

Longview Baptist Temple
Sunday School Lesson
January 18, 2009



=SAIL ON THE STEWARDSHIP=

The Example of Giving Through the Local Church
II Corinthians 8:1-9

INTRODUCTION: Paul's conception of giving is a big one. To him, giving is a grace, a ministry of the Holy Spirit, wrought in personal experience and out-worked in practical expression.

Whenever he planted churches, the Apostle made it his business to instruct the people of God in the doctrine of Christian Stewardship.

As a consequence, the Churches in Macedonia, such as Thessalonica, Berea, and particularly Phillipi were renowned for their charity and liberality.

POINT OF CONTACT: In the passages we read this morning, the Apostle brings this fact to the attention of the Corinthians and concludes the paragraph with the supreme example of the self-giving of our Lord. Apparently, even though this assembly abounded in such gifts as faith and utterance of knowledge and all diligence it laced in the grace of giving. So Paul confronts them with these two examples of giving to beget in them a sense of responsibility in Christian Stewardship.

Let us look now at the examples and learn the lessons that God would teach us:

- I. **THE EXAMPLE OF HUMAN GIVING.** Verse 1. "Moreover brethren we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the Churches at Macedonia." As Paul has indicated already in his first letter to the Corinthians the occasion of this inner-church money raising program was the need of Jewish Christians in Jerusalem.

Persecution and privation had left the mother Church in desperate need of assistance from outside. News of this had reached the believers in Macedonia and they had risen nobly to the challenge.

Now, says Paul, addressing the Corinthians, "You do likewise." Then he proceeds to describe in detail the example of this giving on the part of the Macedonians.

- A. **It was sacrificial giving.** Verses 1 and 2. Paul takes great care to show that it was not in circumstances of prosperity that the saints in Macedonia gave their liberal offering. Some severe test of affliction had come upon these local churches and they had been reduced to what is described as "deep poverty" or more literally "down to the bottom poverty."

But in it all, their affliction in poverty was their joy in liberality. This is true sacrifice that they had learned as we shall see presently from their matchless Saviour, "...who for the joy that was set before them endured the Cross, despising the shame."

Dr. Roy Larens tells of a Christian businessman who was traveling in Korea. One day he saw in the field by the side of the road a young man pulling a rude plow while an old man held the handles. The businessman was amused and took a snapshot of the scene. "That is a curious picture," he thought. "I suppose these people are very poor," he said to the missionary who was the interpreter and guide to the party. "Yes" was the quiet reply, "those two men happen to be Christians." When their church was being built they were eager to give something toward it, but they had no money. So they decided to sell their one and only ox and give the proceeds to the Church. This spring they are pulling the plow themselves. The business man was silent for some moments; then he said, "That must have been a real sacrifice."

"They did not call it that," said the missionary "They rather thought it was fortunate that they had an ox to sell." Needless to say the businessman was silent. When he reached home, however, he took the picture to his pastor and told him about it.

Then he added, "I want to double my giving to the Church and do some plow work. Up until now, I have never given God anything that involved real sacrifice."

The Macedonians gave with joy and liberality. It was sacrificial giving. But notice also that it was spontaneous giving.

- B. **Spontaneous Giving.** Verses 3 and 4. The scripture makes it clear that the grace of giving is not so much the result of outward compulsion as a consequence of inward expulsion. In a very real sense, it is the expulsion power of a new affection.

Thus, Paul admits that he had no authority to demand offering from the Corinthian saints, but he could certainly afford them the opportunity to prove the sincerity of their love. And the example he holds up is the giving of these Macedonians who sacrificed even beyond their power. The secret was simple;

they gave of their own free will. This is an accurate rendering of the phrase, "They were willing of themselves."

What is more, they took the initiative in beseeching Paul with much entreaty that he would receive their gifts as a token of their fellowship with the saints at Jerusalem.

Thus, we see that spontaneous giving is not careless giving. It is giving that is prompted by the Spirit of God and guided by the Word of God. This is one example of these dear saints at Macedonia to the Church of our day.

Would to God that we knew something of sacrifice and spontaneous in our giving. But here is still another lesson from their example of Stewardship:

- C. It Was Spiritual Giving. "And this they did not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord unto us by the will of God."

In other words, their giving was the outward expressing of their utter dedication to God, or as someone has put it, "The crowning point of their generosity was their complete self-surrender."

There is a kind of giving which is unspiritual. It has ulterior motives.

One form of it is drawing attention to one's self. Such a motive the Lord Jesus sounded, condemned in his Sermon on the Mount. He said, "When thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth, that thine alms may be in secret."

Another form of unspiritual giving is to bring our offerings to God with a spirit of ill-will and reluctance. This, of course, runs contrary to the apostolic injunction to give with purpose of heart, not grudgingly, or of necessity, for God loveth a cheerful giver. The worst form of giving, however, is that of tempting to buy off one's indebtedness to God.

How different was the spirit of the Macedonians. Not only was their giving ungrudging, but it was joyous and generous. It was accompanied by an act of complete self-surrender. The construction of the verse before us indicates the giving of themselves to the Lord and to the apostles was a deeper act of commitment. The word "first" is not used here in a temporal sense, but rather with the idea of the prior idea of the prior claim. They first gave their own selves to the Lord and unto us by the will of God.

This means that before their generous giving these people, had dedicated themselves afresh to the Lord, placed themselves unreservedly in the apostles' hands for the service of Christ, then provided the monetary support for the saints at Jerusalem. This is spiritual giving.

Once again we exclaim, "What an example of human giving is depicted for us in these verses." And if we would ask further to know their secret surely the answer is that the manner of their giving was the measure of their love for Christ their Saviour and Lord.

- II. **THE EXAMPLE OF DIVINE GIVING.** Verse 9. In this one, all embracing and matchless sentence, Paul shows that the Holy Spirit which prompted the Macedonians in their giving, is that same eternal Spirit who sustained the Saviour when he offered Himself without spot to God.

In other words, Christ's giving of Himself was sacrificial, spontaneous, and spiritual. Consider this a little more closely.

- A. Christ's giving was sacrificial. For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor.

The tense of the verb suggests that the fact of the incarnation rather than the condition under which Jesus lived was uppermost in Paul's mind.

To the apostle, Christ became poor in the very act of becoming a man. He just could never get over the sacrifice of our Lord in contracting to the measure of a woman's womb. So he declares in another place, and without controversy, great is the ministry of godliness. God was manifested in the flesh.

- B. Christ's giving was spontaneous. The scripture says though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor. In perfect harmony with the Father and the Holy Spirit, He took the initiative in coming to earth to give Himself a ransom for you and I.

Paul spells out the spontaneity of self-giving when he declares, "The righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise; say not in thine heart who shall ascend into Heaven, that is to bring Christ down from above, or who shall descend into the deep, that is to bring Christ up again from the dead." In other words, whether it was the condescending grace of the incarnation or the conquering grace of the resurrection, it was all in Christ.