

GIVING UNDER GRACE

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(Continued from the October-December Number, 1950)

II. TEACHING OF THE OTHER PASSAGES

Having now examined the major sections of Scripture dealing with the subject of giving, there yet remain a number of scattered verses to be considered. Despite their isolation these Scriptures are not to be thought of as unimportant. In fact, as we shall see, they afford several important principles to be observed and contribute the major number of suggestions as to whom gifts should be made. This study is not exhaustive since not all texts on giving are examined. Only those passages are considered in which some hitherto untouched factor is found. The order in which these texts appear in Scripture will be followed.

Matthew 10:8—"Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give." The first part of this verse, given as instruction to the twelve apostles in the pre-cross period, may be disregarded as not pertinent to the subject. But the last statement constitutes a vital precept as furnishing the basis for giving.

Nothing is more fundamental than this divine injunction: "freely ye have received, freely give." In it the very essence of the spirit of giving is formulated. By it selfishness and vanity are excluded, and impartiality and sympathy obtained. These brief words are aglow with the warmth of divine love and mercy, and are fragrant with the very breath of grace. To the unsaved, who know nothing of the mercies of God freely bestowed, they are cold phrases devoid of meaning; but to the one who has once tasted the free gifts of grace in salvation they kindle in his breast the warm fires of gratitude and awaken the deep well-springs of affection, till an overpowering love opens his heart and his purse-strings to a needy world, and parsimony and penury in charity become impossible. Giving is here seen as the highest expression of the divine character; therefore, Christians are to give as God gave.

Acts 6:1—"And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration." This brief report of a first-century church quarrel provides the first indication of who might be properly regarded as subjects of charity. Evidently widows, who because of age or the care of children are not capable of earning their own living, are to be supported by the gifts of the believers. In this connection, however, the rule of 1 Timothy 5:16 applies: "If any man or woman that believeth have widows, let them relieve them, and let not the church be charged; that it may relieve them that are widows indeed."

Acts 20:35—"I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive." These words of Paul preserve a traditional utterance of Christ not recorded in the gospels. But though the occasion on which He spoke is unknown, yet these words are none the less significant. Again there is found in this phrase a brief epitome of grace. What hollow mockery there is in hearing this phrase as it is sometimes used on such occasions as Christmas, when the heart is really fixed on the gifts that will be received in return for the ones given! That is not the divine method. It is giving which is a blessing, not receiving, as only those who thus enter into the heart of God can testify.

Paul also states here that it is the privilege of the believers by their labors to "support the weak." These are probably the sick and infirm who are unable to work themselves, and require the regular assistance of others.

Romans 12:13—"Distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality." Appearing in between a call to prayer and an exhortation to hospitality, Paul lists the care of needy saints as a Christian's concern. This seems an obvious obligation, and yet one that is often neglected because a natural reticence keeps those in need from informing others of their condition. To obey this injunction, often, will require

an active inquiry or investigation of the financial state of worthy saints, and always calls for a keen and observing eye for tell-tale marks of privation.

Galatians 6:6-10—"Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things. Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting. And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith." This passage presents no new thought in the matter of giving-principle, but is very rich in practical suggestions. The word "communicate" (κοινωνεῖτω) means to have or share in common, and refers to the support of teachers who give themselves wholly to the ministry of the Word. This would include, in a large sense, such institutions as Bible schools, seminaries, and Christian colleges, which surely may be said to "teach good things."

The aspect of giving in this whole passage is well brought out by a paraphrase, as follows: "A part of your giving is to the ones who teach you the Bible. Be not deceived, God is not mocked; for whatsoever a Christian man soweth in his giving that shall he also reap. He that spends his money on himself will see his gift corrupted with himself, but the one who gives his money to spiritual things shall reap the reward in the time of life everlasting. And don't fret about the number of calls upon you for giving, for in due season God will give you your reward, if you faint not. Depending upon the amount of your income, therefore, give to everything you can, but first of all give to the causes that are of the household of faith."²⁸ Observe, the "causes that are of the household of faith" are to be put first in giving, before such secular benevolences as the Red Cross and Community Chest.

1 Timothy 5:8, 17—"But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the

²⁸"Where to Give," *Revelation*, 19:2 (February, 1949), p. 49.

faith, and is worse than an infidel. . . . Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine." Financial responsibility to his own next-of-kin must be put first in the believer's practice of giving. This is the more important because such charities are usually taken for granted by the public, and fail to elicit the praise that often makes giving to strangers so pleasing to the ego. "Charity," as the old proverb has it, "begins at home" and this fact the Christian must not overlook. This does not imply that habitual loafers must be supported simply because they are blood relations, but if needy and worthy relatives exist they are to be provided for.

Verse 17 enjoins the financial support of elders in the church, especially those that "rule well" and "labour in the word and doctrine." In modern practice, this would usually denote the pastor of a church and as many others as give themselves to full- or part-time service in teaching and ministering. This is not a salary or a wage (though for practical purposes it may be paid in that form), but is called an "honor," from which we get our expression "honorarium."

3 *John 5-7*—"Beloved, thou doest faithfully whatsoever thou doest to the brethren, and to strangers; which have borne witness of thy charity before the church: whom if thou bring forward on their journey after a godly sort, thou shalt do well: because that for his name's sake they went forth, taking nothing of the Gentiles." The "brethren" and "strangers" to whom John makes reference here are evidently travelling missionaries who depended entirely on Christian gifts for support, as it is recorded they went out, "taking nothing from the Gentiles." No further sanction is needed for the support of foreign and home missionaries than these words. They extend also to itinerant evangelists, Bible teachers, colporteurs, and the like.

SUMMARY

Having now examined this subject in the light of the New Testament it seems suitable here to pass under review

the whole field traversed. This may be presented in a condensed, but highly practical, form.

Why a Christian should give. Believers are to give because they have themselves richly received (Matt. 10:8). In addition, they are to give on the ground of having first given themselves and all they possess to God (2 Cor. 8:5).

Who should give. Under grace, every believer is privileged to participate in the gracious ministry of giving, and is urged to use the privilege to his own blessing (1 Cor. 16:2, 2 Cor. 9:7).

How much to give. No specified amount or proportion is ever levied upon those who live by grace. God asks only that the believer take some cognition of His abundant blessing and give as God has prospered him (1 Cor. 16:2). Whatever the amount is, it is to be a pre-determined sum, that is, whatever is "purposed in the heart" (2 Cor. 9:7).

How to give. More is said of this than of any other factor, since the motive in giving is all-important under grace. Believers are to give with a willing mind (2 Cor. 8:12), cheerfully (2 Cor. 9:7), bountifully (2 Cor. 9:6), aboundingly (2 Cor. 8:7), and freely (Matt. 10:8).

When to give. Though the act of giving itself may not always be done on Sunday, yet believers are exhorted to lay by a determined amount "in store" each Lord's Day, that they may have a fund from which to distribute their charities (1 Cor. 16:2).

To whom to give. The scriptural list of those who may be considered proper objects of charity need not be regarded as exhaustive. It may be taken as suggesting in general terms the more usual recipients of Christian gifts. These include needy saints (Rom. 12:13, 2 Cor. 9:12), the sick and aged (Acts 20:35), elders in the church—which term would include the present-day pastor (1 Tim. 5:17), Bible teachers (Gal. 6:6-10), widows (Acts 6:1, 1 Tim. 5:16), strangers (Rom. 12:13, 1 Pet. 4:9), poor relations (1 Tim. 5:3-16), and missionaries (3 John 5-7).

It will be evident, from the above, that the New Testament doctrine of giving is full and complete, lacking no element

essential to a well-rounded instruction. There is thereby afforded no excuse for borrowing any features whatsoever from the legal system presented in the Old Testament. To do so is, to that extent, to "fall from grace" to the infinitely lower level of duty and legal obligation. It remains to indicate the heaven-high character of the principles of giving here developed, as related solely to grace and opposed to law.

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"Grace is above all—according to Augustine—the power of a divine creation in Christ renovating man from within. Its operation holds first, negatively, in the remission of sin by which the way is thrown open for communion with God; and then, positively, also in the communication of a new principle of life. As we have inherited from the first Adam our sinful and mortal life, so the Second Adam also implants in us by the Holy Ghost the germ of a sinless and immortal life, from God and in God. Positive grace works then not simply, as according to the view of Pelagius, from without—by instruction and exhortation upon our understanding; but descends into the center of our personality and imparts to the will, at the same time, power to obey the truth which is taught and to follow the pattern exhibited by Christ. Augustine styles it hence an *inspiratio bonae voluntatis atque operis*, also *inspiratio dilectionis*. The unwilling it meets to make him willing, the willing it follows after that he may not will in vain. In short, grace is the marrow and blood of the new man: from it proceeds all that is truly good and divine, and without it we can do nothing that is acceptable to God."—*Bibliotheca Sacra*, May, 1848.



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