



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

## **Liberality**

**Lesson Aim:** to challenge our people to abound in the grace of giving

**L451. Date:** April 1976. **Text:** II Corinthians 8:9-15; 9:7-9; I Corinthians 16:1-2. **Topic:** Church Covenant; Giving: To God.

**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, the relief of the poor, and the spread of the gospel through all nations.”

A preacher moved to a new pastorate. As a part of his adjustment to that ministry, he changed the order of service in the Sunday worship hour. The church had been singing, praying, hearing a special message in music, receiving an offering, and then hearing the sermon. The new pastor adjusted the order so that the singing and praying were followed by an offering, special music, and the sermon. A brother in the congregation complained, “I do not prefer to hear a song between the offering and the sermon. Nothing prepares me to hear a message from God like giving my tithes and offerings”

Whether one agrees with the order of service or not, the brother had the right idea about offerings. Giving to God through His church is an act of worship. It is recognition of His sovereignty. It is a joyful acknowledgement of the Lordship of Jesus Christ over the life of a believer. It is a fine way for one to prepare his heart to hear God's message. Giving is truly an act of worship.

Members of each Baptist church have committed themselves “. . . to contribute cheerfully and regularly to the support of the ministry, the expenses of the church, the relief of the poor, and the spread of the gospel through all nations.” It is that solemn commitment which places a lesson on financial stewardship in the midst of a study of the church covenant.

Please be a good steward of the opportunity to study the lesson. Ask God to show you what your stewardship obligation is. The lesson aims “to challenge you to abound in the grace of giving.”

## I. THE PICTURE OF JESUS' LIBERALITY

**“... Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich,”** II Corinthians 8:9.

That principle should guide the Christian in his giving. Give as Jesus gave. Jesus gave His life.

A. Jesus gave willingly, not by compulsion. No one, not even His heavenly Father, required Jesus to do more than He was gladly willing to do. Freedom from compulsion marked the whole of His life. Since “God loveth a cheerful giver,” Jesus set the example of willing offering — even the offering of Himself.

B. Jesus gave liberally. He gave Himself, even to His very life. How difficult it is to understand why a person, who is a recipient of His gift, would want to give less than all he has to the Lord. Christians who “tip” rather than “tithe” should consider how much the Lord gave.

C. Jesus gave unselfishly. He gave for believers' good and God's glory. Away, then, with the spirit which gives because it expects more from God (a business transaction) or which gives to keep away God's judgment (a kind of spiritual insurance policy). Give for the glory of God, not for personal profit. Give without thought for personal benefit. Give for the sake of the good it will do to others.

D. Jesus gave totally. He gave His very life. Do not be content with ten per cent offering to the Lord. Do not be content with a tithe plus a free will offering. Know that God owns all and deserves all. Give yourself, first, and then give your tithes and offerings to the Lord.

## II. THE PRINCIPLES OF CHRISTIAN LIBERALITY

A. Increase your giving. The considered opinion of the Apostle Paul was that good resolves to give should be followed by a performance. As a person grows in the graces of faith, teaching, knowledge, devotion, and affection for fellow Christians, he should increase in the grace of giving (II Corinthians 8:7, 10).

Many Christians follow the system of giving ten percent of their income, plus adding free will offerings. That is a valid guideline to follow in

financial stewardship. Be careful, however, that the tithe does not become the maximum of your giving. There are many Christians whose financial circumstances are such that they should give well above ten percent. There are many Christians who do give much more.

It is wise to practice percentage giving. If necessary, start with three or five percent. Year by year, increase your giving. Move upward to ten percent (plus offerings) but do not stop there. Keep on growing. Increase your giving. While inflation continues, the church must give more each year just to retain her financial strength. You must give more to keep on giving the same amount. Do not hit a plateau of giving and level out there. Year after year, give more (a large percentage), and watch God bless in providing for you.

B. Plan and perform your gifts. II Corinthians 8 deals with a benevolent offering received by Christians in Europe to help suffering and destitute Christians in Asia. The brethren at Corinth were the first to propose such an offering. They agreed to receive it and to send it on for its benevolent purpose. Quick to plan, they were slow to perform. They acknowledged the need. They recognized that someone should supply it, but they were slow to help. Paul encouraged them, "Let your readiness to finish the collection be just like your readiness to start it. Give according to what you have, not worrying about what you have not."

Do you catch the principle? God intends for you to plan your offerings and to give according to your plan. Do not wait for sudden inspiration when the offering plate starts down your pew. Give according to a plan which you have worked out in times of prayer before the Lord.

C. Share with those who have need. Christian giving is always in response to need. The need is twofold. (1) Each believer needs to give. He needs the spiritual growth which comes through faithful stewardship. (2) The people who wait for a spiritual ministry need the gifts of God's people to make that ministry possible. Christian giving is for the purpose of providing for need. Christians in Europe gave that Christians in Asia might have the necessities of life. Christians in Asia and Europe had previously given that non-Christians might hear the gospel and receive the necessities for spiritual life. All Christian offerings are for the purpose of answering need in human lives to the glory of God.

D. Rejoice in the privilege to give. **"Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly nor of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver,"** II Corinthians 9:7. Evaluate that admonition. (1) Each person should make up his mind what he will give. (2) He should give a predetermined amount. (3) His giving should not be with

reluctance nor with a sense of compulsion. (4) He should have a spirit of happiness at the opportunity to give.

One's spirit (attitude) can spoil his gift. God is not concerned only that a person gives. He is concerned that the gift be presented gladly. God cannot approve a gift presented in a spirit of avarice or covetousness. The Israelites early manifested how offerings should be among God's people. "... They came, every one whose heart stirred him up, and every one whom his spirit made willing, and they brought the Lord's offering . . ." Exodus 35:21. Give with joy!

### III. THE PROVISION OF ALMIGHTY GOD

A. God's love will be made evident to the Christian who gives as God prescribes. "... **God loveth a cheerful giver,**" II Corinthians 9:7. The faithful steward will know God's love. He will manifest it to him. Spiritual growth, calm assurance of spirit, strength in times of testing, confidence in the providential care of the heavenly Father, fellowship with God all through each day — those and other blessings attend the man to whom the love of God is evidently manifested.

B. God's grace will be made evident to the faithful Christian steward. "... **God is able to make all grace abound toward you . . .**" II Corinthians 9:8. What is grace? It is God doing for men that which they do not deserve. What is "all grace"? It is God doing the unexpected and undeserved in all areas of the believer's life. To whom does God promise to extend "all grace"? It is to the person who is a faithful and joyful steward of his resources in the support of God's ministry to men. How much "all grace" will God provide to His faithful children? He will cause all grace to "abound" toward them. What a promise! Claim it, and know God's reward,

C. God's sufficient supply will be available to the faithful Christian steward. "... **God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work,**" II Corinthians 9:8. Look at what God said! He will supply the faithful steward with such blessings that, under all circumstances and on all occasions, all that is needed will be supplied so the believer will have ample means to meet every situation, plus some left over for other good causes. It would be hard to believe, if God had not said it. Away, then, with that spirit which says, "I cannot afford to give. I would not be able to get by on what I had left." God admonished, "**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.

D. God will provide increasing opportunity for service to the faithful Christian steward. Be faithful in stewardship, and God will enable you to “. . . abound to every good work . . . and multiply your seed sown, and increase the fruits of your righteousness,” II Corinthians 9:8, 10. If your heart cries out for increased opportunity to serve, here is the way to open the door: be a faithful steward of what you have where you are. God will provide increased opportunity.

**“He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much. If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches?”** Luke 16:10, 11. Be faithful, and you will have the larger opportunity for service in Jesus' name.

#### **IV. THE GUIDELINES FOR CHRISTIAN GIVING**

**“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 gatherings . . .”** I Corinthians 16:2.

A. Time for giving — “Upon the first day of the week . . .” Why is the first day of the week the proper time for giving? That is commonly the time when Christians meet to worship. It is evident, from that injunction, that giving is a proper part of the worship activities of believers. The most logical time to acknowledge God's ownership of all, and man's stewardship of all, is when God's people gather before Him to worship and study.

From earliest Christian times, the first day of the week held a special place in worship. (1) Jesus arose from the dead on the first day of the week (Luke 24:17). (2) The Holy Spirit came in power on the first day of the week (Acts 2:1-41). (3) The Lord appeared to His disciples on the first day of the week (John 20:19). (4) Jesus gave the Revelation to John on the first day of the week (Revelation 1:10). (5) Christians met to worship on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7). (6) Christians gave their offerings to the Lord on the first day of the week (I Corinthians 16:2). What do you do on the first day of each week?

B. Persons who give — “Every one of you . . .” Christian giving is a grace to be enjoyed by each believer. Many Christian families arrange for each member of the household, even the small children, to have an offering to present to the Lord in His house. Since He is Lord of all, it is right that He be honored by the offerings of all. How tragic that the financial responsibility of the average congregation is borne by a small percentage of

the people. Let everyone give.

C. Portion to be given — “. . . As God that prospered him . . .” That lays the foundation for percentage giving. If it were required that each give the same number of dollars, some would suffer hardship, but others would not. Some may give twenty-five percent of their income whereas others may give but two percent. God instituted the percentage method of giving so that, whether one's income be large or small, he could give with equality. Give your offerings according to God's provision, and you will be a good steward.

D. Purpose of giving — “. . . That there be no gatherings . . .” The church should have available the funds needed for the work of the kingdom of God. On occasion, it is permissible for a church to have a “special offering” for a project, but her financial support of the kingdom work should not depend upon special offerings. Consistent percentage giving will provide the funds necessary and keep the work from suffering, relieving the problem of high-pressure “special offerings.” That is God's way.

Years ago, when the Packard automobile was being manufactured, the company had as its advertising slogan: “Ask the man who owns one.” It was built upon the premise that a satisfied customer is the best advertisement. If you have some reservation about the principles of Christian financial stewardship set forth in the lesson comments, do not reject the teaching. Ask the Christian who has tried it. Let someone who has been along the way recount the blessings he has received from faithful support of the Lord's work by giving tithes plus free-will offerings. To paraphrase the slogan, “Ask the Christian who has tried it.”

**“Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful,”** I Corinthians 4:1, 2.

## Questions

1. What does stewardship mean?
2. What does Acts 20:35 mean to you?
3. What example did Jesus set in giving?
4. How can a Christian increase his gifts to the Lord?
5. What does it mean to “purpose” in your heart to give?
6. How can you be a cheerful giver?
7. What grace does God give to the faithful steward?
8. What sufficiency did God promise?
9. How can you follow I Corinthians 16:2 in your giving?
10. How can you become a good steward of your life?

