 3 : 10).

But, having regard to the fact that we are living in a dispensation that is characterised by the presence on earth of the Spirit of God, and that we are not expected to be occupied with a material, visible house but rather with a spiritual temple, we may profitably enquire as to **what objects** we should help by our giving? We should not give blindly. Both heart and mind should be exercised. The New Testament names three objects which, indeed, summarise all other things.

WHAT OBJECTS ?

Each is spoken of in Paul's letter to the **Galatians** :

(i) Ch. 2 : 10 "Only they would that we should remember the **poor**," that is, poor saints. These are our first charge, saints in our own company who stand in need of material help of one kind or another. The brethren at Jerusalem were very properly concerned with those who, due to persecution, were brought into a state of need. Having regard to the fact that Paul had previously bitterly persecuted even unto death those who named the name of Christ, it was only a reasonable requirement that, now that he was propagating the faith he once destroyed, he should stir up an interest in the temporal welfare of those who had suffered at the hands of himself and his erstwhile associates.

(ii) Ch. 6 : 6 "Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto **him that teacheth** in all good things." That is, those who spread abroad the Word of God either to saint or sinner, should be assisted in a material manner so that their good work may go forward and they may be sustained in doing it. It is only right that, if they minister in spiritual things, they should reap carnal things from those who benefit. Just as in the case of the Jewish people, the Gentiles have benefited by their spiritual things and they are, therefore, duty-bound to help them in material things, so it is also in the case of the servants of the Lord. There should be a hearty co-operation between teacher and taught in this matter: the one communicating spiritual things, the others material.

(iii) Ch. 6 : 10 "Let us do good unto **all men**, especially unto them who are of the household of faith." Thus the circle widens and all men should be within the ambit of our liberality. There is much need and suffering around; by no means all the sufferers are culpable; they are mostly the innocent victims of the misdeeds of others. The "spirit of Jesus" may be shown by dipping our hands

into our pockets, and so opening the door of their heart by the openness of our own hand.

EXAMPLES

The Scriptures abound in **examples** of kind and generous giving to those who are unworthy of our help, save that their needs makes a claim upon us.

The **Supreme Example** is, as we all know, the grace of our Lord Jesus who, though He was rich, yet for our sakes became poor, that we through His poverty might become rich (2 Cor. 8 : 9).

Who can measure His wealth? To compute only that which pertains to the planet on which we dwell is beyond the brain of the cleverest. It all belongs to Him. The cattle on every hill, the wealth of every mine, to say nothing of the limitless wealth in those things which fill space. He is their Creator; their Owner; and their wealth is His by right ever since they existed. But in grace to us, for our sakes, He laid all aside and became poor. To write of His poverty in birth, in family life, in daily work, would exceed the possible limits of this paper. He did not enrich Himself by preaching. No, He had not a penny to produce to demonstrate a lesson (Mark 12: 15). In order to pay the temple tax He had to exert His divine knowledge and power: The foxes had holes, and the birds of the air had nests but He had not where to lay His head. In order to get the treasure in the field, and the pearl of the sea, He sold all that He had. He gave up life itself in order to secure these for Himself, and He was cut off and "had nothing" (Dan. 9: 26 R.V.). Oh! how poor, that we might be—oh! how rich. Can you measure those "unsearchable riches" which are ours in Christ Jesus? To enrich us He impoverished Himself. No higher example could we have.

Think, too, of the **wise men** who coming from the East when they saw the Babe and His mother, worshipped not the mother but Him, and brought out their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh (Matt. 2: 11). Their gifts gave practical expression to the sentiments of their heart: it was the way in which their worship expressed itself. It should be so now. It is a happy combination of which the Scriptures speak that "on the first day of the week" the disciples came together "to break bread" (Acts 20 : 7) and on that day and on that occasion they made "the collection" (1 Cor. 16: 1-2) for the aforesaid objects. Who can tell how acceptable such gifts are, not only to God who smells in them a sweet odour, but also to the recipients! Joseph and Mary were very poor and could ill afford a long journey to and a long stay in Egypt. Where was the money for such an undertaking to have come from? Here it was: the gold met

the need. Thus did God provide and thus were the donors honoured. God often meets needs in this way.

We should not consider the likeability or otherwise of the intended recipient of our gifts. That should not come into account. Our eye should be on the **need**: not on the merits of the man. Nor on the extent of our means. Is the man in need? If so, that's enough: the duty is plain. The priest and the Levite were preoccupied with themselves, with their religious rites and scruples and so "passed by." The **Good Samaritan**, however, who ever has a warm place in the hearts of us all, saw the need, and it stirred his compassions within him (Luke 10 : 25-37). The oil and wine which were part of his journeying-equipment were readily used on the man who, normally, would have nothing to do with him. Beast, money, bandages—made out of what?—were all used to alleviate the man's suffering and to ensure his quick recovery. What an example!

Or, think of the **widow** whose fame has gone down to posterity because the Lord saw what none other saw. He sat over against the treasury and into it she put her all (Luke 21: 1-4). If the fact is true that the Rabbis would not accept less than two mites (though this is passing strange) this widow had to give up her all. If they would have accepted but one it stands to her credit that she gave two. Despised by men, and indeed, robbed of them (see Luke 20: 47) she is honoured by the Lord. He assesses the true worth of her giving. The giving of others was but a percentage. She gave all. They were able to dip into their abundance. She "cast in" all. Think you that the God of the widow would abandon such an one to penury? I trow not. Her name liveth for ever, though it be not that of her natural birth or marriage.

The **Macedonians**, amongst whom were the **Philippians**, teach us much touching the matter (2 Cor. chs. 8 and 9). Once and again from the earliest beginnings of the Gospel among them they had shown practical fellowship with Paul. It makes one wonder why the church at Antioch had so lamentably failed in supporting the servant of the Lord whom they had commended, for Paul has regretably to admit that "no church communicated to him in the matter of giving and receiving" save these Macedonian saints (Phil. 4: 15). And this they did despite their great affliction and deep poverty, as well as adverse civil conditions. Why, indeed, was it that the churches at Lystra, and Iconium and Derbe did not help him? Why did not the Jerusalem saints show fellowship? Could they have done so? And if so, why did they not do it? But Lydia's open house and the jailor's open table were but the beginnings of the **Philippians'** loving generosity.

God will not remain their debtor. He knows how to repay even in time that which, inevitably, will receive a reward at the Judgment seat.

A poor lady in Devonshire (England) wanted to give the Lord an offering. Two or three times she returned home to get a smaller coin as she felt what she had brought was too much for her to afford. She could not, however, reduce the sum. At last, she gave it. In the afternoon of that day, someone who knew nothing whatsoever about her exercises, called on her. When leaving he pressed into her hand a paper note which represented very very much more than she had given to the Lord. Are you surprised? If we lend our boat He will always repay by filling it.

REASONS

But there are **many reasons** why we should give of our substance to the Lord. Let me set them out thus:

Reason No. 1. Because of **Grace received.** To use the words of 2 Cor. 8: 1 "the grace of God bestowed." Grace given soon becomes, if allowed free course, grace giving. Go through chapters 8 and 9 of this letter and mark with your pencil the frequent recurrence of the word "grace." Giving is as much a gift as is preaching, teaching, or any of the other gifts. Freely ye have received: freely give.

Reason No. 2. It proves the sincerity of your love (2 Cor. 8: 8). Paul repeats this in verse 24. A love that does not practise, is a misnomer. The error of the Corinthians was that they had talked about this particular matter of giving to the poor saints long enough. It was all talk: no action. Paul had boasted that they were forward in making the proposal yet he felt the possibility of being sorely ashamed before his fellow-workers should he discover that it had halted at the talking stage, and the enacting of it was simply non-existent. What kind of love is that? It certainly was not "sincere," It was not a genuine article; its proper counterpart, being absent, showed it to be spurious. It is all too easy to talk about giving, and to stir others up to give, yet what does the talker himself do?

Reason No. 3. It demonstrates **Consistency of profession.** "They glorify God for your professed subjection unto the Gospel of Christ." (2 Cor. 9: 13). The Gospel is not limited to a message of hope for sinners. It is vast in its scope: it includes also teaching and exhortations for the saints. What kind of profession is ours if we profess to be subject to the Gospel and do not imitate the self-sacrificing liberality of the One who is the heart of it? John has similar words on another line. "This is His commandment (or rule): that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ" and conjoin with that profession of faith this other thing: "love one another as He gave us commandment" (1 John 3: 23). The two

should ever go together: Faith and Works: Profession and Conduct: "The Gospel" and "liberal distribution" (2 Cor. 9:13).

Reason No. 4. It is Evidence of trust in God. What if it should cause that our reserves become diminished? What if it should entail our living "from hand to mouth."? If it is His hand that fills the mouth there need not be cause for anxious care (Luke 12:22). "God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work" (2 Cor. 9:8). He will see the barrel does not dry up entirely. Even if the brook should dry up, He has His other and miraculous resources, If I do not trust in God, and refrain from giving in consequence, how can I expect others to trust in Him?

Here, then, are four very good and sufficient reasons why I should "offer willingly" to the Lord.

PRINCIPLES

We may, further, indicate a few principles which should be observed in this matter. Read carefully 1 Cor. 16:1-4, and note these:—

We should give **regularly**, laying aside the Lord's portion when we receive either our weekly or monthly salary or wages. 1 Cor. 16:2 does not imply that all our gifts should be given through the collection of the church, but that what is given for that particular channel should on that occasion, that is, when the saints are gathered together, be collected.

Each one should feel his responsibility in the matter. A socialistic spirit, leaving the matter of giving to the better-off or the more well-to-do should be totally absent from the company of the saints. This is a question of fellowship: it is an expression of fellowship, in which all the saints, no matter what their resources may be, slender or large, contribute as they are able (see Phil. 4:14-15 R.V.).

Giving should be **proportionate** to our ability. It is acceptable according to what a man hath, not according to what he hath not. God's mind is that there should be an equality. Those who are poor cannot give as much as the rich. Ten per cent was the requirement under law: who would dare put saints under law now in this direction? Ten per cent for some might be ridiculously small: for others it might be crushingly heavy. Each one should settle before God the amount that can be given to Him for the aforesaid special objects, after properly and in a God-honouring manner discharging every legitimate domestic liability. If a man provides not for his own he is worse than an unbeliever.

The disciples at Antioch, having learned through the prophesying of Agabus, that a great famine was about to come, "each man, according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwell in Judæa." They did not leave it to a few; but all did what they were able (Acts 11 : 29).

We should give **bountifully**. God loves a cheerful giver (2 Cor. 9 : 7).. He does not want us to give grudgingly. He would rather not have it in that mood.. There should be cut out of our giving all thought of "necessity." "I suppose I must do it." That is totally unacceptable to God. It may swell the funds to some extent but it has grieved the heart of God and inflicted a spiritual wound upon the reluctant donor.

We should give **discriminatingly**. God is liberal: "He has dispersed abroad," but He is discriminating: He gives to those who need, that is, "He gives to the poor" (2 Cor. 9 : 9). There is much failure in this direction. It is a solemn thing as to who or what we support. Not all who appear to be eligible for it are really eligible. We must not be content with merely giving into a fund. We should know to what purpose the fund is intended to be put. None has too much money; it, therefore, behoves all to use what they have in such a way that it fosters spiritual work that is approved of God.

Happy results will follow if we seek to do what we should and if the Lord can say of us we "have done what" we "could." It will result first, in "the **glory** of the same Lord and the declaration of your ready mind." The recipients will "**glorify God**" as they see the love of God working itself out in His people.

Further, it will "**cause thanksgiving to God.**" Oh, if we could hear the hearty thanksgivings which, perhaps, are breathed in the silence of a lonely home by some needy saint! It would compensate us for any little that the gift may have really cost us! It would be reward enough surely, though the Lord would not allow it to remain at that.

Moreover, our giving would prove to be an **impetus to others**. Not that we should let our left hand know what our right hand doeth: nor should we blow a trumpet in a street to call attention to it. But when saints in an assembly contribute to the need of others, no matter who, it stirs others to emulate such action. And so the work goes on.

We are often reminded that the cup of cold water will not escape His notice, but will surely receive a reward. But most of us can afford to give much more than a cup of cold water. When we give that cup instead of giving what we should, it becomes one of those "**worthless things**" which will become manifest at the Judgment seat. It will entail "**loss**" for us who, had we but let the work of grace have its way in our hearts, could have "**gained**" much.

What is the state of our heavenly account? How much is on the credit side? And on the debit side? Look into it: and see if there is any “fruit abounding to your account”; how much “receiving” has there been? And how much “giving”? And what is the net balance? Note these accountancy terms in Phil. 4: 15-17, and apply them to yourself.

Anything we give out of a pure heart will be “an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well pleasing to God.” We need have no fears. “My God” says the experienced Apostle, “shall supply all your need” (Phil. 4: 18-20).