



“Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift,” II Corinthians 9:15.

Diligent Service: Financial

Covenant: We engage therefore, by the aid of the Holy Spirit . . . to contribute cheerfully and regularly to the support of the ministry, the expenses of the church, and the relief of the poor, and the spread of the gospel through all nations.

Aim: to meditate upon the deeper meanings of giving. For instance, as the Lord’s Supper portrays His death, giving portrays His act — and the Father’s act.

Text: II Corinthians 9:6-15

INTRODUCTION — “It is more blessed to give than to receive,” Acts 20:35. According to Jesus, this is the supreme beatitude. It is not surprising, therefore, that every person who unites with a Baptist church joins in solemn covenant with his brethren in Christ “to contribute cheerfully and regularly to the support of the ministry, the expenses of the church, and the relief of the poor, and the spread of the gospel through all nations.” This is a worthy commitment.

It will be observed that this financial commitment involved in church membership comprises a three-fold area of service. (1) The Baptist church member pledges himself to support the administrative phase of the church— “the support of the ministry and the expenses of the church.” (2) The commitment also involves benevolence— “the relief of the poor.” (3) The commitment includes mission work— “the spread of the gospel through all nations.” This suggests no member should pick a “favorite” project and major on it in his offerings, but support the total program of the church.

The member pledges himself to give “cheerfully” and “regularly” to support the church. According to the Apostle Paul, this is the kind of stewardship which pleases God, I Corinthians 16:2; II Corinthians 9:7.

The most consistent and Biblical method of financial stewardship is the giving of tithes and offerings. This is the finest, fairest, and most prosperous method yet suggested. The Christian should give all his tithes and offerings through the church where he maintains membership. Even those offerings designated to some phase of the denominational program should be given through the church. The Lord said He was to receive glory through the church, Ephesians 3:21.

EXPOSITION

I. THE UNDERLYING PRINCIPLE, 9:6.

Giving and receiving are in exact proportion. The more we receive the more God expects us to give and the more we give the more we receive! Paul takes an illustration from the farm to elucidate this truth. The man who plants five acres of cotton will not harvest as much as the man who plants one hundred acres. So the man who gives one-twentieth of his income will not receive the blessings of the Lord as does the man who gives one tenth! This is exactly what Paul says in principle in verse six.

Observe that the Lord does not make the giving of any certain portion of income imperative. He leaves the amount to the choice of the believer. However, He warns that small giving will result in small receiving! Selfless and liberal giving will promote the prosperity of the believer. **“The liberal soul shall be made fat,”** Proverbs 11:25.

Perhaps someone objects that he cannot afford to give money to the church. Proverbs 11:24 provides the answer: **“There is that scattereth and yet increaseth; and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty.”** Each person should determine the quality of his stewardship fully aware of the consequences of his choice! God values our giving according to what is left after the gift is presented!

When the time comes to prepare your offering to the Lord through the church, remember this statement: **“He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly: and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully,”** verse 6.

II. THE CHRISTIAN SPIRIT, 9:7.

A heart-deep purpose is to underlie all Christian giving. No man is ready to present his offerings to the Lord until he has “purposed in his heart” concerning its quality and quantity. Deliberate choice, free from constraint

or the impulse of passion, must determine the manner and amount of one's offerings. Compulsion (known as "high pressure offerings") has no place in the support of the work of the Kingdom of God.

Unless one "purposes in his heart" regarding his offerings, it will likely be spoiled by his feelings related thereto. Reluctance spoils the gift. Regret removes its fragrance. The free and joyful spirit is to accompany every offering presented unto the Lord through the church.

It is not simply the person who gives whom God loves. It is rather the person who gives with delight. — "the cheerful giver." The "cheerful" giver is one who finds it a delight to share in the work of the Lord. He who gives with avarice and covetousness commits such a trespass that God can never bless the giver. The Christian spirit is the spirit which rejoices to give. Do you find a delight in giving?

Exodus 35 presents a beautiful picture of free-will offerings. When materials were needed to build the tabernacle and its furniture, Moses called for "whosoever is of a willing heart" to bring their offering. **"And they came, every one whose heart stirred him up, and every one whom his spirit made willing, and they brought the Lord's offering to the work of the tabernacle of the congregation . . ."** verse 21. Both men and women responded with gifts. So abundant were their gifts that an announcement had to be made to bring no more offerings. How would you and your church respond to such an appeal? Look again at the principle set out in II Corinthians 9:6.

III. THE PROMISED REWARD, 9:8-11.

Faithful stewardship doesn't cost, it pays. One man expressed it thus, "I shovel out and God shovels in and God has a bigger shovel than I have!" Look at what God promises to the faithful steward.

1. God promises an abundance of grace, verse 8. **"And God is able to make all grace abound toward you."** Every gift of His loving-kindness is yours when you "honour the Lord with thy substance," Proverbs 3:9. Giving does not lessen our store, but rather increases it! God is able to multiply His grace upon the giver that the paradox, "he that scattereth, increaseth," is proven true. Even if there was no material profit from faithful financial stewardship, the enlargement of the spiritual life would be sufficient reward for faithfulness.

A certain company used the slogan in advertising: "Ask the man who owns one." In like manner it may be recommended, "Ask the man who has tried joyful and regular Christian financial stewardship." Without exception

he will reply that it brought great spiritual enlargement. This alone is sufficient recommendation for every believer to follow this example. To believe this is to believe in the promise, power, and providence of God.

2. God promises unceasing sufficiency. Verse 8. **“That ye, always having all sufficiency in all things . . .”** Such a “competency in every thing” will make up for luxuries never possessed and qualify for battles yet to be fought. Herein is a promise for success in any project since the believer's sufficiency does not rest upon one's own ability but upon the grace of God. Nine-tenths with God's blessings goes further than ten-tenths without it. Try it and see!

Observe the inclusive words used to describe God's supply: “always,” “all sufficiency,” “all things.” What more could the believer ask? In view of this promise, who could question but that God would care for the Christian who contributed liberally and faithfully to the Kingdom work? God promises, “You will have no need which will go unmet if you will give regularly and cheerfully to the Cause.” Blessed promise indeed! **“Give, and it shall be given unto you: good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again,”** Luke 6:38.

3. God promises opportunity to abound in good works, verse 8. Giving is not intended simply to receive good things from God. God gives His blessings to qualify the Christian to render greater service. Such service will bring other blessings which will, in turn, qualify for yet more perfect service.

Enriched by God's grace, the believer imparts the divine bounty to others by deeds of goodness. This is the plan which God has ordained. If your opportunities for service are limited, examine the quality of your stewardship of opportunities already in hand.

4. God promises to increase your “fruits of righteousness,” verses 9-10. The good man will find God's blessings multiply his efforts until he is able to produce works of increasing righteousness. The means of doing good will be increased as one takes advantage of opportunity to do good. The reward of righteousness is the ability to produce still more righteousness. The more faithful one is as God's steward the more his stewardship will be increased. He that is not faithful in little things need not expect God to trust great things to him, Luke 16:10-12. The righteous life is much more blessed than the unrighteous one. Faithful stewardship will “increase the fruits of your righteousness.” Such fruits of righteousness is nothing more than the “fruit of the Spirit,” Galatians 5:22.

5. God promises a life filled with multiplied blessings, verse 11. The

faithful steward will be “enriched in everything to all bountifulness.” That is, all his needs will be supplied. This, in turn, will cause thanksgiving to God. Great joy and gratitude to God will result in praise and thanks to God. Observe the difference in the spirit of the church when the budget is “in the red,” when repeated statements must be made urging members to make up the deficit, and when liberality abounds and needs are met. Gloom and depression accompany the former condition while praise and thanksgiving accompany the latter. That kind of stewardship which provides necessary funds and workers will cause any church to rejoice in the Lord. Try it in your church and see.

There is no blessing like that of faithful stewardship. It provides resources for the Kingdom work. It increases the spirituality of the steward. It encourages others to faithful stewardship. It honors the name of the Lord. Have you tried it?

IV. THE NOTABLE RESULT, 9:12-14.

1. Faithful stewardship supplies the needs of the work, verse 12. The offerings under discussion in II Corinthians, chapter nine, were being received to supply the needs of brethren caught in a famine in Judaea. So liberal were the offerings from the churches (see II Corinthians 8:1-7) that the needy brethren were supplied.

This applies to the commitment expressed in the Church Covenant that the member will “contribute cheerfully and regularly to . . . the relief of the poor.” This is a part of the “pure religion and undefiled before God” as defined by James 1:27.

Benevolence, as important as it is, is not the only subject considered here. The needs of missionary brethren who depend upon the churches to supply their needs, as well as the needs of ministers who serve fulltime in the work, must be included also. Blessed is the church whose interest reaches beyond the four walls of her own building, beyond the homes represented in her membership, beyond the confines of her own city and state. Blessed is the church whose stewardship is marked by wholehearted liberality and a worldwide vision. Is this your church?

2. Faithful stewardship causes hearts to overflow with thanksgiving, verse 12. Many workers in the Lord’s cause look to Him and His people to supply their needs. Even if the supply is sent through the agency of other Christians, it still brings thanksgiving to God. The Apostle Paul wrote that when the church at Philippi sent offerings to support him in missionary labours, “I rejoiced in the Lord greatly,” Philippians 4:10.

Even a casual reading of your state Baptist paper or the Gleaner, our national missions magazine, will bring reports from missionaries of their joy for the interest and support of the brethren. They look to God for the supply of their needs. God, in turn, speaks to His churches to send the offerings in His name. Thus they who give and they who receive rejoice together.

3. Faithful stewardship glorifies God, verse 13. Paul says the Jerusalem Christians glorified God because the Corinthian Christians were following the precepts of the Gospel in financial and spiritual stewardship. There is no better way to prove one belongs to Jesus than by the faithful stewardship of all things in life.

Baptists have covenanted together to “contribute cheerfully and regularly to . . . the spread of the gospel through all nations. This is a solemn commitment but in exact accord with the Great Commission Jesus gave the church, Matthew 28:18-20. Christian stewardship is basically a stewardship of the gospel. Life, time, talents, and money are important because these can be used to spread the gospel. When a people devote their time, talents, money, and life to spread the gospel, it always glorifies God.

Stewardship will express itself in personal service, community missions, and denominational cooperation. But always it must be God who gets the glory when the gospel is obeyed and propagated. Are you so living that God is glorified by your own stewardship? Is your church so conducting her business that God is glorified in all these areas of service? Faithful Stewardship always glorifies God.

4. Faithful stewardship increases brotherly concern for one another, verse 14. As one serves another in love he finds himself loved in return. This affection expresses itself in fervent prayer for each other. Someone has said, “He who prays for me, enriches me.” This is why the Apostle Paul so often called upon his brethren to support his ministry with their prayers. When brethren pray for one another their fellowship is unified and strengthened.

Love begets love. As one serves another in love he finds himself loved in return.

When a member gives his offerings to the Lord through his church, he will find himself loving and being loved more. There is no spectacle quite so shameful as the person who lives with the church but loves not. Be a faithful steward and notice what a difference it will make in your relationship to your own church.

V. THE UNPARALLELED EXAMPLE, 9:15.

Paul reaches the ultimate in the grace of giving when he speaks of

God's gift of His own dear Son. **“Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift.”** All our gifts fall so far short of God's gift that they are not worthy to be compared.

This section on stewardship of giving is closed by the doxology of praise for God's gift. Jesus, God's gift to men, is His true great, supreme, all-comprehending gift. Infinite love and unspeakable grace are conjoined here. God's love and gift are the perfect example by which man is to judge all his giving. Especially if one thinks the demands of Christian giving are too strict or too demanding, let him look at God's gift and all complaints will cense.

1. God's gift is the perfect example in motive. Love prompted God to give Jesus. Read John 3:16-17. The love which motivated the Gift is unselfish in nature, unfading in duration, and unequalled in expression. It is a self-giving spirit which loves another for the other's sake. It is the love which “seeketh not her own,” I Corinthians 13:5.

John applies the motive to Christian stewardship saying, **“Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another,”** I John 4:11. The same love which He showed to us, we are to show to one another! Christian love leaves behind all thought of personal advantage. It is an affection and concern solely in behalf of the person loved. This is the highest possible affection a man can exercise.

2. God's gift is the perfect example in value. God's gift is of such inestimable worth that all heaven bowed in wonder at the grace which provided it. The angels sang and worshipped when Jesus was born. He is the second person of the Trinity, the Creator of all things, the jewel of heaven. Yet, He “emptied Himself” to become man and die for men!

In view of God's great gift, how can Christians ever offer the small and cheap to Him? David once resolved that he would not offer to the Lord that which cost him nothing, II Samuel 24:24. The Christian must not do less. Malachi accused his generation of “robbing God” when they brought animals to be sacrificed to Him which were of little value. God does not want the sick and weak. He wants the “firstfruits” of our increase. Take your offering off the top and present it to God. Never give to His great cause the crumbs which are left over.

The answer to all Christian stewardship is personal dedication. Let a man first give himself to the Lord and he will have little problem about giving his possessions to Him also.

CONCLUSION—To be a faithful Christian is to be a faithful steward. God expects us to be stewards of life, time, talents, and possessions. Christian stewardship is not a burden but a joy. (1) It produces a good conscience toward God. (2) It frees from the sin of covetousness. (3) It

provides funds for the Lord's work. (4) It often brings increased ability to give. (5) It contributes to spiritual growth. (6) It fulfills one's financial obligation to his church. (7) It enables one to influence his household to be good stewards of all of life and its privileges.

Only through the church can the member exercise proper financial stewardship. Only thus can he have a consistent part in “the support of the ministry, the expenses of the church, the relief of the poor, and the spread of the gospel through all nations.” The work of the church is the most important work in the world for the Lord works through her. The church member has assumed a solemn stewardship in becoming a part of that body'. **“Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful,”** I Corinthians 4:2.

QUESTIONS

1. What is “the supreme beatitude”?
2. How is giving more blessed than receiving?
3. What portion of the Covenant is considered today?
4. What principle underlies Christian stewardship?
5. How can one be a giver that God loves?
6. Why should one “purpose in his heart” before he gives?
7. What promises accompany faithful stewardship?