
Stewardship Part XI

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A Template of How the Early Church Gave

How did the early church give? Well, it was not just a mere ten percent, because they gave *abundantly out of deep poverty* (NKJV)! In fact, they may have even given more than they should have! But, they did it because of their love for Christ and knowledge of what He did for them! Their motives were astonishing to other people around them. They need to be our “norm” too. Not that we should give beyond our means, but we should give with a sense of the awe of what Christ did for us. The early church had whole-hearted surrender to Christ, which is the abandonment of our Will to His (Gal. 2:20). *They gave everything*. What do you give, and where does it come from?

2 Corinthians 8:1-15 - (NIV)

- ...*Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy...*
- ...*and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity...*
- ...*even beyond their ability...*
- ...*Entirely on their own...*
- ...*privilege of sharing in this service to the saints...*
- ...*they gave themselves first to the Lord...*
- ...*keeping with God's Will...*
- ...*in faith ...excel in this grace of giving...*
- ...*I am not commanding you...*
- ...*you through his poverty might become rich...*
- ...*you were the first not only to give but also to have the desire to do so...*
- ...*the gift is acceptable according to what one has...*
- ...*not according to what he does not have...*
- ...*eager willingness ...the willingness is there...*
- ...*your plenty will supply what they need...*

A warning: beware of your motives. Do not give because you expect to get! God is not a divine bellhop, and He is not required to give you anything. Yet, He does, out of His love and grace! Some very bad teaching has been sneaking in like a snake its way in our churches and airwaves, called the “Health and Wealth” gospel. It says that if you give your money to the preacher or church, God will bless you or give you ten times more, or whatever amount they come up with. They tell you that “Jesus wants you wealthy,” “Jesus wants you rich,” “Jesus wants you prosperous,” and “God wants you rich!” (Direct quotes from Christian Research Institute equip.org by several different preachers!)

This is not the point of the passage in 2 Corinthians!

And furthermore, nowhere in Scripture is this idea found or even alluded to, nor is there even a passage you can twist to say this. It is completely made up! Such teaching is to rationalize the greed and sin of men. This is not the spirit of the Corinthians. They

did not even have enough to give what they gave; but they gave anyway, not to get something back, not so they could become wealthy, but because they had given themselves to the Lord, their God, their Savior. We must not allow ourselves to fall prey to greed and the lust of power and money. Our churches are in trouble financially; less than ten percent of the churches tithe any amount over two percent, while others get rich from false promises based on greed and not found in Scripture! Yes, God will usually bless you when you give to Him! I have, in twenty years of pastoral ministry, rarely seen otherwise, but the gift must come from a willing heart, not a “get back, or get rich” attitude. Our riches come from being in Him, not in money or things! Remember, the Lord delivered us from the materialistic attitude and earthy riches for a much greater richness that we could never possibly fathom--that which is to come!

If He does give back to you, it is because of your motive, your heart! Or, He may let the devil give to you, but watch out, because you may have nothing in the hereafter! Jesus says, *Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap...* (Luke 6:38)

Jesus says to us, “give and it will be given to you.” What is the context? *For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.* This passage is dealing with hypocrisy! Remember the analogy: as in real estate the most important thing is location, location, and location; as in Scripture and our interpretation of it the most important thing is context, context, and context!

Maybe God will give all of your money back plus ten times. Maybe He wants you in poverty as He lived; maybe He wants you rich. But, in my experience and from Scripture, I have seen Him not only give back to you what you sowed in the first place; I have seen God take care of your needs! We have to learn to trust Him when we give, and He will increase the fruit of our righteousness. So, do you see anywhere in Scripture that God will make you wealthy if you give, or if you ask? **NO!** It says, He will meet your needs, and He will fill your life with Himself, which is a greater richness than any amount of money Bill Gates has! We are to seek righteousness because this is the great wealth!

Questions

Read 2 Corinthians 8:1-15:

1. What do you give, and where does it come from?
2. What do you tend to be generous with, time, money or? What causes you not to be generous?
3. How is generosity an aspect of faith and maturity?
4. Look at the passage in 2 Corinthians and ask these inductive questions:
 - a. What does this passage say?
 - b. What does this passage mean?

- c. What is God telling me?
 - d. How am I encouraged and strengthened about money management?
 - e. Is there a sin in my life on how I deal with my time, talent and treasures which confession and repentance is needed?
 - f. How can I and or my church be changed so I can learn and grow?
 - g. What is in the way of these precepts affecting me? What is in the way of my listening to God?
 - h. How does this apply to me and my church? What will I do about it?
5. How does Jesus want you prosperous?
6. Why would some preachers and churches say if you give your money to them God will bless you or give you something?
7. Why do we need to beware of our motives? Have you ever given because you expected to get? If so, why and how can you rationalize it by God's Word? How can you improve your motives about stewardship and money in general?