

Lesson: Supporting the Work: The Role of Giving

Lesson Overview

Biblical Passage

2 Corinthians 9:6-15

Supporting Passages

Luke 6:38; Acts 11:27-30, 20:35

Memory Verse

2 Corinthians 9:7

Table Talk Question

Does financial giving reflect my relationship with God?

Biblical Truth

God desires for Christians to give willingly from the resources that He has entrusted to them in order to support ministry and bring glory to Him.

Context

Paul had written his first letter to the Corinthians from Ephesus. Apparently he received word back from the Corinthians while he was still in Ephesus. In his second letter, Paul encouraged the Corinthians to give faithfully to meet the needs of Christians in other places. Paul emphasized that God faithfully supplies what Christians need spiritually, materially, and physically to enable us to serve Him and help others. Giving is not meant to be a burden but a blessing.

Commentary

Investigation

There is a difference of opinion about giving. Those most antagonistic toward the Church often claim that giving is all that the Church ever talks about. However, giving is an essential element of worship and has both a practical and spiritual impact on one's relationship with Christ. The apostle *Paul* dealt with this issue boldly and unapologetically in his writing to the church at *Corinth*. He made sure that his readers understood that giving is right. And he went on to explain how to do the right thing the right way.

Paul addressed these issues as he reminded the church in Corinth of their previous decision to set aside an offering for the poverty-stricken Jerusalem Christians. Paul encouraged the Corinthians to follow through and explained to them the proper principles of giving and the blessings that accompany such Christian generosity.

Importance

This lesson supports the Essential Truth that The Church is God's Plan. As Christians, we know that all believers are members of one united spiritual body, the Church, of which Christ is the head. The main physical expression of the Church on earth is in the local congregations of baptized believers, united by their faith in God and the fellowship of the gospel. The Church's purpose is to glorify God by taking the gospel to the entire world and by building up its members. Different churches have different ways of accomplishing this. But churches need financial support from their members to carry out their mission. This lesson highlights the importance of giving.

Interpretation

2 Corinthians 9:6 In 2 Corinthians 9:1-5, Paul wrote that he had boasted to those in Macedonia of the generous gift that was being collected by the Christians in Corinth. Not wanting to be embarrassed by the Corinthians backing out of their commitment, Paul decided to prepare the way by sending some of the "brothers" (v. 5) to supervise the final arrangements. Was this a coercive move, a direct demand, a subtle manipulation, or just good administration? More than likely it was the last option. This verse introduces generous giving as a way to encourage and remind fellow believers.

In verse 6, Paul presented an agricultural analogy. If you plant a little, you will reap a little; if you plant a lot, you will reap a lot.

2 Corinthians 9:7 Paul described Christian giving as a matter of the heart and pointed out that the decision to give could be based on various motivations. Coercion can lead to giving done grudgingly. Legalistic demands can lead to obligatory giving done out of a sense of duty. But the kind of giving that God loves and blesses comes from the generosity of a "[cheerful]

Lesson: Supporting the Work: The Role of Giving

giver." People should purpose in their own hearts what they should give.

2 Corinthians 9:8-9 There are benefits to be derived from giving. Is it wrong to expect something in return for giving? Paul didn't seem to think so. He declared God's ability and apparent willingness to provide in all things with all sufficiency at all times. Paul explained that when someone gives some of what he or she has with the right attitude, he or she receives from God all that He has. The benefits of giving affect this temporal life as well as the eternal life to come.

2 Corinthians 9:10-11 Paul returned to his agricultural analogy begun in verse 6. There was no need for the planter to plant sparingly because God supplies the seed in the first place. The use of the seed provided by God has three possibilities: 1) It can be wasted by hoarding, 2) much of it will be used to feed others, or 3) some of it will need to be planted in order to produce another harvest.

A seed that is sown maintains and even multiplies the supply. A seed that is stored rots, and the seed that makes bread is consumed. Therefore, the one who plants much seed will have more increase than the one who plants very little. In other words, generosity produces abundance that enables even greater generosity. This generosity blesses others, which in turn results in expressions of gratitude to God. In reality, the giver and receiver are both blessed and enriched. And God is glorified.

2 Corinthians 9:12 Paul stressed that the overflowing benefit of giving is thanksgiving to God. The gift that had already become a blessing to the donor and had already succeeded in meeting the needs of the recipients then generated praise to God. Perhaps it is for that reason that giving is both a ministry of service and an act of worship.

2 Corinthians 9:13 Paul identified three differences between giving as a ministry of service and simple charitable giving. First, Christian giving prompts thanksgiving to God because it has been done in His name. Second, while other giving prompts praise to the generosity of the charitable organization or the generosity of a particular benefactor, Christian giving understands that God is the ultimate provider. Third, Christian giving is therefore due the ultimate praise and worship. To glorify God is to esteem Him highly.

Paul may have felt that the Corinthian church needed to prove itself to those in Jerusalem. Certainly the reports of immaturity and irregularity concerning the church had come to the attention of others, not just Paul. Here was a chance to demonstrate their faithful obedience. It was from Jerusalem that James spoke of faith that should be demonstrated by obedience.

The gospel of Christ is a message of Good News to all. It knows no racial, geographic, or economic barriers. An offering from the church at Corinth demonstrated all three natural barriers being overcome. This offering would be from Gentile Christians to Jewish Christians, from a European church to a Palestinian church. Economically, those in prosperity were reaching out to those in poverty.

2 Corinthians 9:14 The Corinthians would give to those in Jerusalem and those in Jerusalem would pray for those in Corinth. Mutual reciprocity was assumed. But there was something greater that Paul anticipated or perhaps desired. Paul counted on a heartfelt connection to be made between these opposites—their "hearts will go out." He did not just want them connected by a gift. He wanted them to be connected to one another because of the gift. A monetary gift alone would not break down the barriers that existed between the two parties. But God's surpassing grace used the gift as a bridge to bring them together.

2 Corinthians 9:15 Paul concluded with his own doxology of praise. Throughout the passage, he had referred to God's grace and the gifts of the saints. Now he erupted in praise for God's indescribable gift. None of this would be possible without God's gift of His Son, Jesus Christ.

Implications

The apostle Paul took seriously the challenge to help mature in their faith the churches for which he was responsible. Paul may have had his biggest challenge in the church at Corinth. Though it would be difficult, he knew that two things hung in the balance: the reputation of the Corinthian church and the needy Macedonian churches. Paul understood that The Church is God's Plan. He wanted to make sure that the Corinthian believers understood and lived it out as well. He wanted to insure that the Corinthians experienced the blessing that comes through giving. Paul wanted the Corinthians to glorify God through generous giving. Paul used the needs of the churches in Macedonia to illustrate to the Corinthians the role that giving plays in spiritual development.

Many people in today's culture accuse pastors and churches with being focused on money. They use this excuse to stay out of church. Others who do attend are so strapped with debt that they think they cannot afford to give. These individuals and their churches miss the blessing of generous giving. Lack of giving hinders growth and maturity among the members, so as

Lesson: Supporting the Work: The Role of Giving

believers we must be willing to examine our own attitudes toward giving. At what level are we giving to support the ministries of the church and to meet the needs of people? Planning for giving is something that Paul demonstrated as he made the arrangements to deliver the gift to the Macedonians. In our culture, folks frequently give like they spend—with no prayer, plan, or preparation. When we enter into spending lightly, we get into trouble. Likewise, when we enter into giving without planning and preparation, we miss the blessing that God intends for giving to be in our lives.

- Have you ever given money to someone you thought had a real need and found out that he or she used the money for something else? How did this affect your future giving?
- What does debt have to do with our ability to give?
- When were you the most fulfilled in giving? Why?
- Do you think about God's response to your giving? Is He glorified in your giving?

Free Thought

"He who gives what he would as readily throw away, gives without generosity; for the essence of generosity is in self sacrifice."—Henry Taylor