

THE GRACE OF GIVING  
2 Corinthians 8:1-15

Intro: As long as I can remember, passing the offering plate has been a part, and a very important part of the Sunday services of the church. People expect it, and come prepared to give something. But we also should wonder how many people are actually kept away from church because of the offering. Also, we have to realize that usually there are people in the congregation who do not know the Lord, and we are asking them to give to the Lord and to support the work of the church. We should not be surprised, therefore, if some people feel that this wins some merit for them with the Lord, which, of course, is not true.

For the past three Sundays I have been dealing with matters that relate to the work of the local church. I have spoken about the Lord's Supper, about baptism, about the importance of church attendance, and today about giving to the work of the Lord in the church.

From my own experience I would say that pastors are inclined to see what the Word of God says about the observance of the Lord's Supper, as well as the Scriptural mode of baptism, but when it comes to the reason for church attendance, and how the work of the Lord should be supported, we are more inclined to do what has been done in the past without giving a great deal of thought and/or prayer to it. It might even be true that with regard to the ordinances of the church, the Lord's Supper and baptism, what has been done determines what they are going to do in the future.

But let me say this: Whenever we get away from the teaching of Scripture, whether it be concerning the Lord's Supper, or baptism, or church attendance, or giving, we are robbing ourselves of blessings which the Lord intended for us to have in these four areas of the ministry of the church.

I might very well be the same if the Lord had not brought several special people into my life--and, curiously, two of the people I am going to refer to were in heaven before I was born, one was living during my lifetime but died without my having the privilege of meeting her, the fourth was one of the Lord's choice servants who had a tremendous influence in my life. In fact, regarding this fourth one, I don't know of any of the Lord's servants who has influenced my life more than he, unless it would have been my parents. I am not thinking now of Lucille who has been the greatest blessing I have ever had, or my children who have been a great blessing to me, and continue to be a chief avenue of blessing from the Lord to me. Neither am I thinking of many of you who have

left your mark on me. I am talking now about men and women of God through whom the Lord has taught me how the work of the Lord is to be supported. I am not saying that they are the only ones who have followed what I am going to be teaching this morning. In fact, I know there have been others. But these are the people who have made a profound effect upon me.

The first of these men was J. Hudson Taylor, who was the founder of what originally was known as the China Inland Mission. He started out as a missionary trusting the Lord for the supply of his own needs, and, as the Lord blessed his ministry, he eventually had hundreds of missionaries in China who were trusting the Lord to meet their financial needs as well as their other needs. One saying that Mr. Taylor became famous for was this: "God work, done in God's way, will never lack for God's supply." No offerings were ever taken. If missionaries were accepted by the mission, Mr. Taylor and his associates believed that the Lord would meet their needs without making the missionaries raise their support. And the Lord did! As far as I know, the mission under its new name, the Overseas Missionary Fellowship, still maintains the same financial policy. If you have never read the life of Hudson Taylor, I strongly recommend that you do. I never knew Mr. Taylor, but the story His life has been used by the Lord to strengthen my faith.

The second man was a contemporary of Mr. Taylor; his name was George Mueller. He will always be remembered for his work with orphans in Bristol, England. (By the way, Mr. Taylor was also an Englishman.) Mr. Mueller took care of hundreds of orphans, loved them, cared for them, evangelized them, and yet never appealed to anyone for money. The story of his work is a great story of the faithfulness of God. He and Mr. Taylor supported each other's works, and both of them gave much of their time to prayer. I would encourage you to get A. T. Pierson's life of George Mueller. It, too, will be a rich blessing to you, and be a means of great encouragement for your own soul.

The third person was a lady--Amy Carmichael of Donavur, India. She was originally from Scotland. She went to India by way of China, and in her work rescue baby girls from certain temple prostitution. The work was hard and supported by prayer and money by people all over the world, yet she never appealed for money. Her work continues to day and continues with the same financial policy. God still supplies their needs. Ladies enjoy her books (I think that she wrote about 40 of them), but I am one man who been blessed by her writings. And I would strongly encourage all of you to read Gold Cord, written by Miss Carmichael, which is the story of

her work in her own words. I guarantee you that you won't be able to read it without weeping with blessing as you see evidence in her life of the faithfulness of God in every way, including the way the Lord met the financial needs of the work.

The fourth person is the one I knew, Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer, the founder and first president of what was originally called, The Evangelical Theological College, later known as the Dallas Theological Seminary. It was founded back in 1924, and I had the privilege of being one of Dr. Chafer's "boys" (as he called us--he had not children of his own). He never took offerings for the Seminary. He did not charge tuition to those of us who were students. And he even provided free rent to as many married students as could be house in the Seminary apartments. Dr. and Mrs. Lewis Johnson, Dr. and Mrs. Witmer, Marilyn Custis' parents, and Lucille and I benefitted from that policy because we all lived with our families in the Seminary apartments at the same time. During the years we were there, the Seminary often faced difficult times financially. Dr. Chafer did not get out prayer letters. Instead he would call a day of prayer, cancel classes, and it was wonderful to see how the Lord provided.

In all four of these works (and I am sure that there have been others) there was hardly ever a surplus, but there was always that faithful provision of money as the Lord moved upon the hearts of people to give in answer to prayer. And the gifts that were sent in often met needs which the donors knew nothing about until they were told about them afterwards.

As you know, today is our last Sunday in this building. We will be here for the Tuesday Bible Class this week, and also for our Wednesday night meetings. But the men's prayer meeting next Saturday will be in our new facilities. So we are moving. We have accumulated a lot of stuff during the few years of our history, things which go now to our new home, or into storage. We are getting rid of some things. But there is one thing you will not find among our possessions. That is an offering plate. We have our black box where people can give as the Lord leads them, but no one has a plate passed before them in the hope that they will give. The person who can't give anything is just as welcome as the person who can't give anything. We don't ask for pledges. What you give is up to you. If you don't know the Lord, we don't expect you to give anything.

I trust that I am not saying these things boastfully, nor by way of criticism against those who take offerings. What

other churches do is between them and the Lord. But from the beginning the Lord led our men, even before we had elders and deacons, to trust the Lord to meet our needs without taking offerings. We may have to go through difficult times in the future, but I can say to the glory of the Lord that month after month since our beginning back in January of 1981, the Lord has made our needs and provided for us in every way. And this really is a testimony to His goodness and faithfulness.

A few years ago a man attended one of our services, and as he went out afterwards, he said, "Good night, Pastor, you forgot the offering." I didn't have a lot of time to talk to him, but I did tell him that we didn't take offerings, but that people could give whatever they desired to voluntarily. If people give and include their names, accurate records are kept. But no one is ever asked to give. If we are asked about our policy, we tell people. But we leave it up to each person to give as the Lord leads them.

I am not saying that it is sinful to pass an offering plate, but I am telling you how the Lord has led us. And the Lord has honored our desire to let those give who want to, but not to force anybody to give.

Now I have taken a considerable amount of time to tell you how I came to realize that there was another way to see the Lord's provision without passing the offering plate. But I have not included what I have learned from the Word of God, which is the most important part. And so, for the rest of the time I want to take you to the Word of God to show you just a little of what the Word teaches about giving.

First, let me point out that:

I. THE WORD OF GOD TEACHES THAT WE SHOULD GIVE MONEY TO THE LORD AND TO THE WORK OF THE LORD.

So, if you are wondering what God wants you to do, it is clear from Scripture that we should honor the Lord with the money that He has provided for us. The Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians church more about money than he did in any of his other epistles. And, as he brought his first epistle to that church to a close, he said this:

Upon the first day of the week  
**let every one of you lay by him in store,**  
**as God hath prospered him,**  
 that there be no offerings when I come.

You may remember that Luke recorded that Mary Magdalene, Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, Susanna, and many

other women "ministered unto him [the Lord] of their substance" (Luke 8:2, 3).

Giving is spoken of in 2 Cor. 8 (our Scripture reading) as a "grace." (Read 2 Cor. 8:7.) It is called a "grace" because it is a gift from God. Look at the other words in the verse:

- 1) "Faith."
- 2) "Utterance," which includes both thought and speech.
- 3) "Knowledge."
- 4) "Diligence."
- 5) "Love."

All of these come from God. So does the desire to give, and the ability to give. We are to abound in them all, but also in the grace of giving. This certainly means that God wants us to give, to honor Him with our money.

These leads to a second point which is closely related to the first:

## II. HOW SHOULD WE GIVE, AND HOW MUCH.

The answer to that question is given in several passages of Scripture. Look at 2 Cor. 8:5. The giving of our money is a reflection of the extent to which we have given ourselves to the Lord. If we have really surrendered ourselves to the Lord, then no one has to tell us that everything that we have and all that we are, is the Lord's to be used as He leads us.

Notice also 2 Cor. 8:12. And then look at 2 Cor. 9:7.

The Lord doesn't want us to give because we feel that we have to give; He wants to give because that is what we want to do. "A cheerful giver" is a hilarious giver, one who is eager to give, one who is thankful to give, happy to give.

We have a good example of this in the Old Testament when they were gathering material for the building of the Tabernacle and for the clothing of the high priest and the lesser priests. I am speaking of the account in Exodus 35 and 36. Please turn to those chapters. As Moses began to tell the people what they were to bring for the building of the tabernacle and the garments of the priests, he made the very significant statement which is found in Ex. 35:5. He made it clear that they were bringing their offering to the Lord, and that they were to bring their gifts with "a willing heart." I take it from that that if they could not bring their gift with a willing heart, they weren't to bring anything. But look what happened! (Read Ex. 35:20-29.) They read Ex. 36:1-7.

Remember: This was giving when people were under the Mosaic

Law when they were required to tithe. But this was not the tithe; this was an offering which the people were to bring with willing hearts. Most pastors would be afraid to tell people to give that way. But the amazing thing is that when people gave from the heart, they had to had to be restrained from giving. Did you ever hear a pastor talk like that to his congregation?

People will often ask the question, How much should I give? Should I give a tithe? There is some question as to how much the tithe was under the old covenant. I usually like to stay away from the word tithe because it is a word which belongs to the Law. But I also say that a tenth is a good place to start, but don't stop there. Remember that we are bringing our gifts to the Lord, and the Lord loves "a hilarious giver"! If people under the law gave a tenth, surely under grace we ought to give that much, and more! My Dad used to say that we ought to give as much as we can because we can't outgive the Lord. He may have gotten that expression from someone else, but I heard it first from him.

I have used this experience several times before, but I want to repeat it again because some of you may not have heard it --an example of a hilarious giver. Illus: the lady in West Memorial whose husband would not let her give to the church. He gave her money for bus fare to and from church, and that was all. She would ride the bus to church, and then put her bus fare in the offering so that she could give something to the Lord--and then she would walk home, and it was over a mile! A cold walk on a winter day.

Let me give you a third point:

### III. WHAT DO THE RIGHT GIFTS GIVEN IN THE RIGHT WAY MEAN TO THE LORD?

To answer this question I want to take you to Paul's letter to the church at Philippi, chapter 4, verses 10-20. (Read, noting especially verse 18.)

You can't smell it, but when you give your gift, large or small, with a willing heart, to the Lord because you love Him, its odor, like sweet incense, rises to the very throne of God. It pleases Him well.

Too often when we talk about giving, we talk about the blessing it is to us, or the blessings our gifts will bring to us. And those are both legitimate blessings. But the highest and best motive we can have for giving is because of what it means to the Lord. Let us never lose sight of that.

One more point, and I am finished.

#### IV. WHO IS SUPPOSED TO GIVE?

When it comes to the Lord's Table, we say only believers are to partake. When it comes to baptism we say that the ceremony means nothing unless you are saved. Even when it comes to the church service we say that it is primarily for those who know the Lord. But when it comes to the offering, we at least give the impression that we will take it from anybody--whether a person is saved or not!

But the Word makes it very clear that giving, the grace of giving, is a ministry only for those who know the Lord. We welcome anyone to our services. But we would be doing a great injustice to you to tell you that we want your money. I hope that here at Trinity Bible Church we can always say to people who don't know the Lord what Paul said to people who were in the Corinthian church, even those who believe: "I seek not your's, but you" (2 Cor. 12:14).

One place I feel that we are really dishonoring the Lord in these days is when Christian works appeal to people in the world for the support of the Lord's work. The Lord doesn't need our money. He has many ways to meet the needs of His work whether we give or not. And to appeal to the world, and to worldly organizations, for money to support the work of the Lord, is a great dishonor to God. He is the God of heaven and earth. Let's be satisfied with what the Lord gives to us from His people, and thank Him that He enables all of us to give what we give, and hopefully we give it for His glory.

Concl: When we think of giving to the Lord, let's not just call it giving, but the grace of giving. It is the Lord Who gives us what we have to give, and He makes us not only willing to give, but eager to give, because we love Him and we want to express our love to Him for His goodness and faithfulness to us.