

THE GODLY GIVER

**He Who Sows Bountifully
Will Reap Bountifully**

Biblical Research Library

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The greatness of Christian integrity is revealed in the life of the one who gives his life for others. Jesus focused the thinking of His disciples on this principle of faith when He said, “*Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends*” (Jn 15:13). And Jesus led the way. Any who would in turn be the friend of Jesus, will crucify their own lives for their friends (See Gl 2:20). Crucifying our lives for Jesus simply means that in order that we be a friend of Jesus, we must give our lives for others, just as Jesus gave His life for us. The body of Christ functions on earth when the members sacrificially give themselves to others. This is the core nature of the character of those who would follow the example of their Redeemer. When we crucify our own lives for Jesus, it means giving our time. And that which represents our time is our money. The money we earn from giving our time in a job, represents our lives. Money thus becomes a very important symbol of our being crucified with Christ. If we do not give our money (our time) for the function of the body of Christ, then we are a dysfunctional part of the body. No one can be joined and held to the body without being a sacrificial giver to the financial needs of the body. When Paul wrote that the whole body is “*fitted and held together by what every joint supplies,*” he meant both time and money. Without either, one is a dysfunctional member of the body.

INTRODUCTION

There is a simple definition of the word “godly.” The root meaning comes from the action of God as Jesus explained in John 3:16: “*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son*” God is a loving giver, and those who would be godly—godlikeness—must be givers. Therefore, in view of His sacrificial giving, “*we love because He first loved us*” (1 Jn 4:19).

We live in a world of churchianity (Christendom) where there is a great deal of ungodliness masquerading as godliness. We confess that godliness is always our struggle. It is a struggle because we seek to be like God, while at the same time, we

have these selfish, narcissistic yearnings to consume upon our own lusts because we seek to be “the man.” It is a struggle that prevails with all men, rich or poor. In the developing world, this struggle can be traced back to the time when some missionary/evangelist initially took the sweet name of Jesus to some far off nation. Some godly sender made sacrificial contributions in order that the message of the gospel be preached to all the world. But something went wrong in that many of the converted did not emulate the godly giving of those first senders of missionaries and evangelists. The self-proclaimed poor of the developing world offered all

sorts of excuses to convince the sending disciples that they were still a “mission point,” even after centuries of holding out their hands to the senders. In the world in which we live, this is a predominant problem among those who would live after the sacrificial life of Jesus.

We suppose a principle of New Testament missions was violated. Paul took no bag of money with him to hand out payment to Timothy. All Paul had was a needle, and thus said to Timothy, “Get to work helping me make tents so we can preach the gospel” (See At 20:31-35). But that all changed when the financially endowed sent their “money” (missionary) force into all the world in the last three centuries. A psychology of dependency developed in the minds of some of the converted, and thus the financial function of the body has handicapped in the “mission points” of the world. A cuffed-hand theology and behavior was developed. And to this day, the converted are having a difficult time taking ownership of evangelizing their own nations by supporting their own evangelists.

But we must not place all the blame on those godly givers who sent the first evangelists, and continue to send them today. The messengers only followed, in many cases, the example of colonial governments who built roads, and hospitals, schools, and everything to bring the “Third World” into being renamed the developing world. These colonial powers built, and then they handed out loans to financially dysfunctional new governments, and then again, forgave the debts. Now what would we expect of the citizens of these

lands, but to continue what was perpetuated by good-hearted people of colonial powers who simply wanted to give people out of “poverty” into our definition of being “developed.” Unfortunately, all the giving developed a culture of dependency that left the receivers continually subservient to the handouts of former colonial givers.

This is where many of us in the developing world are, trapped in a culture of an extended hand, waiting around for the next NGO, or the next foreign church, to show up and do for us what we should be doing for ourselves. Those godly givers of the West should not become frustrated with our situation, for our forefathers created these “receiving” societies whose residents have a difficult time in assuming the responsibility for their own destiny.

The good news is that in most of the developing world the younger generation is growing out of the “cuffed-hand” culture of their fathers. They are taking ownership of their GNP. They are doing so well in this struggle of financial rebirth that they have recognized the ungodliness of the cuffed-hand churchianity of the past and are giving to the birth of a new future. It is a refreshing wind of change that will take the church of the developing world on to victory, regardless of the sins of the fathers. It is now time for a true financial partnership of the universal body of Christ to revive the organic growth of the body of Christ, just like it was in the first century.

This change in the paradigm of thinking moves us to focus again on how God

would have us think and behave as His children, as members of the global body of Christ. After all, He sent forth the ultimate example of how we should give in our godliness. He defined godliness by which godly people take action. We would do well to rehearse not only His teaching on the matter, but also on how the early disciples financially functioned in partnership with one another as the organic body of Christ. Their sacrificial giving was seated in what God required of Israel from the very beginning of the nation. Jesus came with a new message. His was a message that was encapsulated in the statement, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, **as I have loved you, that you also love one another**” (Jn 13:34).

The early church simply picked up where Israel left off and was illustrated in the living sacrifice of Jesus. They believed and obeyed the new commandment of love. Their giving of themselves to the Lord was recorded for posterity, and thus, we have today a beautiful book of how to

get the job done in our own lives. The secret to doing what they did was revealed in one statement that Paul made concerning the Christians in Macedonia: “**And this [sacrificial contribution] they did ... they first gave themselves to the Lord ...**” (2 Co 8:5). This was the living sacrifice about which Paul wrote in view of the fact of all that God has given to us. It was thus only natural that the Holy Spirit communicate this appeal: “*Therefore, I urge you brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service*” (Rm 12:1).

We can always identify those who have sacrificially given themselves to the Lord. **Those who are sacrificial givers are those who have given themselves to the Lord.** Once one gives himself wholly to the Lord, giving of one’s money only comes naturally. And those who are not sacrificial givers ... well ... continue to read what follows.

Chapter 1

Old Testament Giving

God is the creator of all things, and thus all things belong to God. He is the creator of man. Notice very carefully what God said when He created man.

*And God said to them ... **have dominion** **I have given you** every plant bearing seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree To you it will be for*

*food. And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the sky, and to everything that creeps on the earth ... **I have given** every green plant for food (Gn 1:28-30).*

The above makes man only the steward of what was created for him by God. Man, therefore, must remember what God

says, “*The silver is Mine and the gold is Mine*” (Hg 2:8; see Ez 18:4). Also, “... *the world is Mine and its fullness*” (Ps 50:12; see At 17:24-28; Cl 1:15-17). It is as the Psalmist wrote, “*The earth is the Lord’s and its fullness, the world and those who dwell on it*” (Ps 24:1). “*For every beast of the forest is Mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills. ... for the world is Mine and its fullness*” (Ps 50:10,12).

If we would seek to take personal possession of that which belongs to God, then we are irreverently trying to take ownership of that which does not belong to us. We must always remember that we only have dominion over that which already existed before us.

One of the first challenges that faces the new Christian is to realize that all that he has first originated with God, and thus all things belong to God. We are only stewards of that which we have control. We must grow out of claiming our own wealth, for it is God who gives us the opportunity to have wealth through the things He created (See Dt 8:11,17,18). God eternally owns all that exists since He is the origin and eternity of all that will exist.

Because of the benevolence of God, man has been given the right to possess and use (“have dominion”), but not the right to take ownership of that over which God has made him a steward. God can never give up His ownership of all things. He cannot because He is the creator and sustainer of all things. It is necessary to understand that, “*we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out*” (1 Tm 6:7). Job re-

alized this truth. After having lost all, Job declared, “*Naked I came out of my mother’s womb and naked I will return. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed is the name of the Lord*” (Jb 1:21). When we consider the things of this world over which we have dominion, we are actually “naked possessors.”

One of the first evidences that one is truly a mature child of God is discovered in one’s realization that everything belongs to the Lord. At the same time, one of the evidences of unrighteousness is when one seeks to take ownership of that which is God’s. Good stewards seek to be righteous, and thus, they follow the life-style of Proverbs 3:9: “*Honor the Lord with your possessions and with the firstfruits of all your increase ...*”

The righteous are known for being good stewards of that which God has allowed them to have possession (See Lk 16:10-12). The good steward, therefore, uses that which has been given to him by God in order to honor God (See Mt 25:24-27). Paul wrote, “*Moreover, it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy*” (1 Co 4:2). But when the steward seeks to lay claim to that which is truly God’s, then he has turned into an idolater. He is not trustworthy. He idolizes the material by excluding the rightful owner of all things. Every materialist is an idolater. Of such people, the Holy Spirit charges in reference to our personal struggle with materialism, “... *put to death your members that are on the earth ... covetousness, which is idolatry*” (Cl 3:5). With these principles in mind, consider God’s teaching on being a good stew-

ard by faithfully offering to God that which manifests one's reverence for Him.

A. Abel offered to the Lord:

The reverential action of offering back to God that which is His has existed from the beginning. The offering of that which is of this created world did not originate with Old Testament teaching through the law of Moses. On the contrary, from the very beginning it was required of man to manifest his reverent worship of God through commanded sacrifices.

“Now in the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought the fruit of the ground as an offering to the Lord. But Abel brought the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions. And the Lord looked with favor on Abel and on his offering” (Gn 4:3,4).

We do not learn until the writing of Hebrews 11:4 why God looked with favor on the offering of Abel. *“By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that **he was righteous**”* God had favor with Abel's offering because Abel was righteous, that is, he did that which was right according to the will of God. And in order to do that which was right according to the will of God, the will of God had to have been revealed to both brothers. What God would accept as a correct offering was not a guess on their part. Both Abel and Cain offered according to acceptance or rejection of the instructions of God concerning sacri-

fices. Abel walked by faith in the word of God (See Rm 10:17). Cain sought to walk contrary to the instructions of God concerning an appropriate offering. His offering thus manifested his unrighteousness, which unrighteousness was later revealed by his killing of Abel. It is imperative, therefore, that when it comes to doing what God would require of us concerning offerings, we must follow His instructions.

B. Abraham and Jacob offered to the Lord:

Four hundred years before Moses inscribed any laws concerning offerings and contributions, Abraham had given a tenth (tithe) offering to Melchizedek (Gn 14:20; Hb 7:4-10). Melchizedek was functioning as a priest of God, and thus Abraham was obligated to continue Melchizedek's ministry as a priest by giving sustenance to him. Long before Jews existed, Abraham, as a Gentile, was giving to a Gentile priest of God, Melchizedek. Sacrifices and offerings, therefore, were not confined to Israel alone. Such things were not an invention of the Israelites.

The grandson of Abraham, Jacob, also gave offerings (Gn 28:20-22). Both Abraham and Jacob made their contributions and offerings before the law of Moses was given on Mt. Sinai around 1445 B.C. We must assume that God instructed the people of faith that the spiritual representatives for God must be supported (See Hb 1:1,2). Since tithing was practiced by the patriarchs before the law of Moses was given to Israel, then we

must assume that it has always been a command of God to contribute to His spiritual workers. And when sin came into the world, God instructed that sacrifices be offered for sin. From the time man first sinned and needed atonement before God, and direction in living through spiritual leadership, God has required sacrifices and contributions from man.

C. Israel offered to the Lord:

The Old Testament law of Moses (the Pentateuch, or first five books of the Old Testament), was given to the nation of Israel on Mt. Sinai as the law of the covenant that God made with the nation.

Within the Old Testament law, there are numerous instructions concerning offerings that were to be offered for sin, and contributions that were to be made to the Levites as God's spiritual leaders among the people (See Lv 27:30-34; Nm 3:11; 18:20,21; Dt 14:22-29; see Book 45, in the *Biblical Research Library*).

There were several different tithes that were required of the Israelites. There was the **first tithe** that was "holy to the Lord." The tithe of the **firstfruits** of the crops was also to be given. There was also the **second tithe** that was eaten by both the Levites and the one who offered the tithe. In the following statement, notice why God enjoined these tithes on the people:

You will surely tithe all the increase of your seed that the field brings forth year by year. And you will eat before the Lord your God in the place that He will choose

to place His name there, the tithe of your corn [maize], of your wine and of your oil and the firstborn of your herds and of your flocks, so that you may learn always to fear the Lord your God" (Dt 14:22,23).

Tithing reminded people of God's ownership of all that exists. When they offered their tithe, **they were manifesting their reverence to God for all that He had given to them as a blessing.** If they failed in their tithes and offerings, therefore, they would not be offering worship to the Lord who created them as a nation among nations.

Besides all the tithes for their spiritual leaders, there were many other laws given to Israel in reference to being benevolent to the poor. There were contributions that were to be made as freewill offerings. When Moses built the tabernacle, the people gave abundantly to its construction, even to the point that he had to ask them to stop giving (Ex 25). When the harvesters cut the crops of the field, the Israelites were not allowed to cut the corners of the field in order that the poor glean from the harvest (Lv 19:9; see Rt 2:15). They were not to gather every grape from their vineyards in order that the poor be able to glean from the harvest (Lv 19:10).

When people today seek to bind legally on God's people the commanded contributions and offerings that were required of Israel, they seem to forget that God required of Israel more than the ten percent tithe. What was required of Israel in offerings amounted to more than thirty

percent of the products that they generated through their labors. We must keep in mind that the contributions and offerings that were required of Israel were for the support of the nation, not just the Levites. If we would seek to bring laws from the Old Testament over into the new covenant that we now have with God, then we must bring over all the laws concerning contributions and offerings that were required of Israel. It may be convenient to think only of the ten percent, but to be consistent, when considering the contributions and offerings of Israel, one must think of thirty percent and more. What we do learn from God's requirements of Israel is that He required contributions and offerings. We must also continue contributions and offerings for our spiritual growth in Christ today. The nature of our contributions and offerings has changed, but not the principle of giving.

D. David offered to the Lord.

At the end of his life, David prepared for the building of the temple. All that he did in reference to preparations for the building truly identified him to have a heart of worship.

In 1 Chronicles 22:5 it is stated that "*David prepared abundantly before his death.*" His free-will giving was planned, and it was planned to be in abundance. David purposed and planned for the building of the temple, which his son, Solomon, would eventually build. Though God did not permit David to build the actual temple, this did not mean he could not prepare materials for his son to use in

building the temple after he died. In preparation for the building of the temple, David was even given by God a building pattern. "*All this,*" David said, "*the Lord made me understand in writing by His hand on me, even all the works of this pattern*" (1 Ch 28:19).

Now when it came to prepare for the building, David had the plans, and thus, he knew what it would take to build the building. So the people partnered with David in the preparations for the temple.

And they with whom precious stones were found gave them to the treasury of the house of the Lord by the hand of Jehiel the Gershonite. Then the people rejoiced for what they offered willingly, because with a whole heart they offered willingly to the Lord. And David the king also rejoiced with great joy (1 Ch 29:8,9)

It is significant to notice what David said after the contributions were made. David realized that all that was given actually first belonged to the Lord. "*Yours, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty. For all that is in the heaven and in the earth is Yours*" (1 Ch 29:11). They willingly returned to God that over which they had dominion because of their reverence for the God who actually owned what they returned to Him. David continued, "*But who am I, and what are my people that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort. For all things come from You and from Your hand we have given to You*" (1 Co

29:14). **They willingly gave out of a heart of gratitude because they realized that they were only stewards of all that belongs to God.** This is the secret to bountiful giving. Our bountiful giving manifests the depth of our spirituality. It manifests that we understand that all belongs to God, and thus, our contribution to God's work is only returning to Him that which is rightfully His. Now see if this is not what David said in the following statement:

I know also, my God, that You try the heart and have pleasure in uprightness. As for me, in the uprightness of my heart I have willingly offered all these things. And now I have seen with joy Your people who are present here to offer willingly to You (1 Ch 29:17).

One will not offer willingly to God with a cheerful heart if he does not realize that all things belong to God. David's uprightness, therefore, as well as the uprightness of the people, **was manifested in their willingness to return to God that which was rightfully God's.** David and the people thus worshiped God through their willful giving. We could conclude, therefore, that if anyone would not willingly return to God that which is God's, then he is not worshiping the God who owns all things. The materialistic idolater allows his possessions to take the place of the God who should be idolized in our giving.

Christians are no longer under the law that was given to Israel (Rm 7:1-4). We are under the law of Christ. How-

ever, what is important to remember concerning the laws and practices of the patriarchs concerning offerings and tithes is Romans 15:4. *"For whatever things were written before were written for our learning ..."* (See 1 Co 10:11). We learn from the offerings of the patriarchs that **God requires offerings from His people.** We are not under the tithe of the ten percent, but we are certainly under the principle that as Christians we must give to our Lord. And if anyone does not give to the Lord, then he falls under the condemnation of Malachi. The Lord first reminded Israel, *"For I am the Lord. I do not change"* (Ml 3:6). The people to whom these words were written had turned from the will of God. They had manifested their lack of reverence for God by withholding that which belonged to God. God judged them with the words, *"Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me. But you say, 'How have we robbed you?' In tithes and offerings"* (Ml 3:8). When we withhold from God that which belongs to Him, then we have robbed God of His possessions. Israel's sinful state was identified by their not returning to God that which belongs to God. We would judge any society to be "God robbers" if they lack in giving to God.

The world and all that is in it belongs to God. In her backslidden state, Israel's fall from God was identified by a violation of the laws that pertained to returning to God that which was His. But their sinful behavior went deeper than violating laws concerning tithes and offerings. They had turned from serving the one true

and living God to serving gods they had created after their own imagination. And these gods in their minds said that what they possessed was their own. Their lack of giving their offerings to God, therefore, revealed their covetousness. When one ceases to reverence the one true and living God, then he will minimize, if not terminate his offerings. He will do so because he thinks that the possessions he

has acquired belong exclusively to him because of his hard work to acquire them. Offering to God is something that is simply natural for those who know that all they possess belongs to the God who created all things. When one does not give to God, then he is covetous, and no covetous person has a right to be forever in the presence of the One who owns that which he covets.

Chapter 2

The Happy Steward

Giving to help others is a fun thing to do. In fact, after Jesus washed twenty-four dirty feet, and 240 stinky toes, He said to His disciples, *“If you know these things, **happy are you if you do them**”* (Jn 13:17). What He said to His disciples was if they wanted to be happy, then they must find ways to give themselves away to the needs of others. If they find themselves at any time unhappy, then they must just look around for some dirty feet.

The struggle of the Christian is not so much in learning how to become a good steward, but in learning that as a disciple one is a steward by life-style. Once the disciple of Jesus fully realizes that he has been bought with the price of the precious blood of God’s Son, then he begins to understand that he is not his own. All he has and all his life belongs to the One who bought him (See Gl 2:20). All that the disciple owns, therefore, is returned to its rightful owner. Once he recognizes the rightful owner of all things, the disciple assumes his rightful position of being a

steward over that which belongs to the rightful owner. Once one comes to this understanding of discipleship, all struggles to return what is rightfully God’s is over. It simply becomes a joyous thing to return to the Rightful Owner that which one has for so long selfishly consumed upon his own lusts. This was the secret to Christian maturity that the early disciples discovered. It is the reason why they were so sacrificial and happy in their giving immediately after they gave themselves wholly to the Lord Jesus Christ.

All our studies that we would do in reference to offerings and contributions are of no avail unless we learn what stewardship is as a Christian resident of this world. It is absolutely imperative that the concept of stewardship be understood from every angle of obedience since this is the answer concerning why the early Christians were so sacrificially giving in reference to one another and the world in which they lived. Theirs was simply a benevolent culture that we in our world

of consumerism and possessions have a very difficult time understanding.

The recorded examples of stewardship in the Old Testament were written for our learning (Rm 15:4). Abel, David, Abraham, and the other Old Testament heroes of faith, realized that **personal ownership of the things of this world was never a concept to be applied to man in his relationship with God and the things of this world.** We are not the true owners of that which we possess. We are stewards. The patriarchs realized that it was not possible to have a wrong attitude toward the things of this world, and at the same time, have a right faith toward God. In order to have the right attitude and faith toward God, they first realized and confessed that *“the earth is the Lord’s and its fullness ...”* (Ps 24:1). They realized, as Moses instructed Israel, that *“the heaven and the heaven of heavens is the Lord’s your God, the earth also, with all that is in it”* (Dt 10:14). And notice carefully what David said to the people after they had made their free-will offering for the construction of the temple: *“For all things come from You and from Your hand we have given to You”* (1 Ch 29:14). Every Christian must ask himself what Paul asked the Corinthians. *“And what do you have that you did not receive?”* (1 Co 4:7). When one answers this question correctly, then he has confessed that he is only a steward of all that he has. He is on his way to being a happy disciple. But realizing that one is a steward of God’s things, and behaving as a steward, are two different things.

A. Stewardship beyond the collection plate:

One of the unfortunate “religious practices” that has crippled the teaching that we are only stewards of that over which God has given us dominion, is the culture centered around the “church collection plate.” With this practice has come selfishness and a justification for material excess. We need to see the theology of the collection plate for what it really is, and the culture that it develops in the minds of God’s people. It has developed the following:

1. Legal giving: The collection plate has developed a legal approach to giving. When the collection plate is coming our way, we think, “How much should I give?” Such thinking is an appeal to a sense of what we feel is our duty to give. If we place anything in the plate, regardless of the amount, we feel that we have performed our duty before God. We have settled a legal account for “worship.”

2. Guilt giving: By thinking that we must legally give, and then pass such off as some “act of worship,” we have concluded how little we can give in order to relieve our conscience about our giving. We have led ourselves to believe that the legal “act” of giving has somehow constituted our worship before our God. We have led ourselves to the conclusion that God is satisfied with a trivial gesture to contribute some small amount. We have thus satisfied our conscience that we have performed an “act of worship,” and are then released from worship with a “closing prayer.”

It is unfortunate that we have propagated such thinking and behavior throughout the world. This teaching on giving has conveniently worked in those cultures of the world in which there are those who are always looking for something to be given to them. But in their culture of asking and expecting from others, Christians have failed to understand their stewardship of those things that surround them every day. So with the flip of a coin in the collection plate, such people sign off God and any feelings of guilt that they are responsible to God for all that they possess. But we cannot sign off our discipleship by the deposit of a coin in a collection plate. Disciples give to the collection because of who they are, not in order to maintain their discipleship.

3. Selfish giving: Once we have relieved our conscience by a trivial gift, we then deceive ourselves into believing that what we did not give now belongs to us to consume upon our own lusts. But we have forgotten that we have no claim to that which is left, for it too belongs to God. **The faithful steward realizes that that which remains in his pocket after the passing of the collection plate, is as much the property of God as that which was given.**

The only difference between that which one places in the collection plate and that which remains in his pocket, is that which has been placed in the collection plate has been turned over to be distributed by the decision of the group, whereas that which remains in our pockets remains in the power of our own decision as to how we will use it for God's

glory. Whether in one's pocket or in the collection plate, it all still belongs to God. Peter reminded Ananias that when his contribution was yet in his pocket, it was his to use (At 5:4). He had no right to lie about the amount given, since all that he had actually belonged to the God before whom he lied. Haggai reminded the people that the silver and gold belong to God, whether given or kept in one's own possession (Hg 2:8). The faithful steward understands this. He is the one who will give to the collection plate, but after the "closing prayer," he will also give to the poor man begging on the steps of the temple.

B. Stewardship beyond the tithe:

Efforts to bring over the legal "tithe" (tenth) of the Old Testament law into our new covenant relationship with God is sometimes a selfish effort on the part of some. Such destroys the New Testament teaching that Peter explained. *"Knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold ... but with the precious blood of Christ ..."* (1 Pt 1:18,19). Paul told the financially dysfunctional Corinthians, *"... you were bought with a price ..."* (1 Co 6:20). And that price was the precious blood of the incarnate Son of God. Whoever would want to stop at ten percent in his giving to God has totally missed the point of the high price that was paid for his salvation.

When one comes to Christ, he should be careful. He must not bring his selfish behavior of the world into the organic function of the body of Christ. In reviewing

the behavior of the Old Testament faithfuls, and the mandates concerning the contributions and offerings of Israel, we learn that those who would live by faith are sacrificial stewards in reference to those things over which they have control. Now the question is, How does one behave as a good steward?

In leading Israel to the sacrificial new commandment that He would introduce to those who would follow Him (Jn 13:34,35), Jesus taught that there were the faithful and wise stewards, as well as the wicked and lazy stewards. He taught that there were stewards who **had little, but did much** (See Lk 16:10; 19:17). He taught that there were those stewards who **did little with little** (Mt 25:26). And He taught that there were those stewards who **did much with much** (Mt 25:20). But when stewards would come to Christ in order to be His disciples, they would learn how **to do much with little** (See 2 Co 8:1-4). As disciples of Christ, the task is to learn that we own nothing, but owe everything. And because we know that we owe everything, we are as Paul confessed, *“I am a debtor both to the Greeks and to the Barbarians, both to the wise and to the unwise”* (Rm 1:14). Paul was a debtor because he realized that the entirety of his life had been bought. This realization moved him. He wrote,

I have been crucified with Christ. And it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. And the life that I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me (Gl 2:20).

The crucified disciple is not concerned with percentages of time and money, but with the principle that the totality of his life has been given in payment for what Jesus paid for him at the cross.

It is often an unfortunate shame that those who legally bind the tithe on their adherents today often give more than those who claim they are disciples, but are not under the tithing system of the Old Testament. We must first remember that the percentages that are given by legalistic givers, does not justify bringing Old Testament laws over into the law of Christ. The lack of commitment on the part of those who have supposedly given themselves as living sacrifices to God must be reconsidered (Rm 12:1). Our commitment to Jesus is not based on percentages, but on the principle of one who has crucified himself with Christ. If we would be as Paul, we no longer belong to ourselves, but to Christ. This would include everything we are and have.

If we fully understand the cost of our salvation, there is no limit to what we will give. We will never allow ourselves to be bound by percentages in our giving. The problem actually lies in the fact that those of a consumer society have created a “Christian giving” after the desires of entitlement. We have convinced ourselves that that for which we have worked so hard is certainly ours by ownership, and thus we have a right to consume what we have upon our own lusts. But we forget that we have been bought with an eternal blood offering. Our love for God for this offering must motivate our sacrificial offering for Him. Phillip’s translation of

1 John 3:18 is appropriate: *“Let us not love merely in theory or in words—let us love in sincerity and in practice.”* Any discussions concerning giving, therefore, must certainly conclude that our giving exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees who gave only a tenth. Our problem is often that we give only a tenth of that which we should be giving.

Paul wrote to the Corinthians that death will be swallowed up in the victory of the resurrection (1 Co 15:54-58). *“The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.”* Now immediately after he spoke of things concerning death, he turned his discussion to, *“Now concerning the collection for the saints ...”* (1 Co 16:1). Maybe he was trying to remind us of something in the background that we must seriously consider when we discuss the subject of contributions. Two men once stood at the grave of a rich man. One turned to the other and asked, *“How much did he leave?”* The other responded, *“All that he had.”*

Stewardship begins with a penitent

heart. Before we came to Christ, we lived after the selfishness of consuming upon our own lust, walking *“according to the ways of this world”* (Ep 2:2). We were dead in our sinful way of life. But in repentance, this life-style was reversed. All our personal goals in life and standards of living changed when we allowed ourselves to be bought with the precious blood of Jesus (1 Pt 1:18,19). Purchased people are debtors to the One who bought them.

God seeks for the broken and contrite heart of repentance (See Ps 51). In our repentance, God looks beyond a legal sacrifice in fulfillment of law. He looks to the heart of the one who gives the sacrifice (See 1 Sm 16). Our stewardship, therefore, is a manifestation of our most inner repentance. If our stewardship is crooked, our heart has not yet been fixed with repentance. We will continue to give into the collection plate. But when it comes by, we realize that we are actually measuring our spiritual health as a steward of God by what we release back to God who give it.

Chapter 3

A Journey Of Discovery

Jesus' mission during His ministry to the Jews was to lead them into a new paradigm (covenant) in their relationship with God. This meant two things: (1) He had to lead Israel to Himself as the Messiah (the Christ), and thus, the cross. (2) He had to prepare the Jews for the end of national Israel and lead them to a new covenant relationship with God (See Jr

31:31-33; Rm 7:1-4). The cross would end the old covenant and establish the new (Cl 2:14; Hb 10:9). The destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 would end the Jewish state. Jesus' ministry, therefore, was transitional in reference to God's work among men on earth. God was transitioning His relationship that He had with all men from creation to the cross to

a new era from the cross to the final coming of His Son. During this new era He would work with all mankind through Jesus Christ.

It is crucial to understand that Jesus' ministry was a time of transition. During His ministry, Jesus made many statements concerning offerings that were meant to transition the thinking of the people to the time when they would accept Him as the Savior of the world. The Jews would be transitioned out of the legal structure of the Old Testament law in reference to offerings into a new covenant wherein there would be grace-motivated giving in response to the cross offering of Calvary. We thus understand Jesus' teachings on giving during His ministry as teachings to bring the Jews to a time when they would not be governed by law under the Old Testament, but by the law of faith and grace that would, in the context of giving, move them to give far beyond the restrictions of a ten percent tithe. In fact, giving out of the motivation of grace would move them to give beyond their ability (See 2 Co 8:1-4; compare 1 Co 15:10).

A. Golden-rule giving:

On one occasion during His ministry, Jesus said to the Jews the following statement:

Give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, it will be poured into your lap. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured to you again (Lk 6:38).

Some misunderstand this passage. It is not that giving is an investment plan with God. In other words, some believe that the more they give, the more God will give to them as "interest" on deposited money. They give as if investing in the stock market. This is selfish giving. Our brethren who live in poverty stricken areas of the world would argue that this motive for giving has certainly not helped them financially. Nevertheless, we have never seen an obedient child of God go without that which is necessary for life.

Look at Luke 6:38 again. Embedded in the statement is the "golden rule" in action. "*All things whatever you want men to do to you, even so do also to them ...*" (Mt 7:12). Now look again at Luke 6:38 above. Jesus first speaks about our giving to others. When we measure out grain to another person, we must "press it down" and "shake it together" in order that a full measure is given. And then, Jesus said, go the extra mile by letting it run over the top of the container. If one does this in his business dealings with others, then others will do the same in return. However, if one tries to cheat a person on the amount of grain that is given for a specified price, then others will cheat you.

Christians must take the initiative to do that which is right and fair to others. Jesus said that they must initiate the lavish giving. They must do so in a manner that will be reflected in how people will return the gift. If this is done, then others will treat the Christian with respect. This is giving according to the golden rule; it is giving according to how one would like to

receive. One should give as he would like others to give to him.

B. Grace-driven giving:

Jesus was once in Jerusalem, standing where people came to give the temple tax, which was required of everyone. *“Now He looked up and saw the rich men putting their gifts into the treasury”* (Lk 21:1). These who could afford to do so, were also contributing their tax. But there was no sacrifice in their giving.

“Then He saw also a certain poor widow putting in two small copper coins” (Lk 21:2). The poor also came to pay what they were obligated to give. We might think that the poor should be exempt from the temple tax. After all, they were poor and had little of this world’s goods. But they were not exempt. So Jesus just stood there and allowed the poor widow to take ownership of the maintenance of the temple by doing that for which everyone was responsible and no one was exempt.

Jesus spoke concerning the widow’s contribution, *“Of a truth I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all”* (Lk 21:3). It was “more than all,” because **it was all that she had**. Jesus said, *“She out of her poverty has put in all the livelihood that she had”* (Lk 21:4). Mark’s account explains more of what the poor widow did. *“... for they [the rich] all put in out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all that she had, even all her living”* (Mk 12:44). The poor widow was as the Macedonians, who would later after the

cross, and out of their deep poverty, contributed beyond what was expected of them (2 Co 8:1-4). What makes poor people do this?

Jesus just stood there as the poor widow cast in all her livelihood. He did not tell the collectors to return her contribution. He did not because she was obligated to give, even out of her poverty. When one becomes a Christian, and considers what Jesus sanctioned in reference to the contribution of the poor widow, **poverty can never be an excuse not to contribute to the financial function of the body of which one has become a member.**

One does not become a member of the body of Christ in order to be financially supplied, but to supply the needs of others (see Ep 4:16). Those who cry out poverty in an attempt to exempt themselves from that which is their duty to do, need to talk to this poor widow. We would never consider robbing God by failing to return to Him what is rightfully His. The poor widow knew that in order to take ownership of her relationship (partnership) with God, she had to sacrifice all that she had. **No one else can pay for our partnership with God and fellowship with the universal body of Christ.** If we do not give our gift for our partnership with God and the body of Christ, then we are not manifesting our thanksgiving for what He has done for us. This is why the poor Macedonian disciples begged Paul to take their contribution for the famine victims of Judea (See 2 Co 8:1-4; more later).

Christianity is about being godly. And godliness is about giving. If we are

not giving as the poor widow, then certainly we are not seeking to live godly after the God who gave His only begotten Son in order to give us something that was free, but so costly on the part of Jesus. Our sacrifice for the work of God, therefore, is our signal to God that we want to partner with Him in His universal ministry to take the message of the cross to all the world.

It is interesting that the poor widow gave all her livelihood without any knowledge of the grace of God that would later be poured out on the cross by the One who stood by her as she cast in her thanksgiving gift. If she so gave simply to assume her responsibility as a faithful Jew, then how much more should we be willing to give as faithful Christians who have a full knowledge of the cross? **Does her faithfulness in giving according to law bring judgment on our unwillingness to give in response to grace?**

As Jesus took Israel to the gift of the grace that was revealed on the cross, He not only taught on the subject of giving, but He also, through the example of poor widows, sought to reveal that which was coming. Those who could be His disciples in the future would not live under the limitations of the legal tithing of the Old Testament law. The motive for the giving of His disciples would be increased greatly because of the grace that would be revealed. They would experience in the cross of Christ something that was far beyond their imagination. God would work something wonderful through His Son that would draw out of people giving beyond their imagination. Those

who would seek to take ownership of the new covenant they have with God would no longer make their offerings according to law, but according to grace. And once one realizes his salvation by grace, there is no limit to what he will give, and thus, no limit to the joy of offering to God in response to what God has done for us through the cross. This is the secret to cheerful giving.

When we study through all the instructions in the New Testament concerning giving, the secret to understanding the Holy Spirit's instructions is discovered in the reason why the poor widow was willing to give all her livelihood in order to take ownership of God's business. The Christian does not now give according to law. He gives in order to take ownership of the new blood-bought covenant of grace that he now has with God. It is not that we are trying to buy legally into this covenant relationship with God. The opposite is the truth. Because we have come into this covenant through our obedience to the gospel, we now "*work out your own salvation with fear and trembling*" (Ph 2:12). Since we have been saved by grace (Ep 2:8), we are now God's "workmanship" (Ep 2:10). It is as someone said, "**Man**, you are now on the **ship**, so get to **work** with your contributions."

In order to take ownership of the ship we are now on (the church), as the poor widow took ownership of her covenant relationship with God through the old covenant, we must understand that we are only stewards of all that we possess. Her sacrificial giving was a manifestation of

her appreciation, not for the purpose of paying for an entry fee into the covenant, but in thanksgiving for the covenant. She gave in thanksgiving of the covenant that she and all Israel had with God. As the poor widow, the Christian manifests his appreciation through sacrifices in order to take ownership of the house of God, of which he is a part (See 1 Tm 3:15).

No matter how poor one might think he is, if he desires to be a part of Jesus' ministry, and to show thanksgiving for the

covenant of grace, he must respond to grace with a free-will offering according to how the grace was freely and lavishly poured out on him. However, **if we seek to respond to the free and indescribable grace of God through law giving, then we have not yet discovered the spirit of cheerful giving.** When preachers cry to the people to give their tithe (tenth) according to law, they are actually cheating the people of cheerful and appreciative giving according to grace.

Chapter 4

Taking Ownership Of One's Own Load

The letter to the Galatians may have been the first letter of inspiration written to the early Christians. It was written to the disciples in the region of Galatia where Paul and Barnabas went on their first mission journey (At 13,14). If the letter was written early, then we assume that the teaching of the letter was directed to new Christians. They may have been less than five years old in the faith. This fact is important because it gives us an idea of what God expects of His children even from their early years in the faith. In the letter, Paul not only addresses the threat of legal religiosity, but also exhorts the disciples concerning the responsibilities they must assume as God's children.

In the first chapters of the letter, Paul addressed the doctrinal challenges that faced these new Christians. In chapter 5 he gave a final exhortation to stand free in Christ as opposed to being brought into the bondage of legal religiosity (Gl 5:1,2).

It is in chapter 6 that the Holy Spirit, through the hand of Paul, reveals some very practical responsibilities of our function as members of the universal body of Christ. In 6:4 he admonished that each disciple must take ownership of his or her own work by not claiming ownership of the work of others. The disciples should not behave as some in Corinth who took glory in the work of others (See 2 Co 10:13,16). On the contrary, "... *each one will bear his own load*" (6:5). Paul laid the foundation for what was coming. When it comes to taking ownership, "each one" must assume the responsibility of being a disciple. Every disciple must take ownership of that which one should assume as a productive member of the organic body of Christ. Christians cannot pass off on others their responsibilities. If one would be a Christian, and thus a disciple of Jesus, then he cannot assume that someone else will bear his load.

Christians seek to give physical things freely as they were freely supplied with spiritual things (See 2 Co 8:14). A disciple of Jesus simply cannot ask someone else to bear the load that God expects him to bear.

In the context of Galatians 6, Paul led his readers to the responsibility of verse 6. *“Let him who is taught the word **share** in all good things with the one who teaches.”*

The word “share” is from the Greek word *koinonia*. The meaning is “joint partnership.” We hear of many unfortunate definitions throughout the world of the word “partnership.” To many, partnership means, “Give me the money and we will do the work of spending it.” This is one’s “cuffed-hand” culture speaking. But this is certainly not what Paul was saying in the context of Galatians 6:6. The ownership that is expressed in 6:5 must be continued into verse 6. **“Each one”** must join in partnership to support the teacher. **The student must take ownership of his teaching by supporting his teacher.** Whether his teaching comes through the person of the teacher, or through the book a teacher might write, the student has the responsibility of personally paying the teacher or buying the teacher’s book. Disciples who do neither are simply walking contrary to the instructions of the Holy Spirit in Galatians 6. They walk as dysfunctional members of the body, and thus in violation of fellowshiping those who are teachers of the word. One cannot expect to grow spiritually in study of the word of God if he seeks to acquire his knowledge of the

word without taking ownership of his source of teaching.

In the use of the word *koinonia* in 6:6, money is involved. Obligation and responsibility are incurred. Each student has the responsibility to pay the teacher. The student cannot sluff off on another his or her responsibility to pay his or her Bible teacher. Any disciple, therefore, who does not pay his teacher is behaving in a manner that is contrary to Paul’s instructions in Galatians 6:6. He is trying to come to his teacher empty handed. He sins while trying to grow spiritually by being taught the word of God without paying the teacher. It is a spiritual contradiction. And thus, we now understand why those of some societies who have freely received too many contributions find it difficult to grow to the spiritual levels of true discipleship in stewardship. **The culture of their outstretched hand always hinders them from taking ownership of their responsibilities to be Christians who give.**

Any student who would walk out of a Bible class, without feeling his responsibility to make sure that the teacher was supported for his labors in teaching, has certainly left the class to walk disorderly. Anyone who would seek a free spiritual book written by a teacher is working against the spiritual nourishment that he would receive from the book. We are dysfunctional disciples when we expect a free ride in reference to the sources of our being taught.

It would be good to offer some suggestions on this point since this fundamental teaching of the word of God leads us

into many of the texts that we will discuss later. We remember in the early 1980s when we went as evangelists to the West Indies (Caribbean). We lived on the island of Antigua. In the first few months of going from shack to shack in teaching, we were pleasantly surprised by the giving of the people. These were truly “Third World” (developing world) residents. According to Western standards they were very poor, living in shacks across the island and eating from their own gardens. But in every house we entered and taught the word of God, after the class the people of the house, the students, would collect up some fruit in the house to give to us, for they had no money. We graciously accepted their “pay” for the class, and went on our way thinking, “These folks got the point. Someone in the past taught them well.” There were no cuffed-handed people on the entire island.

Their history had taught them a great

lesson about ownership. In the early 1950s, the general population, which was held in economic bondage by the land owners, went on strike. In doing so, the people had to struggle for themselves to survive. During those years of trying to feed their families, the people ate anything to stay alive. In all their struggles to survive, they learned a great lesson of life. They learned to take ownership of their own lives and their own destiny. And when some foreign teachers later came by, they would not take something (teaching) for nothing. The West Indies people could teach the post-colonial, post foreign-aid cultures a few things about financially taking ownership of oneself by paying their teachers. People look at the West Indian culture with respect because of who they are. But people will always look down on a cuffed-hand culture. The word “partnership” has a difficult time being understood correctly in such cultures.

Chapter 5

The Joy Of Financial Functionality

Most all of the members of the early body of Christ functioned organically from the time when they were still dripping wet from the waters of baptism. Even on the birthday of the ekklesia (church), “*all who believed were together and had all things in common*” (At 2:44). The members of the body were not only connected to the Lord in a covenant relationship through obedience to the gospel, they were also connected to one another in service to the physical needs that prevailed

at the time, especially to the support of those who went forth to preach the gospel they had obeyed.

The beginning of the ekklesia in Acts 2 sets the model for everyone who would later obey the gospel. As a result, the organic function of the early obedient went forth out of Jerusalem to all the world, even to us today. Growth of the church happened because others followed the example of those first disciples. Growth happened in Antioch (At 13:1-3). Growth

happened in Ephesus (At 19:8-10). It happened in Thessalonica (1 Th 1:6-10). And it happened in Philippi (Ph 4:15,16). It was simply understood that when one freely received the gospel, **he was to make sure that it was freely preached somewhere else.** One of the greatest examples of this was the sacrificial giving of a few Christians in the city of Philippi.

A few years after their conversion, Paul wrote to the Philippians, *“Now you Philippians know also that in the beginning of the gospel when I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me concerning giving and receiving but you only”* (Ph 4:15). The Philippians’ partnership with Paul in preaching the gospel to other places through him began when they were new Christians. In fact, they were only a “few days” old as Christians when they began their support of the evangelists who went on to Thessalonica, for Paul, Silas and Timothy stayed only a few days in Philippi (See At 16:12). These were not “taker Christians,” *“for even in Thessalonica,”* Paul wrote, *“you sent once and again for my needs”* (Ph 4:16). When Paul went on from Thessalonica in Macedonia, the Philippians, who were in Macedonia, even continued their financial partnership with him in preaching the gospel in Achaia. He later wrote to shame the Corinthians, *“And when I was present with you and in need, I was not a burden to anyone, for what I lacked the brethren who came from Macedonia supplied”* (2 Co 11:9).

The fascinating function of the Phil-

ippians, as well as the Thessalonians, who both resided in the province of Macedonia, **is that they contributed to reach out with the gospel to other areas from the very beginning of their walk in Christ.**

As the Philippians, the Thessalonians went to work, both locally and regionally, by sending support to Paul while he was in Achaia (More later). But what is strikingly awesome about the behavior of the Philippians was that from their very beginning as new Christians, they *“sent once and again”* unto Paul’s needs while he was in Thessalonica, and then in Achaia. We wonder why they did this? Was it something that Paul taught them? Or, was Paul one who preached for money? From what Paul did in both Thessalonica and Achaia, the answer to these questions was that he worked with his own hands in order not to beg off the brethren (See 2 Co 11:9; 2 Th 3:8). Both the Philippians and Thessalonians witnessed his sacrificial behavior, and thus, they were moved to help support him in order that the gospel go beyond the borders of their province.

Now as we study through these examples of supporting evangelists, we must not forget one very important point. **The evangelists were going forth.** They were not “stay-at-home” preachers who misappropriated the work of an evangelist. They were on the move preaching to the lost in other areas, not preaching to the saved at home. This does not mean that the local brethren should not support their teachers. This is not the discussion of this chapter. The point here is that

those who obey the gospel must make sure that the gospel is preached to the lost in every nation of the world.

So the next question would be, Was what the Philippians believed and accepted inherent in the gospel that Paul preached? This would be our conclusion. God is a giver. He gave His only begotten Son (Jn 3:16). Therefore, anyone who would truly accept the message of God's love, seeks how he or she can get this message of love out to others. **Godly people want to give as God gave good news to them** (1 Jn 4:19). This is the beauty of the gospel. When one obeys this message of love, he must give, even when one is in poverty circumstances as the Philippians. Listen to the Holy Spirit's testimony of the disciples in Macedonia where Philippi was located:

Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God that has been given to the churches of Macedonia, that in a great trial of affliction, the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty, abounded in the riches of their liberality. For I testify that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability they gave of their own accord, begging us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints" (2 Co 8:1-4).

The only begging that should ever come from a disciple of Christ is his begging that someone take his contribution. Why have we reversed this to an outstretched hand that is always looking for a gift? If one becomes a dis-

ciple of Jesus, then his begging from others must stop. If it does not, then the person **never** really believed the message of the free gift of grace that moves believers to be givers. Godly people do not beg for themselves. They only beg that the needy receive their contributions of love. Now we can understand why Paul wrote that the Thessalonians must withdraw their fellowship from any person who would seek to beg off the church. He wrote to the disciples who had some beggars among them, "*Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw yourselves from every brother who walks disorderly and not after the tradition that he received from us*" (2 Th 3:6).

Paul did not behave disorderly among the Thessalonians (2 Th 3:7). He, Timothy and Silas **did not** eat "*any man's bread without paying for it*" (2 Th 3:8). Their "orderly walk" and example was that they "*worked with labor and hardship night and day so that we might not be a burden to any of you*" (2 Th 3:8). So if there are any among the brethren who are "*not willing to work neither let him eat [beg]*" (2 Th 3:10). Christians are not beggars off one another. They are partners together in Christ. If there are beggars among us, then Paul states that these beggars are walking disorderly. And because they are walking disorderly, two things must happen: First they must not be allowed to continue to beg off those who work, and second, if they persist in their begging, then they must be disfellowshipped from the family

of God. The church is not a fellowship of beggars, neither is it a welfare society for those who can work when there is work to be done, but will not work.

Christians who beg off other Christians are walking disorderly in reference to their function as members of the organic body of Christ. If one would be a member of the same church to which the Thessalonians were added, then he cannot be a beggar off his fellow brothers in Christ. If they continue such begging behavior, then they cannot be in fellowship with the organically functioning body of Christ.

The Philippians, as well as the Thessalonians, saw a different culture in the message of Jesus, and thus, they established a culture of giving. They could not compare themselves with other disciples in their region, for there were no other disciples in their region to which they could look for an example. The only example they had was reflected in the behavior of the sacrificial living of Paul, Timothy, Luke and Silas, which example was an emulation of the sacrificial behavior of Christ. *“Let this mind be in you that was also in Christ, who being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God. **But He made Himself of no reputation ...**”* (See Ph 2:5-8). As an example to the Thessalonians and Philippians, Paul, Timothy, Luke and Silas worked with their own hands (2 Th 3:9). So Paul could write to the financially dysfunctional Corinthians, *“**Be imitators of me even as I also am of Christ**”* (1 Co 11:1). The Philippians and Thessalonians had imitated the behavior of Paul. Now

it was time for the Corinthians to enjoy the sacrificial life of Paul by doing the same.

In the area of physical things, one does not come to Christ to see what he can get. If one does, he will not experience the pure joy of being a godly giver for Jesus. Simon came to Christ to see what he could get, but when Peter said he could not buy it for himself, he became bitter. (Read carefully At 8:18-23, specifically verse 23. Simon became bitter because he could not make a profit out of laying hands on people to receive the Holy Spirit.)

The Philippians saw what they could give, not what they could get. As a result, their standard of living came down because of their giving out of their deep poverty. And they did this with *“**the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty**”* (2 Co 8:2). We once said, “Give until it hurts!” We were wrong. The truth is that we must experience the abundance of the joy of Jesus until we give. There should never be any “hurting” in giving. It should simply be as natural for the Christian as eating to preserve our natural body. This is why the Philippians could joyfully give out of their deep poverty. Therefore, the conclusion from our study of the example of the Philippians is that one does not really understand the message of the gospel of joy unless he comes away from the waters of baptism looking for something on which he can pour out his joy. Doing such is inherent in the message of the “good news” (gospel) that we have obeyed. Giving, therefore, should be an occasion of just pure joy, not “hurting.”

Chapter 6

Taking Ownership Of The Gospel

Speaking of taking ownership, consider some of the leading (rich) sisters of Thessalonica. We remember standing in a prayer circle with a group of men. All of us were praying. When it came time for one brother to pray, he prayed, “God, forgive us men of arguing over who is in control. Thank you for our women, for all they say is, ‘What’s next.’”

Sometimes we need to follow the example of the women. Lydia was in Philippi (At 16:11-15) and there were leading women in Thessalonica (At 17:4). Both the church in Philippi and Thessalonica were financially functional when it came to supporting evangelism. We wonder if the Christian sisters in both areas did not have some influence over what the disciples as a whole should be doing?

A. Ability to do and send:

When Paul, Timothy and Silas went to Thessalonica for the first time, they went straight to the religious center in town, which was the synagogue of the Jews (At 17:1). What was unique about this synagogue was that there were a great number of Gentile converts (proselytes) who met in the synagogue. From these “*a great multitude of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women*” were obedient to the gospel (At 17:4). We would assume that these “leading women” were possibly quite wealthy. At

least for some reason, many years later Demas was possibly attracted to their wealth when Paul wrote of him while he himself was in a Roman prison, “... *for Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world, and has departed to Thessalonica ...*” (2 Tm 4:10).

If the leading women in Acts 17 were indeed wealthy women, then they did not give themselves into poverty. By the time 2 Thessalonians was written, the Holy Spirit had to write a letter through Paul that these women not be begged into poverty by some among the Thessalonian disciples who had quit their work. 2 Thessalonians was written less than a year after these leading (wealthy) women became disciples. Then also consider the fact that when Paul wrote of the behavior of Demas, we might assume that the leading women were still wealthy at the time Demas forsook Paul and went to Thessalonica. 2 Timothy 4:10, where Paul spoke of Demas’ behavior, was written several years after the conversion of the leading women in Thessalonica in Acts 17. **The point is that the New Testament teaches nowhere that the wealthy should contribute themselves into poverty.** Doing such is simply not good stewardship on the part of the wealthy. Neither is it beneficial for the evangelism of the church. Paul wrote the “disfellowship” context of 2 Thessalonians 3 to protect the wealthy. Those

who are gifted in making money are encouraged to give, but they are not encouraged to give themselves into poverty. We have always asked churches that are in developing world environments if a wealthy person could be a part of their fellowship. If the wealthy could not be a part of a fellowship of disciples, then the disciples have a problem, not the wealthy who are giving. If the local disciples beg the wealthy members into poverty, then from where will the funds come to preach the gospel to the world? The poor must acknowledge the fact that there are some in the body who are gifted with the ability to make money. We must not envy this gift, but give glory to God. This is a grace by which some can truly praise God. *“But as you abound in everything, in faith and utterance and knowledge and in all diligence, and in your love for us, see that you abound in this grace also”* (2 Co 8:7). This is the grace of giving. And we encourage one another to abound in the grace of giving.

B. Desire to be a doer and sender:

Now consider the Thessalonians. Since the majority of those who were converted in Thessalonica were Gentiles, and very devout, we would assume that their desire would be to preach the gospel to the Gentiles. The result of what the Thessalonians did in the months that followed their conversion is a testimony to their devout convictions, as well as their desire to take ownership of the mission of the body of Christ. As the Philippians, they were financially functional as active

parts of the one body.

After Paul left Thessalonica, he traveled on to Achaia. What is interesting to note is what he found in the region of Achaia when he arrived. It was about six months after he had left Thessalonica that he wrote back to the new converts the following testimony of the fact that the Thessalonian Christians had taken ownership of the gospel they had obeyed:

And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction with joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you were examples to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has spread abroad, so that we do not need to speak anything. For they themselves report about us, what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God...” (1 Th 1:6-9).

Notice carefully the Holy Spirit’s witness to the evangelistic function of the Thessalonian disciples. They became **imitators** of the evangelistic zeal of Paul, Timothy and Silas who came to them working with their own hands to support themselves, while also receiving once and again from the functioning disciples in Philippi (Ph 4:16). The example of the Philippians even influenced the Thessalonians. In fact, when contributions came from the Philippians, the Thessalonians may have felt somewhat embarrassed. If they were to take ownership of the

preaching of the gospel in their own region, then they had to financially come to the party. And such they did in an overwhelming manner.

As the Philippians, the Thessalonian disciples became “*examples to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia*” (1 Th 1:7). It was a phenomenal contagion of evangelistic enthusiasm. Philippi inspired Thessalonica and Thessalonica inspired the whole provinces of Macedonia and Achaia. The enthusiasm for evangelism spread like holy wild fire from one obedient heart to another.

C. The result of doers and senders:

The testimony of the Thessalonians’ zeal was in the fact that “*the word of the Lord has sounded forth from*” them (1 Th 1:8). Such is the identity of a functioning organic body. The Philippians sounded forth the word from Philippi by sending support once and again to the evangelists Paul, Timothy and Silas in Thessalonica. The Thessalonian disciples sounded forth the word in Achaia, specifically Corinth. But the Corinthians? They were financially and evangelistically dysfunctional. They became a dead-end in the function of the body to sound forth the word of the Lord. And now we know why most of the Holy Spirit’s teaching concerning the support of evangelists is found in the letters of 1 & 2 Corinthians. As members of the universal body, they were dysfunctional in supporting evangelism.

“*We do not need to speak anything*” (1 Th 1:8). This is the testimony of a functional body of disciples. This is

the Spirit’s testimony of the organic body at work, both in the local area where body members reside, as well as in areas beyond where they live. When local Christians take ownership of the gospel where they live, there need be no more evangelists coming by to do the job of preaching the gospel. If an evangelist cannot make this statement to those where he has preached, it is possible that he planted the wrong seed, or he failed in his work to disciple those he first taught. He may have failed Jesus when Jesus instructed, “... *teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you*” (Mt 28:20). Or he may have failed the Spirit when the Spirit said through Paul, “*And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, the same commit to faithful men who will be able to teach others also*” (2 Tm 2:2).

However, the problem is usually with the soil in which the evangelist plants the seed of the word of God. Remember the dysfunction of the Corinthians on this matter? Paul chastised the Corinthians. It was the Corinthian soil, not the Seed, that was the problem.

For no other foundation can man lay than what is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one’s work will be manifested, for the day will declare it because it will be revealed by fire. And the fire will test each man’s work to determine what quality it is. If anyone’s work endures that he has built, he will receive a reward. If anyone’s work is burned, he

will suffer loss. But he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire (1 Co 3:11-15).

Paul's efforts with the "Corinthian soil" was about to be burned if they did not repent of their immature ways. If they did not turn from their dysfunctional ways, he would suffer loss because he was their father in the faith (1 Co 4:15). But he would carry on and receive his reward for his labors as an evangelist. The Corinthians, if they did not repent, would become smouldering ashes.

The Corinthian situation was certainly a different story from the Thessalonians and Philippians, as well as those in Antioch, Ephesus and Jerusalem.

When Paul wrote the 1 Thessalonian letter, he stated, "***They themselves report about us***" (1 Th 1:9). Who is the "they"? It was not the Christians in Achaia. There were no Christians there when Paul arrived. By the time Paul reached Achaia, word-of-mouth, the

"bush telegraph," had already communicated the phenomenal conversion and dedication of the Thessalonians. The whole region was talking about the conversion of the Gentiles and leading women in Thessalonica. The point is that we should ask ourselves the question, "Was our conversion so radical that the whole province is talking about it"? Admittedly, the Thessalonians had the fire and conviction of new converts. We must not let that fire of conviction be extinguished from our lives. The only way to keep it burning in our hearts is to continually be in the presence of the newly converted. But if we stop preaching the gospel to the lost in our local areas, we will have no newly converted in our presence to keep our fire going. When we stop preaching and converting the lost, we have set a course for our fire to be extinguished. Is this what Jesus meant when He spoke to the church in Ephesus many years after they were new converts, a time when they had lost their first love (Rv 2:4).

Chapter 7

Have We No Rights?

When we think of the Corinthian disciples we think about dysfunctional disciples. In our study of the problems that prevailed among the Corinthians, we must understand that the letters of both 1 & 2 Corinthians were written to all the disciples in all of Achaia (See 1 Co 16:15; 2 Co 1:1; 9:2; 11:10). However, it seems that there were some power struggles among the disciples, specifically in the city

of Corinth. These struggles led to the same dysfunction that was happening among those to whom John wrote in 3 John. The problem among the disciples to whom John wrote was about Diotrephes who loved to be first, and thus in his narcissistic behavior, he disrupted the evangelists who came through the area, for he refused to receive and support the evangelistic function of the body

of Christ (See 3 Jn, more later).

In Corinth the problem was a group of puffed up leaders masquerading themselves as children of light (2 Co 11:12-15). In their arrogant attitudes, they challenged the authority of the inspired instructions of Paul. They refused to take note that what Paul wrote was the commandment of the Lord (1 Co 14:37). They were seeking to dismiss the influence of Paul by challenging the authority of his inspired words (See 1 Co 2:6-16). All this disruption led to a financial dysfunction of the church of God in Corinth. And because of this financial dysfunction of the Corinthian disciples, we have the letters of 1 & 2 Corinthians that reveal a great detail of information concerning the financial function that should be characteristic of the body of Christ, especially in the area of supporting evangelists.

A. The right to eat.

In the context of correcting the Corinthians' dysfunction concerning the support of evangelists in 1 Corinthians 9:3-14, Paul began by asking if he had a right to eat and drink. He presents his argument in this context on behalf of the support of those who go forth in travels to preach the gospel. It is an argument that is based on John's deductive conclusions of 3 John 7 that we should financially support those who are going about preaching the gospel to unbelievers.

John's deductive argument is that the evangelists went forth to preach the name of Jesus. But in their preaching, they did not take up contributions from the unbe-

lievers to whom they preached. Since they had a right to eat and drink, then the believers, not unbelievers, should support them because it is the work of the church to preach the gospel. Paul argues that this is particularly true if he and Barnabas were married and their wives traveled with them as the other apostles. He wrote, "*Do we not have the right to take along a believing wife, even as the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas?*" (1 Co 9:5).

Paul and Barnabas worked with their own hands in order to support themselves. Paul supported himself while in Corinth, though the believers from Macedonia also sent support to him (2 Co 11:7-9). However, he had a right to be supported by the Corinthian disciples while he labored for a year and a half in the city (See At 18:11). But the Corinthians did not support him, even when he was in need. It appears that in his need, they did not so much as offer to help him. Such was a manifestation of their spiritual immaturity, and their financial dysfunction as members of the universal body of Christ.

B. Laborers are worthy.

Paul then asked the Corinthians if it were not right for a soldier, farmer and shepherd to receive pay for their labors. "*Who as a soldier serves at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of the fruit? Or who feeds a flock and does not drink of the milk of the flock?*" (1 Co 9:7). Who would serve to protect the people if he were not

paid? Who would farm if he were not allowed to eat of his own produce? And who would be a shepherd if he could not drink of the milk? These are logical questions that Paul asked the Corinthians, for he knew that they knew the answer.

Paul was speaking from the point of view of spiritual dignity. Unbelievers would reason that support is rightfully given to soldiers, farmers and shepherds. But in their behavior toward him, the Corinthians were not doing that which the unbelievers would naturally do for the laborer who was worthy of his wages. In giving these principles of payment, Paul wanted to remind the Corinthians that these same principles were based on what God commanded in the Old Testament. *“For it is written in the law of Moses, ‘You will not muzzle the ox while he is threshing’”* (1 Co 9:9; see Dt 25:4). It seems that the Corinthians considered the rights of an ox to be fed more important than feeding the preacher. If God is concerned for oxen, at least those who claim to be His people should be concerned for His evangelists.

C. Partake of one’s hope.

Paul reminded the Corinthians that Deuteronomy 25:4 was also written for our sakes. *“Or does He say this altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, not doubt, this is written so that he who plows should plow in hope, and that he who threshes in hope, should be partaker of his hope”* (1 Co 9:10).

The evangelist lives in hope of partaking of the fruits of his labors. He does

not take contributions from the unbelievers. Therefore, the church must support him. This is especially true if the evangelist is functioning locally as a teacher. In 1 Corinthians 9:10 Paul teaches that the teacher of the body must expect to be paid by the body. And thus, disciples who do not pay their teachers are as dysfunctional in the area of finances as the Corinthians.

Paul rebuked the stingy Corinthians. *“If we sowed to you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we reap your material things?”* (1 Co 9:11). No disciple has a right to plead poverty when he or she has been taught spiritual things by a teacher. If one has no money, but a garden of fruit, then the material fruit must be paid to the one who teaches spiritual things. The widow who gave her last two coins knew this principle. Any group of disciples who do not do likewise are sinning against the mandate of God that he *“who is taught the word share [support] in all good things with the one who teaches”* (1 Co 9:6). This is what is right and according to the word of God. So we ask the question again: When was the last time you paid your Bible teacher?

We must not be too harsh on the Corinthians. After all, they were at least financially supporting those who were working against Paul (1 Co 9:12). Paul’s point in 1 Corinthians 9:12 is that if they supported the arrogant and puffed up teachers among them who spoke against him, then he had more right to their support because he fathered them in Christ (1 Co 4:15).

While in Corinth Paul did not use his right to be supported because he did not

want to be accused of preaching for money (1 Co 9:12). But he reminded the Corinthians of the right of the priest under the Old Testament law to be supported by the people. The people offered the sacrifices, but the sacrifices were shared with the priests (1 Co 9:13). This was the law even before the Old Testament was written. For example, Abraham paid a tenth (tithe) to the priest Melchizedek (Hb 7:1,2). Such was Abraham's duty. And in case the Corinthians, or anyone else throughout history did not get the point, Paul wrote, "*Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel*" (1 Co 9:14). For the disciple who seeks to follow Jesus, this is all that is needed to be said. If one does not support the one who is preaching the gospel, then he is disobedient to the commandment of the Lord. He sins against God. We must be as clear as Paul on this point. If one would be a faithful and functioning member of the church, it is his or her responsibility to make sure that both evangelists who go about preaching the gospel are paid, and those teachers who labor locally are also paid.

Since Paul's mandate of 1 Corinthians 9:14 is very direct, we must understand the context of the statement. Preaching is the work of proclaiming the

good news (the gospel) to **unbelievers**, not believers. In fact, when the word "preach" is used in the New Testament, reference is to the gospel being proclaimed to unbelievers. Christians **preach** to unbelievers, but they **teach** among themselves to believers. Now consider what John said in 3 John 7, that the evangelists did not take up a collection from unbelievers when they went forth to preach the gospel. John's argument was that the believers must therefore provide the evangelists with the right to eat and drink while they preach to unbelievers. Therefore, Paul's argument in 1 Corinthians 9:14 is that it is the mandate of the believers to support the evangelists who go forth to preach to the unbelievers. The context of Paul's 1 Corinthians 9:14 statement is that the Corinthians should have been doing what the Philippians and Thesalonians did when he came to Corinth. The Corinthians should have given Paul the right to live from his preaching the gospel when he left Corinth to preach to unbelievers in other areas. 1 Corinthians 9:14, therefore, is a mandate to support the preachers who are going forth to preach to unbelievers. This is not the passage to use when discussing support of local teachers who are teaching believers. That passage is Galatians 6:6.

Chapter 8

Individual Commitment To Financial Fellowship

We must give credit to the brethren in Achaia for being zealous to make prom-

ises to support the famine victims of Judea. At least, by the time Paul came to

the end of the 1 Corinthian letter, the Corinthians had been rebuked enough for them to take action for the poor saints of Judea. When Paul wrote 1 Corinthians 16:1-4, he stated that before he came, they must take up a contribution, for when he was there he did not want any contributions taken. They must take action, therefore, to make sure that the contribution for the famine victims for Judea be gathered before he arrived.

There was also a practical reason why Paul wanted the contribution taken before his arrival. The contribution was committed by all the saints in all the province of Achaia, the disciples in Corinth being one area of the house meetings throughout the province. Therefore, since the disciples in all Achaia promised to make a contribution, it had to be gathered from all the disciples of all the province. This would take some time, time which Paul evidently did not want to waste on this particular visit to Achaia, for He was on his way to Jerusalem.

A. Special needs:

Paul stated, *“Now concerning the collection for the saints ...”* (1 Co 16:1). We must keep the “poor saints of Judea” in mind as we survey through the instructions that Paul gives to conclude his exhortation to the Achaia disciples in the 1 Corinthian letter. Because this contribution was for a particular situation, then we would conclude that this was a special contribution for a special purpose. In fact, it seems that all the contributions we read about in the New Testament were contri-

butions for specific needs. Whether the need was for an evangelist that came short in his self-support, or for Christians who ran out of money when they visited Jerusalem for the Passover/Pentecost feast, the contributions were made to meet special needs. Such is the case with the contribution about which Paul speaks in the context of 1 Corinthians 16:1-4.

B. The Sunday collection:

“On the first day of the week ...” was a statement of practicality, not a command to establish a time for all contributions. In order to make a common collection, the obvious time to do this was when there was a common time of meeting of those who would contribute. And since the disciples met in their homes on Sunday, then this would be the obvious time for a collection to be made. The practical reasons are obvious. This was a common time of meeting. It was a time when there would be witnesses concerning what was contributed. It would be a time when each member could be known for taking ownership of his or her responsibility to give to the poor saints of Judea. No one was to be exempt from the contribution. Everyone was obligated to help the suffering saints in Judea.

We could not make the first day of the week a legal time for all contributions of the disciples to be made. Such would not be logical or practical. We must keep in mind that this was an occasional need when a contribution was made. Paul’s instructions were made in the historical

context of a special need. And because he instructed a time when the contribution was to be made, **then we must assume that the Corinthians were not regularly having a contribution on the first day of the week before he wrote the instructions.** They had not though He had ministered among them for over a year and a half (At 18:11,18).

Paul's statements must be understood in the context of the special need, the famine in Judea. The first day of the week was certainly a practical time to have a special contribution, but we would not conclude that Paul was mandating a legal time when all contributions are to be made. If a need arose in the life of a Christian in reference to the need of someone on Monday, could the Christian say to the one in need that he must wait until Sunday in order to receive a contribution for his need? If a widow needed the rent paid on Tuesday, does this mean that she could receive funds for her house rent only on Sunday? If an orphan needed to be fed on Saturday night, would the orphan have to wait until Sunday? We must keep in mind that most of the world does not have church bank accounts in which to accumulate funds, and then serve needs throughout the week out of these funds. Most of the world Christians must go to their gardens and get some food to give immediately to immediate needs. Sometimes a little common sense will dispel a lot of nonsense in legalistic theology, and thus, give us a better understanding of the Scriptures.

C. Individual responsibility:

Paul continued, "... *let each one of you ...*" (1 Co 16:2). A stingy and unloving Christian cannot hide among the faithful contributors. "Each one" means that **every individual must assume his or her responsibility to join in the financial fellowship of the functioning organic body.** If one would not contribute something to the special fund, then that person has excluded himself from the fellowship of the body. Making the contribution is the signal that the universal organic body is functioning. And if one does not get in on the functioning body, then he is a vestigial organ that is worthless in the function of the organic body. "Each one" means **everyone.**

1. Every disciple in all Achaia must contribute. We must not forget that the letters of 1 & 2 Corinthians were written to the same people. The letter of 1 Corinthians was directed to the "church of God" at Corinth (1 Co 1:2). However, when we read 2 Corinthians, others are also included. Corinth was a city, but Achaia was the province. So 2 Corinthians begins with the statement, "... *to the church of God that is at Corinth, with all the saints who are in all Achaia*" (2 Co 1:1; 9:2; 11:10). Interesting! So when Paul speaks of "each one," he means all the Christians in all the province of Achaia. **Paul was not speaking to a single assembly of Christians who met at the same place at the same time on Sunday morning.** His instructions of 1 Corinthians 16:1-4 must be understood in the context that there were Christians meeting in homes throughout the province

of Achaia. These were the Christians who had promised to make a contribution for the famine victims (See 2 Co 9:2). It was not just those in Corinth, but individual disciples who were meeting at different places and different times throughout the province of Achaia.

2. “Each one” means equality.

When Paul discussed the contribution in 2 Corinthians 8, he made a statement that each individual was not to be burdened while others hid from their responsibilities of giving to the need. *“For I do not mean that others be relieved and you burdened; but by an equality ...”* (2 Co 8:13,14). Equality means everyone. If someone tries to skip out of the contribution, then he has burdened someone else. Every disciple must take ownership of his or her responsibility to give. No one person is to be left out, and no one person can hide out. The Philippians understood this point very well, for they begged Paul to take their contribution in order that they work in fellowship with the universal body of Christ (2 Co 8:4). We would conclude, therefore, that if any disciple did not give something to special needs, then that disciple is not fellowshiping the universal body of Christ.

D. Bountiful giving:

Paul instructed that each member of the body in Achaia give *“as he may prosper”* (1 Co 16:2). This statement certainly informs us that there is a difference between the tithing system of ten percent under the Old Testament law and what the Christian is to give. Those preachers

who beat the sheep for ten percent have certainly violated the principle of Paul’s statement in 1 Corinthians 16:2. They overlook the word “may” by enforcing ten percent. However, in this statement, the Holy Spirit put no percentage on what a Christian must give. And considering the circumstances and purpose for this very contribution, there could be no percentage mandated. **Christians do not give according to percentages, but according to principles.** The contribution was for famine victims in Judea. These famine victims could certainly not give ten percent. They prospered nothing in famine, and thus, they had to be Christians to whom Christians were obligated to give. And because they did not prosper, the contribution was being made by those in other regions of the world where parts of the organic body had supplies. Ephesians 4:16 is about the principle that the whole body functions to take care of the whole body.

... from whom [Christ] the whole [universal] body being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies [throughout the world], according to the effective working of each part, causes growth of the body to the edifying of itself in love.

“As he may prosper” regulates the amount one gives. The more one receives, the more one gives. If one does not increase his giving with the increase of his income, then he would not be contributing liberally. Our challenge is to understand how much one should give in order to be considered a liberal giver. In

the statement, “*as he may prosper,*” there is no percentage indicated. We certainly cannot use Old Testament laws on tithing in order to determine what percentage must be given in order to be considered a liberal giver under the New Testament covenant.

In 2 Corinthians 9:6 Paul made the statement, “*He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly. And he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.*” This statement does not help much in determining how much one should give in order to feel that he is a liberal giver. It does, however, infer willingness to sow much in order to increase one’s harvest. The metaphor certainly encourages one to sow as much seed as possible in order to have a great harvest. But how much seed one must sow is not specified. All that we can conclude from Paul’s metaphor is that one should sow as much as possible. If he expects a great harvest, then he must guarantee such by sowing much.

“*As one may prosper*” and “*sows bountifully*” lead us to Paul’s statement, “*Let each one give according as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver*” (2 Co 9:7). The cheerful giver purposes, or plans his giving. His giving is not spontaneous. As the farmer plans for a great harvest, he purposely sows a great amount of seed. As one has prospered, he plans to give more. From what Paul said in the above statement, we can determine whether we are cheerful givers. One is cheerful in his giving when he comes to the appointed

time of contribution with a plan as to how much he will give. If he has not planned, then at the appointed time to make the contribution, he grudgingly reaches in his pocket to see what is there to give. **We can identify cheerful givers, therefore, by their planning to give out of that which they have prospered.** The planning giver has sowed much in order to have the ability to give much.

In the phrase, “*God loves a cheerful giver,*” the Greek word for “cheerful” is *hilarious*. We derive the English word “hilarious” from this word. God loves a “hilarious” giver. When one gives out of hilarity, then he knows there is no grief, no duress or constraint, about his giving. He has simply learned that “*it is more blessed to give than to receive*” (At 20:35).

So what would be the basis on which one could determine how much he should give? The answer to this question should be answered upon the foundation of the following statement:

But now He [Christ] has obtained a more excellent ministry, by as much as He is also the mediator of a better covenant that was established on better promises (Hb 8:6).

Christians have a more excellent minister for their sins than the Levitical priest of the Old Testament. Christians have a better covenant with God than Israel’s covenant with God. Christians have a better promise of eternal life than the Jews of the Old Testament. Would it not be reasonable to conclude that Chris-

tians should give “better” than what was required of the Jews of the Old Testament?

Jesus continually ministers at the right hand of God on our behalf. In order for Him to have ascended on high to be our eternal mediator, He had to be given to us as God’s only incarnate and begotten Son (Jn 3:16). And to be this minister on our behalf, He made Himself poor for our benefit (2 Co 8:9). If one who supposes to be a disciple of Jesus, but is not moved to give beyond measure as the Philippians, then certainly he has not fully understood the nature of what was done for him by the Father and Son on the cross.

We have a better covenant relationship with God than the nation of Israel. The covenant that God had with Israel was with that nation alone. His covenant that He has with His people now is worldwide. It is a spiritual Israel of God whose borders are far beyond Palestine. The greatness of the covenant is that one can come into a covenant relationship with God anywhere in the world. This means that those in a covenant relationship with God in Macedonia and Achaia had a responsibility toward those who were in a covenant relationship with God in Judea. The global nature of the organic body of Christ means that each member of the body has a responsibility toward every member of the body anywhere in the world.

Israel had the promise of the coming Messiah. But Christians have the promise that because the Messiah came, they can look forward to His coming again and eternal life. With such a better prom-

ise, every disciple must determine that he will not be in eternal heaven with a feeling of guilt. That guilt will be that after a billion, trillion, mega-trillion years in eternal heaven, and if we could remember, we would be so ashamed of how little we gave in our contributions to get other people where we would be. Now we know why the Macedonians did what Paul said of them concerning their contributions. “... *that in a great trial of affliction, the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty, abounded in the riches of their liberality*” (2 Co 8:2). **We would conclude that contributions that are truly sacrificially given out of a joyful spirit, are truly honored by God.**

E. Special giving:

As previously stated, the context of 1 Corinthians 16 was a contribution for a special occasion. What Paul mentions in the context of verse 2 teaches several lessons, some of which were generated in the context of the Corinthian disciples’ problem concerning the support of teachers. Paul stated, “... *that there be no collections when I come.*” When Paul and others came to receive the famine contribution about which he spoke in this context, he certainly stayed in Corinth long past arriving on Monday and departing on Saturday of just one week. We must notice this simply because 1 Corinthians 16:2 is not a mandate for a regular contribution on every Sunday. If Paul stayed in town past just one Sunday, **then they were not to take up any contribution.** We assumed he stayed past one Sunday,

and thus, on that Sunday they did not take up any contributions.

Sunday is a convenient time to take up contributions, but doing so is not a commandment outside taking up a contribution for a special need. The one who receives his paycheck at the end of the month and gives all that he has purposed to give the first Sunday of the next month, should not feel guilty about not putting something in the collection for the rest of the Sundays of the month. The point is that there is no legal requirement for Christians to make a contribution every Sunday of the year. 1 Corinthians 16 just does not teach this.

When Paul was in Corinth through at least one Sunday on this visit, the Corinthian church did not take up any contributions. They did not on the basis of exactly what he instructed in 1 Corinthians 16:2. The reason he did not want them to take up any contributions was because he did not want to be accused of preaching for hire. His rebuke of their dysfunctional support of false teachers among them, without supporting him, would have been nullified if it were perceived that he came to receive contributions from them for his personal support. And in order to make sure that no one assumed that he was going to reach his hand in the contribution bag, he wrote, “*And when I come, whomever you may approve by letters, these will I send to carry your gift to Jerusalem*” (1 Co 16:3). Paul wanted witnesses of the fact that he did not take any money from their contributions. He would later explain in his second letter to them, “*And in all things I have kept*

myself from being [financially] burdensome to you, and so I will keep myself” (2 Co 11:9).

The Lord’s business must be supported by the Lord’s people. We assume that the Lord’s people, as faithful Israel, understood that all that they had belongs to the Lord. They therefore return to the Lord that which has been entrusted to them as good stewards. This does not mean that the unbeliever cannot contribute to the Lord’s business. Though the unbeliever may not understand the responsibility of the Lord’s people returning to God that over which they have been made stewards, they are in actuality returning to the Lord that which is His. We would certainly teach the willing unbeliever a wrong lesson if we refused his contribution. However, we cannot obligate the unbeliever in order that he assume our responsibility to support the Lord’s business. He has no obligation to do so. Christians are obligated, not unbelievers. Christians are responsible, not unbelievers.

The Christian’s life is based on the principle of Matthew 6:33. “*But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.*” It is not that the disciple of Christ considers his own needs first, and then gives to God the leftovers. If God is to be first in his life, then what one gives to God must be determined first, and then we live off the leftovers. In doing this, we honor God through our substances (Pv 3:9,10). **The liberal giver does not adjust his giving by his standard of living, but his standard of living by his**

giving. It is not his function as a part of the organic body to maintain a certain standard of living, and then give leftovers. On the contrary, he purposes what he will give, and then, he adjusts his standard of living by what is left.

Chapter 9

Financial Fellowship Of The Organic Body

In his first letter to the Achaians (1 Corinthians), Paul dealt with the dysfunction of the Achaian brethren in reference to their support of evangelists who were going forth to preach the gospel. In the second letter it seems that their dysfunction in reference to supporting these evangelists poured over into their failure to fulfill a promise to function as a part of the universal body of Christ where parts of the body were in need because of famine. They had made a promise to fellowship in the famine contribution for Judea, but they were negligent in fulfilling what they had promised. We are not told why they were negligent, only that the second letter was written in order that the contribution be made before Paul arrived in Achaia with some brethren from Macedonia.

The Achaians were financially dysfunctional in reference to the universal body's responsibility to take care of itself in physical needs throughout the world. Though Paul admonished the Achaian disciples in 1 Corinthians 9 concerning their lack of support of preachers of the gospel, in the second letter he turned to the dysfunctional attitudes of some of the Achaian members toward the famine contribution. He felt that if they had promised to financially function in fellowship

with the global body, then they needed to perform what they promised.

In the context of **2 Corinthians 8:10-15** Paul moves into the function of the universal body of Christ and the members' care for one another. The background of his statements in this chapter was a famine that affected the members of the body in Judea. When the Judean members began to suffer from a famine, the whole worldwide body went into action to manifest the global oneness and equality of the body in supplying what was needed where the body was hurting. The members of the body manifested their oneness of the body by making a special effort to send relief funds to needy parts of the body in Judea. This universal response of the body of Christ manifests that those who are truly of the body will join in with any effort where there is a disaster need of the whole body. This is the spirit of Ephesians 4:16. Those groups of disciples who cannot think outside their own assemblies or villages have cocooned themselves in their own isolation and withdrawn their fellowship from the body of Christ. They have become a functional denomination within themselves.

Paul's exhortation of the Achaian members on this matter certainly proves one very important point concerning the

organic function of the one church of Christ throughout the world. **If any individual member, or group of members of the body, wants to remain in fellowship with the one universal body, then they must financially join with the whole body as the body seeks to care for itself.** Of course this is based on the fact that individuals and churches must be knowledgeable of a disaster need. But if they have been informed, then every disciple should first think of how he or she can assist in the disaster. Whether through contributions or personal involvement, Christians must marshal to the need of helping the body where the body is hurting (See Gl 6:10).

A. Fellowshiping the one body:

When Paul wrote the 2 Corinthian letter, he was in Macedonia and on his way to Achaia, in which province was the city of Corinth. He had boasted to the Macedonian disciples that the disciples in Achaia had a year before promised that they would give relief funds to the Judean disciples (2 Co 8:10). This commitment to share in the matter of fellowshiping through giving encouraged the Macedonians to also give, **for they did not want to be left out of the fellowship of the one universal body.** So they too went into action to make a contribution, so much so, that Paul boasted of their sacrificial giving:

Moreover, brethren [in Achaia], we make known to you the grace of God that has been given to the churches of Macedonia,

that in a great trial of affliction, the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty, abounded in the riches of their liberality. For I testify that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability they gave of their own accord ...” (2 Co 8:1-3).

The Macedonian disciples not only gave, they went beyond what would be expected of them. They “**went beyond their ability.**” These were not wealthy disciples. Paul explained to the Achaian members that the Macedonians gave out of “great affliction” and “deep poverty.” Because of their deep poverty, Paul must have been very apprehensive about taking their money for the famine victims. Their willingness to give in their poverty moved them to impoverish themselves even more. And when Paul saw their destitute economic situation, he was quite hesitant to receive their gift. But he wrote of their earnest desire to remain in fellowship with the one body of Christ. Paul wrote that the Macedonian disciples kept on “**begging us with much urgency that we would receive the gift ...”** (2 Co 8:4).

The Macedonians understood the nature of the fellowship of the universal organic body of Christ. They knew that they had to partner with all disciples in this outreach to help the famine victims. They realized that in order to remain in fellowship with the one universal body, they had to partner with everyone in the matter of giving.

In their poverty, the Macedonians were not beggars to receive something for themselves, for being such would be

a disorderly walk as members of the body. **If they were beggars off the body for themselves, then they would disfellowship themselves from the fellowship of the saints** (See 2 Th 3:6). They were “beggars,” **but they were begging Paul and his company to receive their contribution**, which was their “*fellowship of the ministering to the saints*” (2 Co 8:4).

The Macedonian disciples knew that if they did not join in on this brotherhood contribution, **then they would not be in fellowship with the universal body of Christ**. The context of 2 Corinthians 8:1-4, therefore, **is the biblical definition of partnership**. Partnership in Christ means that all the members of the body of Christ must financially share in the matter of giving and receiving both spiritual and material blessings. This is a function of the body of Christ that is inherently natural for those who have obeyed the gospel of grace. Those who would seek to be a part of this body, therefore, must manifest their membership through godly giving. There is no other way for a disciple to manifest that he or she understands the nature of the grace of God that was poured out at the cross.

The sin of sectarianism (the desire to be set apart from the whole) is that individual assemblies of disciples exclude themselves from the whole. Churches sometimes become so autonomous and independent from the whole, that they have little concern for any “poor saints of Judea.” They have no desire to cooperate with the whole in order to fulfill the needs of the whole in any one part of the world. **One of the clear evidences of**

a sectarian spirit is the unwillingness of any member, or group of members, to fellowship financially with the whole. This was a problem with some of the disciples in Achaia who were manifesting their own sectarian spirit to denominate themselves from one another over personalities (See 1 Co 1:10-13).

Church leaders often sin by discouraging the church they seek to lead from financially partnering with the needs of the worldwide church. From the behavior of the Macedonian disciples that Paul explained in 2 Corinthians 8:1-4, at least one point is glaringly clear. If any group of disciples (a church) does not financially share with Christians in other areas of the world when there is a natural disaster in which parts of the body are suffering, **then they are not fellowshipping the universal body**. They have denominated themselves from the whole. They are a denomination because of their lack of concern and action to fellowship with the whole in accomplishing the function of the body of Christ. This is what the Macedonian disciples realized, **and for this reason they begged Paul to take their contribution for the poor saints of Judea**. In the disciples’ actions of contributing to the needs of the saints, therefore, they should make every effort through their contributions to manifest their solidarity with the global body. If any group of Christians do not globally function financially with the whole, then they are manifesting a sectarian spirit and a desire to function apart from the one body. In doing such, they establish themselves as a denomination.

We must keep in mind that the universal sharing of the body is only in reference to making sure that Christians be relieved during times of natural disasters where there is a physical need. The natural disaster contributions continue until the urgency of the disaster has passed. The same is true of the spiritual nourishment of baptized believers. The Macedonian disciples sent aid to make sure that the gospel was preached in Achaia. But when the Achaians obeyed the gospel, **then it was time for them to take ownership of their own spiritual nourishment by supporting their own teachers.** The Achaians made Paul a “church thief” only after they became Christians. He did not, and would not expect support from them while they were unbelievers. But when they obeyed the gospel, then they were to do as the Philippians to send once and again unto the needs of those who go forth to preach the gospel (Ph 4:16). Churches that continue to have their teachers paid by “the Macedonians” (foreigners) are making their teachers “church thieves.” They are as the Corinthians who have not taken ownership of their own spiritual edification, as Paul instructed in Galatians 6:6. Though they may not be able to pay all that is necessary for one to work in a full-time capacity, they should be paying something to their teachers. If they are not paying their teachers completely, then they cannot expect their teachers to work solely with them. Paul’s instructions establish the principle that when one is working with those who are Christians in a local area, then those local Christians must be sup-

porting their teachers. If the local members are not doing this, then they are spiritually, and thus, financially dysfunctional as members of the body of Christ.

B. Common contribution manifests common function:

Because the preceding point is so vital to the unity of the one body of Christ, Paul explained in detail in the context of 2 Corinthians 8 the nature of the fellowship (partnership) we have in Christ in reference to our contributions.

In our study through his instructions, it is imperative to note that Paul is **not** viewing the one universal body to be composed of many autonomous groups of disciples who are functioning in cooperation with one another. On the contrary, he is viewing the individual members collectively as one body. He is speaking of individuals whose desires are reflected through the “assemblies” of the individual members. Their assemblies did not denominate them from one another. It is important to notice this lest any individual member would seek to neglect his or her personal responsibility of giving by hiding in the crowd of some autonomous assembly (church). When the collection is taken, therefore, if one individual part of the body does not give, while the brother sitting beside him does give, the stingy individual cannot find partnership with the whole body through the contribution of his brother. **The contribution of the entire assembly does not negate the responsibility of each individual member to give his or her share.** Collec-

tion plate contributions are not an excuse for neglecting one's personal responsibility to give to any need.

It is imperative to understand Paul's instructions as the one universal body functioning as individual members, regardless of where they sit on Sunday, cooperate with one another to fulfill special needs. In the entire context of his discussions on this matter, he is arguing against groups of disciples declaring their autonomy from one another, and then, relieving themselves of their global responsibility to function as a part of the one body of Christ. The individual saints of Macedonia understood this, but the Achaian may have still harbored some of their sectarian behavior that Paul addressed in the 1 Corinthian letter (See 1 Co 1:12,13). **But if there is any behavior of the body of Christ that brings every member together as one in the universal body of Christ, it is when every member gives together for a common cause.** If church leaders would seek to unite those who follow, then they would do well to educate and organize common causes that everyone agrees should be supported for the preaching of the gospel to the world.

This principle of unity is so important that Christians must look for opportunities where they can manifest their solidarity by financially coming together

to support a common cause. Though a natural disaster may be an occasional opportunity to manifest our common unity and partnership in the universal body, we should seek for other opportunities to manifest our oneness in Christ. Throughout the New Testament, **this common opportunity that is ongoing is the support of evangelists as they go forth to preach the gospel.** This is where Gaius, as an individual member of the one global body, was doing well (3 Jn). When individual Christians join together to support evangelists who are moving about the world preaching the gospel, they are manifesting the fact that they are functioning members of the one universal church.

The dysfunction of many of the Achaian disciples that Paul addressed in 1 Corinthians 9 was that they were not fulfilling their promise to support the collective need of the famine victims, and in particular, the fellowship of supporting evangelists as Paul and Barnabas as they went about as evangelists preaching the gospel. Ironically, they were willing to support Paul's critics who were locally working among them (1 Co 9:12), but they were not supporting those evangelists, as Paul and Barnabas, who were moving among both believers and unbelievers in their work as evangelists.

Chapter 10

Emulating The Nature Of God

We must never forget that the nature of the church of Christ is identified by love, **and love needs no command-**

ment, for the commandment is love (Jn 13:34,35). Therefore, in order to introduce his instructions in the context of

2 Corinthians 8:10-15, Paul stated to the Achaian brethren, “*I do not speak by commandment*” in the matters concerning their completing their promise to give to the famine victims in Judea (2 Co 8:8). This principle in reference to contributions is vital in order to understand the nature of the body of Christ. Love simply needs no commandment to act. Love is the action.

God is love, and those who would be godly after His nature will be identified by their love for one another (See 1 Jn 4:7-11). God needed no commandment to initiate redemption on our behalf. In like manner, we need no commandment to act on behalf of our brothers. This is exactly what John wrote: “*By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren*” (1 Jn 3:16). John wanted this point clearly understood. So he continued, “*But whoever has this world’s goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?*” (1 Jn 3:17). This is the foundation upon which the whole universal body of Christ functions. Love makes the body organic. And this is the reason why Paul did not need “to speak by commandment” in these matters.

Giving that is forced by commandment is not giving out of love. Giving out of commandment is not joyful giving. This is the major mistake of those who seek to bring over the percentages of giving of the Old Testament law (tithing) into the loving behavior of the body of Christ. **When we start pressuring**

people to give according to a law of percentages, we have robbed them of the opportunity to give out of a heart of love. Until one learns to give out of a heart of love, he has not yet learned the joy of giving. Neither has he discovered the true nature of love of the body of our Lord Jesus. If he is still focusing on percentages, and not principles, then his giving will always be grudging giving according to some self-imposed law.

We should repeat here a note to those who still believe that giving is some type of selfish investment plan, that is, giving in order that God give us more material things. These folks seek from God a return on their investment. But godly givers do not think this way. God loved us unconditionally through His grace. In order to emulate God in our lives, we too must give unconditionally. We are not expecting a return on the investment of our love for our brother. The love that identifies the body of Christ is unconditional. It is not selfish. Jesus pointed this out when He said to His disciples,

When you prepare a dinner or a supper, do not call your friends or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return and you are repaid. But when you prepare a feast, call the poor, crippled, lame and blind. And you will be blessed because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just (Lk 14:12-14).

Disciples do not seek material repayment in this life. Their “repayment” will only be when they are raised to walk on

“streets of gold.” **Godly giving is not in hope of carnal rewards in this life.**

A. Held together by love.

“*Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God. And everyone who loves is born from God and knows God*” (1 Jn 4:7). “*Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another*” (1 Jn 4:11). By this, Jesus said, “*all men know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another*” (Jn 13:35). Therefore, in giving to the needs of other disciples who are suffering from a natural disaster, **a body of loving people have no need for a commandment to give.** Giving to others is simply the nature of a loving body. The body organically functions because it is a body of lovers.

We now understand why the Philipians gave “once and again” unto the evangelists Paul, Timothy and Silas (Ph 4:16). This is the secret as to why the Macedonians gave out of their deep poverty (2 Co 8:1-4). They simply could not help themselves. The disciples of all Macedonia were functional in their love for the whole body of Christ because this was who they were, a body of loving people. Therefore, the Achaians’ follow-through on their promise to give to the famine victims in Judea would manifest to others what Paul wrote, “... **the sincerity of your love**” (2 Co 8:8). In other words, if the Achaians did not come through on their promise to give to the famine victims, then they would manifest that they were not a part of the loving

body of Christ. It would be revealed that they could not walk their talk.

In the context of 2 Corinthians 8, Paul explained the sacrificial grace of Jesus that manifested the unconditional love of God on the cross. Jesus was rich in heaven as the creator of all things (Cl 1:16). But because He is identified as love, Jesus’ grace (gift) to man was manifested in an action of love by giving up His riches for the salvation of man (See Ph 2:5-11). God is a giver. Jesus was the unmerited gift given out of love (Jn 3:16). If we would be disciples of a loving God who gave a loving gift (Jesus), then the mind of Jesus must be our mind. “*Let this mind be in you that was also in Christ Jesus ...*” (Ph 2:5). This is true discipleship.

Jesus’ giving was an act of unconditional love for our sakes, and our giving must also be an act of unconditional love for the sake of others. He became poor for us, and thus we must become poor for others. This was the grace that the Macedonians had learned that was the sign of true discipleship. In their deep poverty, they “*abounded in the riches of their liberality ...*” (2 Co 8:2). Therefore, when one seeks to be baptized into this body of loving disciples, he must be cautioned. The standard of living of the prospective disciple will come down upon obedience to the gospel, as it did with the Macedonians.

Disciples sometimes do too much talking about doing something, but do too little about walking their talk. **Talk without performance brings our integrity into question.** This was what Paul was trying to prevent by writing these things

to the Achaian disciples who had talked a year before that they would give. But talk without contribution would bring their sincerity into question. John recognized this among some disciples. He instructed, “*Let us not love in word ... but in deed ...*” (1 Jn 3:18). One must walk his contribution talk. So in order that the Achaians not embarrass themselves by not walking their talk about giving a year before, 2 Corinthians was written. Paul wrote these words that they fulfill the promise they made (2 Co 8:10). “*But now finish doing it [the promised giving] so that as there was a readiness to desire it, so there may be also a completion out of what you have*” (2 Co 8:11).

In 2 Corinthians 8:12 Paul said that we must not promise beyond what we have. The Macedonians knew this. This explains why they went “beyond their ability” to make a contribution to the famine victims. All God expected was that they give out of their ability. But the Macedonians had discovered the joy of discipleship. “*If you know these things,*” Jesus had said to the disciples after He washed their feet, “*happy are you if you do them*” (Jn 13:17). The secret that the Macedonians had learned is that **happiness is generated out of loving sacrifice for others**. This should not be a secret among the disciples of a loving God. It is, however, a secret among those of an unloving world.

The Macedonian disciples could not help but go beyond their ability because of their love for those who were of the body of Christ. The standard of living for loving people always comes down when

they become Christians. All those things we consumed on our own lusts as unbelievers are sacrificed for others when we become believers. We can discover, therefore, the extent of our own discipleship by our performance in giving to others. It is for this reason that true discipleship is often revealed by the passing of the collection plate.

B. Held together by mutual sharing.

In the context of 2 Corinthians 8, Paul moves into explaining the universal function of the body of Christ in reference to our fellowship in giving. “*For I do not mean that others be relieved and you burdened*” (2 Co 8:13). This one statement defines the organic financial function of the universal body of Christ in reference to contributions to special needs. Every disciple throughout the world has the same responsibility in the matter of contributing to the needs of the whole body. When there is a physical dysfunction in the lives of the members in one part of the world, then those who can supply those needs must go into action. Every member who has supplies must seek out of love to supply those members who need supplies. Paul explained to the Ephesians how it works:

... from whom [Christ] the whole body being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working of each part, causes growth of the body to the edifying of itself in love (Ep 4:16).

In 2 Corinthians 8 Paul was saying

that it was now time for the Gentile Achaians to return the favor to the Jewish Christians in Judea. The Achaians now had an abundance of physical things that they could supply the Judean Jews who were suffering from famine. Now the Achaian Christians needed to remember that they were saved in a covenant relationship with God because the Judean Jewish Christians originally had an abundance of spiritual things (the gospel) that was formerly sent out and shared with the Achaians through the preaching of the gospel (See 1 Co 15:1-4). When Christians share worldwide the abundance of either their physical or spiritual things, then the body is held together by what every part supplies (See Ep 4:11-16).

There can be equality among the parts of the body only when there is fellowship in supplying both the spiritual or physical needs of the body. If a group of people determine to stand independent from the whole body by their refusal to share when parts of the body are in need, then they can only compare themselves with themselves as they work within the cocoon of their own fellowship, which thing some in Achaia were trying to do (See 2 Co 10:12). An unwillingness to fellowship in supplying the needs of the body manifests a sectarian spirit that is carried out by denominating a group of disciples from the whole body.

If Christians seek to remain in partnership with the one organic body of Christ, then they must financially partner with one another. This is the concept that moved the Macedonians to beg Paul to take their physical supply for the Judean

saints (2 Co 8:4). If we would seek to remain in this worldwide fellowship, and thus be in an equality (partnership) with all the parts of the universal body, then we must seek every opportunity to share in giving to the financial function of the body of Christ.

If we continually see ourselves in need of something, and thus expect others to give to us, **then we will never take ownership of our fellowship with the universal body of Christ.** It is for this reason that those who view themselves continually as unfortunates who should be supplied by the whole are those who can never feel that they are in partnership with the members of the one body of Christ throughout the world. If churches continually have their hands held out to others for financial help, then they cannot financially join in fellowship with the worldwide body of Christ. It is through giving to evangelists to preach the gospel to the lost, and to disaster needs of the body, that the first century church was bound and held together in the unity of the faith. Their unity was not only a matter of believing and obeying the one gospel, but also in their cooperation with one another as individuals who had been brought into a common loving fellowship in Christ.

C. **Held together through partnership.**

The partnership passage of the New Testament church is **2 Corinthians 8:13,14:**

For I do not mean that others be relieved

and you burdened; but by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may be a supply for their need, that their abundance also may be a supply for your need, that there may be equality.

No better words could have been written to explain the partnership (fellowship) that all Christians of all the world have with one another in Christ. This one passage at least teaches the following:

1. Christians cannot live estranged lives from one another.
2. Christians are their brother's keeper.
3. No Christian is to be burdened while others neglect their responsibility to fulfill the needs of others.
4. When one has a supply of that which another is in need because of a natural disaster, then there must be supplying on the part of the one who has the supplies.
5. No part of the body is to be neglected in having the opportunity to share his or her supply with those who are in need.
6. The body must heal itself through the sharing of what every member can supply during times of natural disaster.
7. The whole body must work as one body in order to supply the parts of the body that are suffering from disaster.
8. No one part of the body is to be burdened

in fulfilling a need while other parts of the body sit idle and do nothing.

9. Except for those who are suffering from a disaster, no one part of the body is exempt in the matter of supplying the needs of the suffering.

One would ask to what extent must our partnership go in sharing in times of calamity? Paul answered, "*As it is written, 'He who gathered much had nothing left over and he who gathered little had no lack'*" (2 Co 8:15). The one who has abundance from his labors gives the leftovers for those in need. And because some shared their leftovers, he who gathered little from the harvest could still feed his family from the leftovers of the one who gathered much (See Ex 16:18). What Paul is saying is that if one does have leftovers, he needs to be looking around for someone with whom he can share his abundance. He needs to seek some opportunity where he can share the abundance of his harvest. **Before we became Christians, we consumed our abundance upon our own lusts of the flesh. But when we became disciples of the sacrificial Servant of the cross, we allowed ourselves to be consumed by the needs of others.**

Chapter 11

Stopping Church Thieves

When dealing with the financial relationship of the taught with the teacher, this is often not a comfortable subject to

discuss because the taught are often so negligent in this Christian responsibility. Nevertheless, because we as disciples

seek to live after the mandates of God, we must seriously study these matters. Therefore, we must examine ourselves in order to determine if we are wayward walking in reference to our responsibilities of taking ownership of our spiritual growth.

The subject of this chapter is a continued discussion from previous studies on this matter of which Paul wrote in the 1 Corinthian letter. Paul repeated some of his principles in the second letter that were revealed a year before when he addressed what was a problem among the Achaian disciples. It is important for us, therefore, to repeat with Paul some of the important principles where the same disciples seemed to lack in reference to stewardship responsibilities. These principles are important to study simply because the duty enjoined upon disciples that is discussed by Paul in the context of the 2 Corinthian letter is often ignored by many who are, as some Achaian disciples, still spiritually immature in these matters.

A few examples might illustrate the problem that often prevails. For example, we received an email from a preacher who was complaining. He said he had been preaching for over thirty years. He had visited a Bible Resource Center in his country and spent some time with the director of the Center. Upon his departure, he asked for a free study Bible, to which the director responded, "There is nothing free. You must pay for them." The preacher went away frustrated, as we suppose the rich young ruler did when Jesus said that he should sell everything he had and come and follow Him. "*But*

he was sad at this saying and went away grieving ..." (Mk 10:22), as did the preacher. But the director of the Center was right. He would not be a "church thief" for the sake of one who should take ownership of his own spiritual responsibilities in paying for a Bible he would use in his ministry.

A Bible printing group once sent over US\$1,000 worth of books to a group of church leaders in a particular city. The books were faithfully delivered on the basis that the recipients promised to pay later. But the payment never came. The recipients thus made the senders church thieves in that they expected something free for their own use. Such cases reminded one of Psalm 37:21. "*The wicked borrows and does not repay.*"

We had a seminar where the *Teacher's Bible* was made available, but no contributions were made, either to the teachers of the seminar or the materials. One student in the seminar drove away in his US\$60,000 Hummer with a "free" *Teacher's Bible* and other materials. We were made church thieves because other poorer brethren paid for the printing of the materials for the seminar, as well as all the teachers who paid their own expenses to travel to and teach the seminar.

But then there are those beautiful stories of faithful brethren who take ownership of their spiritual growth. We labored in teaching for ten hours a day for three days in Lilongwe, Malawi. After the seminar, the delegation of over one hundred preachers who attended the seminar selected a humble fellow laborer of their group to bring, in his ragged

clothes and worn shoes, a contribution to buy petrol to get us on to the next seminar. These brethren were mature functional partners in the body of Christ. We went away without being made church thieves, but praising these brethren for their spiritual greatness in Christ. Sometimes, the most poor are the ones who are the most willing to assume their responsibility to fellowship in the ministry of the word to the world. We are reminded of the poor brethren in Macedonia who, in their deep poverty, went beyond their ability to sacrifice for others (See 2 Co 8:1-4).

We are now ready to delve into the financial dysfunction of the Achaians, specifically those in Corinth, whom Paul admonished in **2 Corinthians 11:7-10**. In this context, Paul sought nothing less than to shame the Corinthians for making him a church thief. He began his shaming of them with an embarrassing question for them to answer:

Have I committed an offense in humbling myself [by making tents] so that you might be exalted [by your opportunity to receive the gospel I preached], because I have preached to you the gospel of God without charge? (2 Co 11:7).

Paul worked with Aquila and Priscilla as tentmakers when he preached the gospel in Corinth. After many Corinthians had obeyed the gospel, he taught them for a year and a half before going on to Ephesus (See At 18:1-3,11). He humbled himself through physical work in order that the Corinthians hear and obey the gospel. And because he worked, they

could not accuse him of preaching for money. Paul was no Balaamite. However, after they obeyed the gospel, and thus were brethren in Christ, their financial relationship with him had to change, but it did not.

So as he stated in 2 Corinthians 11:7, did Paul commit an offense? If the Achaians answered the question correctly, then he did. His offense was that he did not receive wages from them after they became Christians. Within only a few days after their conversion, the Philippians were sending support once and again to Paul, Timothy and Silas when they preached in Thessalonica (Ph 4:16). After only a few weeks in the faith, the Thessalonian disciples were doing the same. But the Achaians were still not supporting Paul during the year and a half that he taught the disciples throughout Achaia. Neither did they support him when he, Aquila and Priscilla, went on to Ephesus. The Achaians made the trio church thieves by their necessity of having to receive contributions from the saints in Macedonia. In allowing this financial struggle to happen in the life of Paul, the Achaians manifested their dysfunctional behavior in reference to the support of their father in the faith.

They made Paul a church thief while he ministered to them the word of God. Paul supported himself and took wages from others in order to minister the word of God to the Corinthians without their support. ***“I robbed other churches,”*** He shamed the Corinthians, ***“taking wages from them, in order to serve you”*** (2 Co 11:8). They made Paul a church thief

by not partnering with him in his ministry of teaching them.

Paul's physical situation in Corinth was not good. He was truly in need of food. He, Aquila and Priscilla were simply not making enough money from their tentmaking business. His situation eventually reached the ears of the sharing and loving Christians in all Macedonia. And these Christians took action. They poured out their hearts to partner with Paul in all his physical needs. Paul shammed the Corinthian Christians by saying, "*And when I was present with you and in need, I was not a burden to anyone, for what I lacked the brethren who came from Macedonia supplied*" (2 Co 11:9; see Ep 4:16).

Because of the slanderous actions of some in Corinth who accused Paul of enriching himself, though they enriched themselves by the support of the Corinthian church, Paul rebuked them further: "*And in all things I have kept myself from being burdensome to you, and so I will keep myself*" (2 Co 11:9). After shaming them for their lack of consideration for a servant of God, Paul said that now he would not take their support if they offered it. He would not because of the messengers of Satan who were masquerading themselves among them to supposedly be messengers of righteousness (2 Co 11:12-15).

In all his preaching in the province of Achaia, of which one city was Corinth, Paul could boast that he preached the gospel without receiving money from the unbelievers to whom he preached the gospel. But he went beyond this. He did not receive wages from the unbelievers

who became believers through their obedience to the gospel. None of the masqueraders could say this. Such is not unlike some preachers today who masquerade as ministers of righteousness, when really they are Balaamites selling their gift for money. If a preacher would prove his sincerity before the people, it might be a time to do what one Malawian businessman said to a group of local preachers who were complaining about not being supported. He said to them, "Get a job!"

So Paul had a job. But this was not the problem with those in Corinth. The problem was that Corinthians had not yet fully understood that when one becomes a Christian, he has assumed the responsibility of supporting the preaching of the gospel to unbelievers, and also supporting the teachers who teach the believers. This is God's manner to preach the gospel and edify the saints.

What the context of 2 Corinthians 11 teaches is that when one becomes a disciple, he is under the obligation of Galatians 6:6. He must take ownership of his own spiritual growth by supporting those who teach spiritual things. Some brethren still have not understood their responsibility that is explained in 1 Corinthians 9:11. "*If we [Bible teachers] sowed to you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we reap your material things?* If a group of disciples allow a Bible teacher to stand before them week after week without supporting the teacher, then they need to pray over Galatians 6:6 and 1 Corinthians 9:11. They are violating a principle by which God meant for the teachers of His word to be supported.

Chapter 12

Balaamite Preachers

It was stated of the sons of Eli that **“they did not know the Lord”** (1 Sm 2:12). The fact that they did not know the Lord was revealed in what they did to the people of the Lord. The sons of Eli were taking advantage of the people concerning that which was required by the Lord in reference to sacrifices. The people were to come to the Lord with their sacrifices, but the sons of Eli wanted more than what the law required for the support of the priests. They were greedy, and thus, **they took advantage of what the people were obligated to do** (See 1 Sm 2:12-17). The Holy Spirit thus recorded of them, *“Therefore, the sin of the young men was very great before the Lord, for men abhorred the offering of the Lord”* (1 Sm 2:17). That which the people should willingly do, that is, give their sacrifices, they despised because the two priests, the sons of Eli, were taking advantage of their offerings. **When preachers take advantage of that which the people of God are obligated to do to serve the Lord, then the preachers are doing an evil thing.** They “do not know the Lord.”

Those whose who preach for money are usually, according to Solomon, identified by two things. *“The leech has two daughters, crying, ‘Give! Give!’”* (Pv 30:15). We can know those who are constantly after the contribution with their hands out. They cry from pulpits across

the land, “Give! Give!” They continually, as the sons of Eli, stand before the people and cry out for the offerings that the people are obligated to give. The people, therefore, “abhor the offering to the Lord.”

The supporters are not always the problem when it comes to the function of money in order to propagate the gospel. We live in a world of Balaamite preachers who take advantage of the innocence of the sheep of God. They abuse the obligation of the church to give their offerings. These profiteers often drive in fine new vehicles before the poor, promising that “God will bless you, too if you will give to the Lord [actually, ‘give to me’].” Their mansions on earth reveal that their minds are on the things of this world.

When Paul was in Corinth, he did not take support from the Corinthians. He was planning to visit them again after he wrote the second letter. But even on this visit he said he would not take their money (2 Co 11:9). It seems that the Corinthians in general had a tendency to accuse people of teaching for money because there were so many profiteers in the Corinthian society. If this were not a problem in the Corinthian society, then Paul would have willingly accepted their support on his visit after writing the second letter. But Paul did not want to be accused of being a Balaamite preacher, as so many are today in the world of Chris-

tendom. We would advise that preachers gain some wisdom from Paul on this matter. Since it is often the case that immature brethren are too quick to accuse preachers of preaching for money, then preachers should be cautioned in reference to the money of the offerings of the brethren. Preachers must never forget that the One they preach had only one robe and no owned place to lay His head at night (See Mt 8:20).

Unfortunately, there are too many preachers in the religious world who are like Balaam. Balaam was minding his own business, doing the work of God. He was known for his work throughout Pethor. But Balak, king of Moab, had another agenda for Balaam. He had money and a list of sermons he wanted preached to a people he feared. He was afraid of the blessed people of God, the Israelites, who were coming his way (Nm 22:3,11). He thus sought for a preacher to hire to carry out his agenda against Israel.

Balak had the support, the sermons to be preached, and the audience to whom he wanted them delivered (Nm 22:5,6). So with cash in hand, he went looking for a preacher he could tempt with purse and position in order to carry out his mission. He knew that there were preachers out there who would sacrifice their freedom and principles for the sake of a salary. Paul knew that there were a host of these hirelings in Corinth who were masquerading themselves as messengers of light (2 Co 11:12-15).

Balak knew how to approach religious hirelings. He went looking for a

dynamic and successful religious leader. He said of Balaam, “*I know that he whom you bless is blessed, and he whom you curse is cursed*” (Nm 22:6). His method of tempting Balaam to preach his agenda was to send an important delegation of elders to the preacher. With the delegation, he sent the greatest temptation to acquire a hireling preacher. He sent “the diviner’s fee,” a handsome salary (Nm 22:6). So with an impressive delegation from a foreign land, and the temptation of great support, Balaam was tempted to accept the agenda of someone other than God, and to preach what the supporters demanded.

At first Balaam held out against the temptation of salary and fame by refusing to compromise his principles. He would not allow his faith and freedom to be bought with foreign support from those of a foreign country who had their own agenda. He even consulted God concerning the request of the delegation of elders. And he initially followed God’s command not to go with the delegation of elders, or to accept their support (Nm 22:8-12). He was following God’s ultimatum. It was not to be changed under any circumstances.

But Balak was relentlessly persistent. He thus sent a greater number of influential people who were more noble and numerous than the first delegation. These were political people who would appeal to the political ambitions of Balaam (Nm 22:15-17). With the temptation of the high salary he initially received from the first delegation, this time Balaam was tempted by the foreigners with a great

position and any request he might have from the nation of the foreigners (Nm 22:17).

Balaam again held out. He refused to go with the political delegation that was sent from the foreigners (Nm 22:18).

But Balaam weakened. He again asked the political delegation to spend the night. God knew Balaam's heart, and thus, he accommodated his carnal desires for gain. He thus allowed Balaam to be ensnared in his own greed for gain and fame (Nm 22:19,20). *"So Balaam rose in the morning ... and went with the princes of Moab."* The mold was then cast for the hireling preacher to sell his gift to another for the sake of support. Balaam wrote his own legacy that the Holy Spirit recorded in Jude 11, when Jude wrote of some who run *"greedily in the error of Balaam for profit"* (Jd 11). Balaam established a "way" of behavior that would always be identified with his name and would describe those who compromise their principles for the sake of a salary as Balaamite preachers. Peter defined this behavior: *"... the way of Balaam the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness"* (2 Pt 2:15). The angel to the church of Pergamos condemned those who *"hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality"* (Rv 2:14).

How could a preacher who was minding his own business establish forever a legacy of greed and selfish ambition? Simple. **We must never under-**

estimate the temptation that comes with a delegation of elders from a foreign country who come with a great "diviner's fee" in order to hire those who would preach their agenda of sermons. It takes men of great spiritual integrity and dignity not to sell themselves to such great temptations. When preachers live in great poverty, it is not difficult to understand why some would be tempted to sell their gift for a salary. We must always remember the life of Paul in Corinth: *"And when I was present with you and in need, I was not a burden to anyone ..."* (2 Co 11:9). Paul did not sell out his gift even when he was in poverty. He did not because he had crucified to himself the carnal things of this world (Gl 2:20). When preachers sell out their gift by preaching whatever the supporters demand, then they have not crucified themselves with Christ. They are Balaamite preachers who will, with smooth and fair speech, tickle the ears of those who sign their pay checks. When we read the following concerning the ministry of Timothy, we conclude that Timothy preached what was necessary, for he did not sell out his gift to supporters:

*Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. **Reprove, rebuke, exhort** with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when **they will not endure sound teaching. But to suit their itching ears, they will surround themselves with teachers who will agree with their own desires.** And they will turn away their ears from the truth and will be turned to fables* (2 Tm 4:2-4).

Chapter 13

The Sin Of Covetousness

Balaam met death because he was tempted with covetousness. He sold his gift for money, and thus paid the ultimate price. Covetousness is the desire of those whose minds are focused on the things of this world. When Paul wrote, “*Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth,*” he had the sin of covetousness in mind (Cl 3:2). Every time the collection plate comes by, many people have a brief struggle with the sin of covetousness. The emotion that encourages one to hold back in his contributions is the feeling of having to give up that which one can consume on his own lusts.

A. Definition of Covetousness:

The Greek word of covetousness is *pleonexia*. It is a word that has a wide variety of equivalents in the English language. It can mean greediness, avarice, a desire to take more than one’s share, or a desire to take possession of that which belongs to another. Those who do not give according to how they have prospered are certainly covetous disciples. They hold back on giving according to their prosperity because they realize that they are relinquishing the right to consume upon themselves that which they release to the church.

Throughout the Bible, a variety of subpoints fall under the definition of covetousness.

1. Covetousness is a desire to possess more than one has. This was the problem of the rich man about whom Jesus referred in the parable of Luke 12:13-21. Jesus introduced His illustration of the covetousness of the rich man by saying, “**Take heed and beware of all covetousness, for a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things that he possesses**” (Lk 12:15). The fact that Jesus cautioned the disciples about the sin of covetousness should be a warning to everyone that this sin can creep into our lives, bringing with it a desire to possess the things of this world. In the preceding statement, Jesus helped us to examine ourselves. We are covetous if we think that life is to be focused on possessions. Jesus’ explanation of covetousness is the love of possessions.

2. Covetousness is a desire to acquire material things in an evil manner. It is the desire to acquire through unfair, dishonest or unscrupulous means the material things of this world. Because of the temptations that come with covetousness, Paul reminded the Thessalonian Christians, “*For neither at any time did we use flattering words, as you know, nor a cloak of covetousness ...*” (1 Th 2:5). Since his focus in life was not to possess the things of this world, his relationship with the Thessalonians did not have the ulterior motive of taking possession of their things. But this could not be

said of some of the shepherds of Israel when the nation was in a state of backsliding from the Lord. God said of them, “*For with their mouth they show much love, but their heart goes after their covetousness*” (See Ez 33:30-32).

3. Covetousness is the love of money. This was the sin of the religious leaders of Israel during the time of Jesus. The Holy Spirit stated that the Pharisees were “*lovers of money*” (Lk 16:14). In the context of his statements in 2 Timothy 3, Paul seems to indicate that covetous religious leaders would arise within the body of Christ. “*Know this also, that in the last days perilous times will come. For men will be lovers of themselves, covetous ...*” (2 Tm 3:1,2). We can understand why Paul was so cautious about this sin. Because of the covetous world in which he preached, he worked with his own hands to support his needs, even paying for everything that he ate. Such behavior seems to indicate that he wanted to shun all appearances of covetousness (2 Th 3:8). He reminded the elders of Ephesus that when he was among them that he “*coveted no man’s silver or gold or clothes*” (At 20:33). Peter also knew that covetous brethren would take advantage of the church. When in a state of apostasy, Peter warned, “*And through covetousness they will with deceptive works exploit you*” (2 Pt 2:3).

B. The curse of covetousness:

Paul wrote, “*For the love of money is the root of all evils, by which some coveting after have strayed from the*

faith and pierced themselves with many sorrows” (1 Tm 6:10). No greater truth could have been said concerning what seems to be our natural desire to acquire and possess. This urge can be so strong that it can lead one to great dishonesty and the destruction of one’s integrity. It is not the money in and of itself that is evil. It is the love of the money that corrupts the very soul of a man. It is for this reason that the Bible is filled with exhortations to guard oneself from the sin of covetousness:

- “*You will not covet your neighbor’s house. You will not covet your neighbor’s wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor’s*” (Ex 20:17).
- “*Incline my heart to Your testimonies and not to covetousness*” (Ps 119:36).
- “*He who is greedy for gain troubles his own house ...*” (Pv 15:27).
- “*Woe to those who join house to house, who lay field to field until there is no place, so that they may be placed alone in the midst of the land*” (Is 5:8).
- “*Woe to him who increases that which is not his ...*” (Hk 2:6).
- “*But now I have written to you not to associate with anyone who is called a brother if he is a fornicator, or covetous ...*” (1 Co 5:11).
- “*But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints*” (Ep 5:3).

C. **The consequences of covetousness:**

The insidious nature of covetousness is that the one who is covetous often has no idea that he is such. To consume upon one's own desires has simply become the culture of his life and the life of his neighbors around him. Such people often judge themselves as nice people, for they are not drunkards or thieves. They are simply trying to maintain a life-style similar to their neighbors. They often present themselves as good community leaders, and often present before the church a cloak of piety and spirituality. They are faithful in being with the disciples for prayer and Bible study. But when the collection is made, they reveal their covetous culture. This is the one about whom John wrote. *"In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not from God, nor the one who does not love his brother"* (1 Jn 3:10). And how does one know he loves his brother? John further explained, *"We know that we have passed from death to life because we love the brethren"* (1 Jn 3:14). But how does one know that he has passed from death to life, and thus, loves his brother? John explains, *"But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?"* (1 Jn 3:17).

Now we understand why Paul was so hard on the Corinthians in reference to their fulfilling of their promise to help their brothers in famine in Judea. But in refer-

ence to his personal needs, he reminded them, *"And when I was present with you and in need, I was not a burden to anyone ..."* (2 Co 11:9). Paul simply suffered alone, but later in this and other statements, shamed the Corinthians for their lack of love toward him because they did not help him in his need. Their lack of care for him when he was in physical need revealed a flaw in their understanding of the concept taught in Galatians 6:6. They were thus not yet perfected in righteousness.

When we are covetous, we will not feel the need of those in need, and thus respond with a heart of love. In the context of the preceding words of John about those who would not manifest their love of the brethren by making sure that physical needs are covered, John concluded, *"Whoever hates his brother is a murderer. And you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him"* (1 Jn 3:15).

Sins of the flesh as drunkenness are clearly evident to all. But the sin of covetousness can reside undetected in the heart of one for years without being clearly manifested. As the rich consume upon their lust, and give only a token when the collection plate is passed, they can hide behind the cloak of a secret contribution. When the poor widow gave all her livelihood, it was known to all. But when the rich gave, **their comparatively large contribution was actually a cloak that disguised their covetousness.**

Liberal giving is the very core of Christianity. It is the revelation of the heart of the one who truly knows God, and thus

seeks to be godly. One has simply deceived himself if he thinks that token contributions can identify him with the God who loved the world so much that He gave His only begotten Son for our sins.

It is the curse of legalism that allows the covetous person to hide behind his token contributions (Lk 21:1-4). The legalist deceives himself into thinking that since he gave something, then he has fulfilled the law of giving. But he has conveniently created a religion after his own covetous desires. He has failed to see that we are not under a law of tithing percentages, but under a new commandment of love that moves us to give as we have been given to by the God who owns all things. Unfortunately, the legalist will go down in condemnation crying out that he gave, but never realizing that he did not give himself wholly over to the Lord. His tokens will take him into total destruction from the presence of the One who so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son.

D. Character of the covetous:

The covetous person is actually denying the one true and living God. He does so because he substitutes another god for God. In the city of Ephesus, Paul was confronted by the adherents of an idolatrous religion (See At 19). Theirs was a religion of idols, and idolatry is creating a god after one's own image and own desires. Therefore, when Paul later wrote to the Ephesian Christians, he identified the nature of the covetous person. He wrote that the covetous man "*is an idola-*

ter" (Ep 5:5). The covetous man is an idolater because covetousness "*is idolatry*" (Cl 3:5). Covetousness is worship of the creation over the Creator. It is elevating the created things of this world above the One who created the world. Jesus explained,

No man can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth (Mt 6:24).

David said of those who made idols, "*Those who make them are like unto them [idols], as is everyone who trusts in them*" (Ps 115:8). The ones who idolize the things of this world are like the things of this world. They are worldly.

A servant is of no value to his master if he serves another master, while pretending to be totally dedicated to his master. When one becomes the servant of wealth, then he cannot be totally committed to God. Not only does the covetous man trouble his own house, he troubles the house of God (See Pv 15:27; 1 Tm 3:15). In the case of Achan, covetousness caused the death of his entire family (Ja 7:21). He saw; he coveted; he took; he died. The idolatrous man can never give his entire devotion to God. "*For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also*" (Mt 6:21).

It seems that the heart of Demas was on the things of this world which he loved. Paul urged Timothy, "*Be diligent to come to me soon, for Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present*

world ..." (2 Tm 4:10). As Demas, and Gehazi, many good men have fallen to the idolatrous nature of covetousness (See 2 Kg 5:22-25).

The sin of covetousness became so grave in Israel that the princes of Israel were known for their bribes by which they exploited the people, even to the point of shedding innocent blood to receive them (Ez 22:12). We must never underestimate the sin of covetousness. We must never fail to identify such as sin. And considering all that is stated in the word of God about the sin, we would do well to be on guard in our lives that we do not deceive ourselves that this sin cannot turn us away from God. Covetousness leads to the destruction of the spiritual life we have in Christ. Because it is a relentless curse to the soul of the Christian, it eventually turns one into a hard-hearted person who is void of empathy for the needs of his fellow man.

Through our obedience to the gospel, we have "*escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust*" (2 Pt 1:4). It is our struggle to stay away from lusts that lead to spiritual death. Those disciples who would persist in their way of covetousness seriously challenge themselves through personal studies of the eternal sacrifice that Jesus made for us (See 1 Co 5:9-11). Those who with smooth and fair speech prey upon the disciples for gain, must also be challenged (2 Th 3:6). God is serious about the sin of covetousness because such is a character that is totally contrary to the godly nature of Christianity.

For this you know, that no fornicator, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no man deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience (Ep 5:5,6).

The covetous person needs to remember the words of Jesus that were spoken in reference to the rich man who was concerned only about laying up riches on earth for himself: "*So is he who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God*" (Lk 12:21). Remember, covetousness comes to light when the collection plate is passed. One member boasted, "If I had US\$1,000 I would give half to the church." His fellow brother sitting beside him said, "What if you had two pigs?" The man responded, "That's not fair. You know I have two pigs."

E. Repentance from covetousness:

We must remember what the Holy Spirit said of the religious Pharisees. "*They were lovers of money*" (Lk 16:14). And when religious people who are lovers of money are denied their money by the preaching of the gospel, trouble is unleashed on the preachers of the gospel.

1. Simon the sorcerer loved, but lost his money. When Philip went to Samaria, he encountered one who was not unlike some preachers today. Simon

was a preacher who was well known throughout the city of Samaria. For a long time he had “*practiced magic and astonished the people of Samaria, claiming that he was someone great*” (At 8:9). As we said, he was not unlike some preachers today who like to stand before the people with great pomp. And in order to guarantee his right to stand before the people, he worked his “miracles,” which were only magical tricks. And we assume that he was known for the two things that Solomon said would identify the leech: (1) Give! (2) Give! (Pv 30:15).

Simon certainly gained a great deal of money from his “miracle services.” He had the respect of the people he fooled. Luke recorded, “*They all, from the least to the greatest, gave heed to him, saying, ‘This man is the great power of God’*” (At 8:10). The people gave heed to the “miracle working” preacher “*because he had for a long time astonished them with his magical arts*” (At 8:11). But then there came to town a preacher of truth. Philip showed up with the message of the gospel. “*But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women*” (At 8:12). The religious profiteering of the “miracle” working preacher was shut down.

But when religious profiteers are shut down, they do not go down peacefully. Simon lost his source of income. Nevertheless, the text says that “*Simon himself also believed ... and was baptized*” (At 8:13). But when he saw the miracles that were done by the apostles, he possi-

bly saw another “angle” by which he could get back into the religious money-making business. So “*when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles’ hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money*” (At 8:18). Simon saw where he presumed he could cash in on the religious business of miracle working (At 8:19). But notice what Peter said to the covetous preacher Simon, “*Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money*” (At 8:20). The reason Simon sought to financially invest in the “laying-on-of-hands” business was because of what Peter pronounced was in his heart. “*Your heart is not right in the sight of God*” (At 8:21). Peter identified the problem when he said to Simon, “*You are full of bitterness and in the bondage of iniquity*” (At 8:23). Bitterness originates out of a heart of one who craves something so much, that when he loses it, he is bitter. Simon lost his position as a “miracle worker” among the people, and thus, he lost his source of great financial wealth. Though he was baptized, he was still in the “bondage of iniquity.” When covetous preachers lose their source of income when their iniquity is discovered, their heart of iniquity will move them to lash out with all sorts of nonsense.

2. *Demetrius loved and lost his religious money-making business.* In the city of Ephesus, another religious profiteer was endangered by the preaching of the gospel. The occasion was the conversion of people away from idolatry to Christianity. The mass conversion was

so great that those who were into the idol-making business became somewhat disturbed. *“Then about that time there arose a great disturbance concerning the Way”* (At 19:23). The problem was that *“a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines for Artemis, was bringing no little profit to the craftsmen”* (At 19:24). So Demetrius called the craftsmen together and said, *“Sirs, you know that by this craft we have our wealth”* (At 19:25). The problem was that a preacher of the gospel came to town and said *“that gods made with hands are not gods”* (At 19:26). And so the market for idol gods took a hit, and the wealth of the idol makers had a bad day on the stock market. Consequently, Demetrius sought to stir up opposition against Paul by appealing to their belief in the idol god Artemis [Diana], that she was in trouble of being *“de-throned from her magnificence”* if this is continued (At 19:27). So what hap-

pens when the wealth of religiously covetous people is endangered? There is mass confusion and opposition against those who preach the truth (See At 19:28-41). One must never underestimate the culture of religious covetousness.

The repentant journey out of covetousness is painful. Sometimes it is so painful that one becomes, as Simon, bitter. To some, as Demetrius, wealth is far more important than truth, and thus, people as Demetrius are willing to stir up a riot against those who endanger their religious profiteering. But for those who seek to serve God, these are those who are willing to endure the pain in order to gain the crown. Those who are wealthy, and who bring their standard of living down for the needs of others, will certainly be blessed with great riches in eternal glory. We must keep in mind that money cannot give itself away. It takes a sincere and godly heart to do that.

Chapter 14

Well-Doing Discipleship

When discussing the sin of covetousness, we must review the life of one who lived in total contrast to a covetousness life-style. Gaius was an unselfish disciple who understood the purpose of discipleship, and thus, through the apostle John’s letter, the Holy Spirit gave him an overwhelming testimony that he was walking in the truth by his well-doing sacrifices to partner with evangelists in the preaching of the gospel to the world.

Romans 10:14 explains the mandate of Gaius’ obedience. This statement of Paul explains the organic function of the body in reference to the financial partnership that members have with those who go forth to preach the gospel. It explains the well-doing of Gaius.

How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how will they believe in Him of whom they have

not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher?

The sending forth and support of preachers is a function of the body of Christ to take the gospel into all the world. This is what the body does. When this function is either ignored by the members of the body, as in the case of the Corinthians, or disrupted by dominating leadership, as in the case of Diotrephes, then the body is financially dysfunctional. In the context of John's letter to Gaius, if this responsibility is ignored by any individual Christian, then that Christian is dysfunctional in reference to his or her responsibilities to send forth preachers to preach the gospel to the lost. Such was the case with the disciples in the area where Gaius lived. The problem was so grave that Gaius may have been in doubt concerning his financial responsibilities to support preachers. For some reason, he wrote to John concerning one who was disrupting the organic function of the body in reference to what Paul stated in Romans 10:14,15.

John subsequently wrote a comforting letter to Gaius in order to reassure him that what he was doing in supporting evangelists was walking in the truth. *"For I rejoiced greatly when brethren came and testified of the truth that is in you, just as you walk in truth"* (3 Jn 3). In this context, Gaius' walking in truth was his financial support of the preaching of the gospel. From what John said of Gaius, therefore, **we would conclude that one is not walking in the truth unless he is doing that which Gaius**

was doing in supporting preachers to go forth to preach the gospel.

Supporting traveling evangelists was a faithful work and walk in the truth. *"Beloved, you do faithfully whatever you do for the brethren and especially for strangers"* (3 Jn 5). Those who had been helped by Gaius on their journeys reported his faithful work to other disciples wherever they went. The extent of Gaius' hospitality of those who came by his way is revealed in the fact that some were not formerly known by Gaius. They were strangers to him. But the fact that they were preaching the gospel was reason enough to warrant his support. John commended Gaius, *"... who have borne witness of your love before the church"* (3 Jn 6).

Gaius' support of the traveling evangelists was a manifestation of his love, and thus, in John's statement of 3 John 6, one definition of Christian love is identified to be one's support of those who go forth to preach the gospel. Gaius' godliness was revealed in his giving. *"You will do well to support them [the preachers] on their journey in a manner worthy of God"* (3 Jn 6). In order to be worthy of God, individual Christians as Gaius, should support those who are going forth to preach the gospel. The other side of the situation is also true. If one does not support the preaching of the gospel through the support of preachers who go forth, then he is not worthy of God. He does not know God, for God is love, and love manifests itself in the support of those who go forth to preach the gospel for God's love of the world through Jesus (Jn 3:16).

The word “support” in 3 John 6 comes from the Greek word *propempeo*. It means to set one forward on his journey with whatever it takes to get the evangelist on to his next location. The word assumes, therefore, that the evangelist is not staying at home. He is gone! He has gone into all the world to preach the gospel. The context of John’s discussion of 3 John is not the passage to be used for those who want to stay at home, and yet be supported according to John’s instructions. There are other passages that teach the church’s responsibility to support their teachers (See Gl 6:6).

In the evangelistic function of the early church, there were evangelists going throughout the world preaching the gospel. Paul, for example, sought to go on to Spain after he visited the disciples in Rome. When he wrote to the disciples in Rome, he hoped to be supported by them in his travel on to Spain. “... whenever I make my journey into Spain, I hope to see you in my journey **and to be supported on my way there by you** ...” (Rm 15:24).

In 3 John, John explained the reason behind Paul’s statement in Romans 10:14. It is the responsibility of every disciple to do what Gaius was doing in supporting those who would go forth to preach the gospel. In 3 John 7,8, John gives three reasons why each individual member of the body should do this.

1. The evangelists went forth to preach Christ. If we would claim to be “of Christ” (Christian), then it is our obligation to support those who preach the

One in whom we believe.

2. The evangelists did not take contributions from the unbelievers. We should support evangelists in order that they and their families can live, and not bring shame upon the gospel message by living in need of material sustenance (1 Co 9:14).

3. We must be fellow workers for the truth that the evangelists preach. We join in with those evangelists who go forth by supporting them on their journeys. We partake of the fruit of their labors when we partner with them through our giving of support (Ph 4:17).

The preceding evangelistic function of the body was disrupted by one man in the vicinity of Gaius. The case here is similar to that in Corinth. There was a group in Corinth who were puffed up and arrogant, and subsequently hindered the Corinthians from supporting Paul, whom they accused of all sorts of nonsense. The same happened with Gaius when Diotrephes, who was puffed up, disrupted the financial function of the body by slandering the evangelists and John with malicious words. One of the evils in which some involve themselves in order not to support a certain preacher is to make slanderous statements to others of the church about the preacher.

The financial disruption caused by Diotrephes was enshrined in one simple statement made by John: “*Diotrephes, who loves to be first among them, does not receive us*” (3 Jn 9). Diotrephes did not receive and send forth even John, the apostle of love. In his actions to domi-

nate a group, or area of house groups, he disrupted the function of the organic body that was explained by Paul in Romans 10:14,15. Gaius could not send forth the beautiful feet of those who preached the gospel because Diotrefes wanted to dominate the church, and thus, present himself to be first among the disciples.

John's letter to Gaius was meant to encourage Gaius during this unfortunate time of financial disruption of his evangelistic outreach through the support of evangelists. *"Beloved, do not follow what is evil, but what is good. He who does good is from God. He who does evil has not seen God"* (3 Jn 11). That which Diotrefes was doing was evil. If Gaius submitted to what Diotrefes was trying to impose on the church, then he would also be doing evil and not walking in truth. The Holy Spirit takes a very dim view of anyone who would disrupt the financial support of those who go forth to preach the gospel.

When any member of the body of Christ disrupts the outreach of the body, then that member is a cancerous evil. His behavior will lead to the death of the body in any particular region where the body is not allowed to preach the gospel. If the other members of the body allow a dominant member to disrupt the evangelistic outreach of the body, then they have fallen victim to the cancerous evil of the autocratic leader. We enable evil when we say nothing about these matters, nor refuse to confront the evil of those who would dominate our desire to send forth those who preach.

When the leaders of a group of dis-

ciples do not allow a traveling evangelist to speak to the members of the body about the function of the body in evangelism, then they have fallen victim to the cancerous evil of Diotrefetic leadership. When a preacher blocks the coming of a traveling evangelist to speak to the members of the body, then he has become a cancerous evil to the evangelistic function of the body of Christ. When churches as a whole are not receiving and sending forth those who preach the gospel, then they are indeed dead with a cancerous evil. When John wrote to Gaius about Diotrefes' hindering of the evangelistic financial function of the body, He wanted all of us to know that such is evil, and should be avoided.

We must not ignore or consider lightly the Holy-Spirit inspired words of John in reference to the behavior of Diotrefes in his efforts to block the evangelistic function of the body. Diotrefes was hindering the function of the body to preach the gospel by not receiving and sending forth those who grow the body into all the world. His actions were contrary to the existence of the church, and thus, his actions were evil. It is for this reason that every disciple, as Gaius, must be assured that receiving and sending evangelists is the function of every member of the body of Christ. Paul concluded his letter to the dysfunctional Corinthians in this matter: *"Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test your own selves. Do you not know your own selves, that Jesus Christ is in you, unless indeed you are disqualified?"* (2 Co 13:5). An old Persian proverb is,

“What I kept I lost. What I spent I had. What I gave I have.” Someone wrote, “If you want to be rich, give; if you want to be poor, grasp, if you want abundance, scatter, if you want to be needy, hoard.”

Chapter 15

Giving With Purpose

If we could learn anything from the negligent Achaians, specifically those in Corinth, it would be to put our money where our mouth is. They at first had good intentions to do what was right in reference to contributing to the famine victims of Judea. However, their performance certainly lacked. It lacked so much that it took the Holy Spirit, through the inspired mind of the apostle Paul, to correct their financial dysfunction. In His instructions to correct their procrastination, the Holy Spirit gave some points that we must seriously consider in order that we too not fall victim to the same procrastination.

Among all the instructions that were given in the letters of 1 & 2 Corinthians, there are some points that will help us to get on with getting the job done in reference to our contributions. If any of these points are ignored, our contributions and collections for any ministry of the body of Christ will certainly be an indication of our lack of concern for God’s work through the body, or at least our procrastination in doing what we have promised to do.

A. Purpose our contribution:

Paul instructed, “*Let each one give according as he **purposes** in his heart*

...” (2 Co 9:7). Contributing to the work of God is not something that is done nonchalantly. It is determined before the act of giving actually takes place. The Greek word for “purposes” is *proaireomai*. This is the only place in the New Testament where this word is used. It seems that the Holy Spirit looked throughout the Greek dictionary in order to choose a specific word to enjoin upon Christians a life-style of intended sacrificial giving. The word means “to prefer,” “to choose,” or “to purpose with considerable intent.” The passage could be translated, “*Let every one give as he has determined before hand.*”

The use of the Greek word indicates that one should make a heart-determined plan to make his contributions. When one is purposing in his heart, he is forming his life around his contributions. The contributions, therefore, are the indication of one who has the Lord’s work at heart. When one has given his heart to the Lord, then his offerings are intentional, directed and planned. There is no sporadic action on his part. On the contrary, with great consideration, he sets aside that which he intends to give. There is no “spur of the moment” contribution with the one who has purposed in his heart.

Because we are to plan beforehand

what we intend to give, then purposing our contributions is a sign of faithful discipleship. Making plans as to how we will return to God that which is His is simply the behavioral pattern of a faithful disciple. If one is not giving anything, then certainly his discipleship of Jesus would be questioned. But in the context of Paul's instructions concerning planned giving, we might question whether one truly has the heart of a disciple if he is not planning his giving. Disciples plan to give, for they understand that giving is a part of being a disciple of the One who gave us all. As the Father planned to give His Son before the creation of the world, so Christians must plan their giving before the collection is taken by the church.

B. Promise the purposed giving.

Paul introduced his instructions on making a purposed contribution with the words, *"Therefore, I thought it necessary to exhort the brethren so that they go before to you and make up beforehand your previously promised generous contribution ..."* (2 Co 9:5). What he was saying to the Corinthians was that they needed to fulfill what they had promised in reference to a special contribution for the famine victims of Judea. For a variety of reasons, they had fudged on their promise. And since he was on his way to them with some of the brethren from Macedonia, Paul was writing in order that they not be embarrassed about making promises and not keeping them (See 2 Co 9:3,4).

The Greek word for "previously

promised" in 2 Corinthians 9:5 is *prokatangelo*. The word means "to announce beforehand." A year before, the disciples of Achaia made a promise to give to the collection that was being made for the famine victims in Judea (2 Co 9:2). They had made a public declaration that they too would give to the need, which promise Paul had announced to other disciples in order to spur them on to likewise contribute. In Paul's instructions concerning what they had promised, there are a great number of lessons to be learned concerning contributions. Read carefully what he instructed them in 2 Corinthians 8:10,11:

And in this I give advice: For this is advantageous for you who were the first a year ago not only to do, but also to desire to do this thing [contribution]. But now finish doing it so that as there was a readiness to desire it, so there may be also a completion out of what you have.

Desire without completion means nothing. Talk without the financial walk of what one has promised manifests a lack of integrity. We must commend the Achaians for their desire. But desire means nothing if there is no performance. At least the Achaian disciples were better than the person who makes no commitment at all to give, or the one who says he just cannot afford to make a promise.

The disciple who has given his heart to the Lord, has also given his promise to do the business of the Lord. Before one becomes a disciple, therefore, he must seriously consider how he will purpose in

his heart that which he is going to give to the Lord, as well as, make a promise that he will complete his planned giving. Jesus reminds all of us,

For which one of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it? Otherwise, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all who see it begin to mock him. (Lk 14:28,29).

C. Perform the promise:

The Achaians had the desire. They evidently made a promise of giving a substantial amount, for Paul used their promised contribution as an example for the Macedonians (See 2 Co 9:1,2). But now they had to perform, as Paul wrote, “**But now finish doing it ...**” (2 Co 8:11). The Greek word that Paul used here is from the root word *epiteleo* which means “to bring to completion.” What Paul was now asking of the Achaians was that they execute that which they had previously purposed and promised a year before.

The contribution about which Paul was writing was a special contribution for a special need. We have discovered that people will often do well in making such contributions. In all their dysfunction as members of the body of Christ, the disciples in Achaia at least responded to the special needs of those who were suffering from a famine in Judea. We cannot fault their desire to help, though their performance somewhat lacked. Neverthe-

less, they did make the contribution. They purposed in their hearts to get the job done, and with some encouragement from the Holy Spirit through Paul, the deed was done. If disciples make such promises today, but procrastinate, then the leaders need to be teaching the exhortations of 1 & 2 Corinthians.

We feel it is also significant to mention that when the Achaians made their promise to give the special contribution for the special need of famine victims, **they were probably less than five years old in the faith.** We mention this because we know of disciples who are decades old in the faith, and yet, they have never been challenged to make a special contribution to a need **outside their local area.** They have never given to mission efforts outside their local area. They have never given to any disaster relief needs outside their local area. Their contributions have usually been for those things they could personally enjoy. Consequently, the selfish motive for their contributions has led them to never being blessed for their contributions. Giving to our “building fund” has its selfish ulterior motives. Giving to increase our comforts in worship is not sacrificial giving.

The Achaians had no New Testaments in their possession to read these instructions as we have today. We might fault them concerning their delay in performing the deed of unselfish contributions, but we cannot fault them on their response to the instructions of the Holy Spirit to contribute to needs outside their local area, and thus to something that they would not personally enjoy. Now we have

no excuse if we have failed to purpose in our hearts to give. We have no excuse because we can simply pick up a New Testament and read the instructions that moved the Corinthians to get the job done. The godly giver seeks to live after the One

to whom he has given his life. He reads with interest every instruction concerning that must be done to follow the God who owns everything. There is thus only joy in the heart of the one who seeks to be as Jesus who gave all for us.

Chapter 16

Special Responsibilities

Since money is an indication of our life, it is a part of our Christian living. We give our time to produce money, and thus, the money is a symbol of our time. When we contribute our money unselfishly, it is the same as giving our time unselfishly to a specific cause or individual. This was Paul's point in Philippians 4:17 when he stated that the fruit of his labors went to the Philippians because they had supported him once and again when he preached in Thessalonica. They were blessed with the fruit because they did not personally reap from the contribution. Giving to the evangelist in his preaching somewhere in the world was what the Philippians were doing. They were not supporting a local preacher, or purchasing song books for themselves, or doing building repairs where they would personally benefit. Theirs was unselfish giving for something from which they would not receive personal benefit. We do not say this because it would be wrong to support something from which we receive personal benefit. It is simply a fact that in the New Testament the giving was directed to someone or some famine victims from which the

givers did not receive any personally benefit. New Testament giving was always for someone else, not for self. It was as God gave unselfishly to us, we give unselfishly to others.

There are other financial responsibilities where contributors can share their time, and thus reap fruit from their sacrifices. These opportunities to produce fruit identify the nature of our discipleship, which is to say, they are opportunities to manifest our love. They are also manifestations of the nature of the church of our Lord.

A. Enrolled widows:

James identified "pure religion" with the statement, "*Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this, to take care of the orphans and widows in their affliction ...*" (Js 1:27). Taking care of orphans is simply being a part of the human race. There need be no commandments in reference to this ministry. James' statement of James 1:27, therefore, is simply a declarative statement, not an imperative. But when it

comes to taking care of widows, the Holy Spirit knew that the disciples needed some special instructions in order that their love not be abused by those women who might become Christians just to get on the payroll of the church.

In the early days of the existence of the church, one of the first points of identity of the church was a common distribution to widows. What is interesting to note is that we have this event recorded in the New Testament, not in reference to making this ministry a mandate, but simply as something that Christians did. In the case of Acts 6:1-7 there were some problems with the distribution. But we must keep in mind that as preaching the gospel to the lost was normal for a disciple, so was caring for widows.

But as this behavior of the church progressed throughout the first century, there was some abuse of the sharing love of the disciples in this matter. By the time Paul wrote the first letter to Timothy, the Holy Spirit had to lay down some qualifications for the church's support of widows. When we study through these qualifications for a widow to be supported, it is interesting to note that the church does not have the responsibility of supporting all widows.

Paul wrote, "*Honor widows who are truly widows*" (1 Tm 5:3). The word "honor" here means to support financially, or to provide for all their needs. By using the word "truly," Paul was instructing that the church must support only those widows who are defined to be true widows according to the instructions that he was about to give. The word "truly" excludes

some widows who are not qualified to be supported according to the limitations that he gives. The church is not obligated to support every Christian widow. The following would be the defining qualifications that would warrant a widow to be supported by the church:

1. A childless widow: "*But if any widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to practice piety at home and to repay their parents, for this is good and acceptable before God*" (1 Tm 5:4). But if a Christian widow does not have children or grandchildren, then she must be considered by the church to receive church support.

2. Spiritually minded: "*Now she who is truly a widow and desolate trusts in God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day*" (1 Tm 5:5). The widow who is not continuing in supplications and prayers has no right to be supported by the church. If she is "desolate," and she has no other means of support, then she is eligible for the support of the church. Being "desolate" would be subjective, and thus, the church must make a decision if a widow is truly desolate. If she is living in a mansion that was left to her by her husband, then she probably is not desolate. The church should ask her to sell the mansion, bring down her standard of living, and then she would be considered to be enrolled as a widow to be supported by the church. An older woman is not truly a desolate widow if she has a retirement plan or pension that will service her needs. A Christian widow must always remember what Paul added,

“But she who lives in pleasure is dead while she lives” (1 Tm 5:6). The church is under no obligation to support a widow who is spiritually dead and unfaithful to the Lord.

3. Children first: *“But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his own household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever”* (1 Tm 5:8). The word “household” in the first century context meant more than immediate children. A household included the immediate children, husband and wife, but also servants and relatives. What Paul was instructing in the above statement was that relatives first have the responsibility of taking care of the widows within the household. This would mean that a Christian family who had employed a Christian servant, has the responsibility of taking care of the widow of a Christian servant. If the head of a household does not take care of the widows of his household, then he is worse than the unbelievers who feel no obligation of taking care of widows. The heads of families cannot obligate the church to do that which is their responsibility. Therefore, if a head of a household is negligent in carrying out this responsibility, then it is the responsibility of the church to approach such a person, for he has denied the faith.

4. The limitation of sixty: *“Let no one be enrolled as a widow who is under sixty years old, having been the wife of one man”* (1 Tm 5:9). No widow under sixty can apply for support from the church. If she is sixty and older, then she must have been the wife of one man, and

thus not a polygamist. If she was a polygamist, then she was not living a faithful Christian life. It could be argued that she may have been a polygamist before she became a Christian, but remained with one man after her baptism. Thus the phrase, *“having been the wife of one man”* could apply only to the time she was a faithful Christian. We would assume that this would be the proper interpretation simply because some young woman may have lived a rebellious life in her younger years as an unbeliever, having more than one husband. Such a person may have been as the woman caught in adultery, to whom Jesus said, *“Neither do I condemn you. Go. From now on sin no more”* (Jn 8:11). If this woman went and sinned no more by having only one husband and living a faithful Christian life, then we would conclude that she would be enrolled as a widow when her husband died because she was faithful at the time of her husband’s death.

5. A reputation for good works: Paul now lists a series of things that the church must follow in order to register a widow to receive support from the church. The prospective enrolled widow must have ...

... a reputation for good works; if she has brought up children, if she has shown hospitality to strangers, if she has washed the saints’ feet, if she has relieved the afflicted, if she has diligently followed every good work (1 Tm 5:10).

From what Paul states here as qualifications for support from the church, we

would assume that a problem prevailed where Timothy was located. The problem was probably in the area of widows of the community lining up for support from the only people in town who took care of widows. Since it was the obligation of the church to support widows, the word got out to everyone in the community that the local church puts widows on a pension plan. In all these qualifications, one point is very clear: **If a widow has not been a faithful Christian for some time, then she has no right to be supported by the church.** In other words, those widows who would seek to be members of the church in order to be supported by the church have no hope of support. The church is under no obligation to take care of any widow who has not become known for being a faithful servant to the saints.

6. No young widows need to apply: *“But refuse the younger widows ...”* (1 Tm 5:11). If a widow is under the age of sixty, then she is not to be supported by the church. Because of the temptations that face young widows, Paul said, *“I desire that the younger widows marry, bear children, manage the house ...”* (1 Tm 5:14). Paul’s qualification of one being a “young widow” would be a woman who still had the ability to bear children. This would be a young Christian woman who was relatively young, and thus had the opportunity to marry and bear children.

Paul’s final instructions concerning the care of widows is significant. *“If any believing man or woman has widows,*

let them assist them, and do not let the church be burdened, so that it may relieve those who are truly widows” (1 Tm 5:16). A Christian man has the responsibility of taking care of his widowed mother. A younger single Christian woman also has the responsibility of taking care of her widowed mother. If those of the household do not support the widows of the household, then the church would possibly have to neglect those who were truly widows. This is the organic body of Christ functioning properly in order to make sure that every faithful widow is cared for in the fellowship of love.

B. Supported elders:

In reference to the support of elders, Paul wrote, *“Let the elders who direct well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching”* (1 Tm 5:17). This statement needs little explanation. “Double honor” refers to double pay. When Paul said in a previous verse of this chapter, *“honor widows ...,”* he meant the same thing as he means here. Reference is to support, not giving respect, though the young are taught to respect their elders. We say this because some have tried to excuse themselves from supporting elders by interpreting Paul’s use of the word “honor” in this text to mean giving great respect. Such would be an inconsistent interpretation, and in being inconsistent, one might neglect his responsibility of supporting worthy elders.

Paul’s instructions to support elders is based on the Old Testament principle,

“You will not muzzle the ox that treads out the grain,” and “The laborer is worthy of his wages” (1 Tm 5:18). Paul explains two worthy works of those elders (shepherds) who should be supported by the church. These are those elders who choose to work in the area of preaching the gospel to the lost and those who seek to teach the saved. However, he uses the word “especially” to refer to the specific ministries of some elders. In general, the elder is to be supported, but specifically, those who labor in preaching and teaching must be supported if they do not have any other livelihood.

The elder must be supported with “double” wages. If one truly understands the nature of a godly elder, then he will have no difficulty understanding what is meant in this statement. Godly elders are with the people. And when the people are in need, the elder reaches into his own pockets. A godly elder will never consume upon his own lusts, and thus will always die a poor man. The church has the responsibility of ministering to the poor through the elders who are with the sheep, ministering aid when aid is needed. Worldly minded and greedy people have no understanding of what is meant in the double pay of elders. And thus, the church should under no circumstances allow the twisted minds of greedy people to discourage the church from obeying the mandate of the Holy Spirit in reference to the double pay of elders. When elders are ministering in growing the church through the preaching of the gospel, and edifying the converts through teaching the word of God, then they must be encouraged to con-

tinue their work through double pay lest they give themselves into poverty.

C. Concerning orphans:

Outside the statement of James 1:27, there are no instructions in the New Testament concerning the care of orphans. As previously recognized, there is a great deal of information concerning the support of widows. In the past chapters, we have studied at length the support of evangelists who go forth to preach the gospel. There is also a great deal of information in the New Testament concerning the contribution of funds to those brethren who are suffering from a natural disaster. We have the instructions of the previous point in reference to the support of elders. But there is nothing about the support of orphans. Nevertheless, James stated that pure religion is identified by people who take care of orphans.

Since there are no instructions concerning orphans, then we can make only one conclusion. **Taking care of orphans is simply a natural thing to do as a citizen of the human race.** There need be no instructions, no commandments. To turn away from an orphan is to deny the very principle of humanity.

But one might reconsider the context of James 1:27. In this chapter, we have reviewed the church’s responsibility of taking care of widows. However, the church does not have the responsibility of taking care of all widows. Only those widows who have been faithful Christians are to be listed for support. We would not come to this conclusion in ref-

erence to orphans, for orphans would have no life history of service that would qualify them for church support as the widows. We could conclude, therefore, that when James spoke of orphans, he spoke of any orphan. It is simply the responsibility of

Christians to do the best they can in taking care of orphans. No qualification is needed on the part of the orphan in order to be supported. Taking care of orphans is a way by which we can determine if we are still citizens of the human race.

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