

Three Models Of Christian Giving

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[0 : 00] Lord and to you. And so part of what's involved in this pattern of giving is the willingness to give ourselves to one another.

And that implies a great deal of trust between one another. And that trust implies love and forgiveness and understanding, but that's what they did first.

They gave themselves to the Lord and then to one another, and then they gave what they have.

Well, that was the church in Macedonia, and that was the pattern of giving that Paul said.

Now, Paul is a fairly clever fellow. He didn't say to the congregation, as I am almost forced to say to you, get with it.

He said, look at this church and compare yourself, and then you can preach your own sermon to yourself. So you take those first verses of 2 Corinthians chapter 8, and you preach the sermon to yourself.

[1 : 07] Now there's a second church that was there. This church was different. And it's to this church, of course, that the letter is addressed, the church at Corinth.

And on this delicate subject, delicate only because I think of the pride and sensitivities, perhaps improper sensitivities of people, you find out that Paul treated them in this way.

In chapter 8, verse 8, he said, this is not a command. There is no way that you can command people what to do.

This has to be the expression of a work of God in their hearts. But Paul wants to stimulate that work of God.

In chapter 8, verse 7, you find out that the Corinthian church was very proud of the fact that they excelled in everything.

[2 : 04] Among all the churches, they had the reputation for excellence in faith, in utterance, in knowledge, in earnestness, and in love for us.

All those things are quoted in verse 7 so that they were spiritually a high-powered church. But remember that it was to them that the letter was written, though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels and have not love, it profits me nothing.

Though I give my body to be burned. Though I sell all my goods. There was this appearance of a super spirituality, but underneath it were some problems.

And so Paul says that they were a very gifted church. And then with great diplomacy, in verse 11, he says to them, that you had a readiness in desiring, but it wasn't matched by your completing.

In other words, your heart's desire was in the right place, but you never got around to doing anything about it. And lots of Christians are in that position, that their heart's desire is right, but their ability to complete what their heart desires is somewhat lacking.

[3 : 36] He reminds them that it's not according to what somebody else says, but it's according to what they have that they should give.

Paul says in verse 12, if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what a man has, not according to what he has not.

In other words, Paul says, nobody is anticipating you to give what you haven't got. And he goes on to describe that and to describe how it's going to happen.

But then he finds that he has to send a man into Corinth who was, in a sense, Paul's get-it-done man. And his name was Titus.

And Titus was the fellow who seemed to be able to make things happen. He was sent, you find, to the island of Crete, in the letter to Titus, to make things happen.

[4 : 43] Here he was sent with Paul's heavy letter to the Corinthians to try and shape them up. And now he's left with them in order to deal with this problem of completing the collection.

The collection was a collection for the poor of Jerusalem. And they were to contribute to it. And Titus was sent in there to help them do it.

He was the man who was to get things done. So you have, on the one hand, a poverty-stricken church, gifted with a tremendous sense of liberality.

You have a more sophisticated and spiritually aware church, in many ways, that came behind because they didn't have this gift of liberality.

They weren't very generous. Now we come to the parish of St. John's. What have we got here?

Well, first we should make the appeal to students.

[5 : 53] But we can't because they all live in unheated, third-floor, one-room apartments, studying late into the night and living on very little.

So that's not much help. So we turn to the pensioners. And the pensioners are all subject to the terrible inroads of inflation.

So that's not much help. So we turn to the young families. And the young families have houses on which there are mortgages through which they are expecting the end to close in on them any day. And to make an appeal to them for support, you can see, is justifiably impossible. You can't appeal to the hustlers.

And the hustlers is not a word from the 20th century. It's basically a word from the book of the Proverbs who talks about the hustlers and how they set themselves out to get money and that their whole commitment and dedication is to get money.

[7 : 11] But the writer to the Proverbs says that they're in serious trouble. And he says, don't hustle to acquire wealth because when you see it, it's gone.

Suddenly it takes to itself wings flying like an eagle toward heaven. So people who are involved in making money fast are not people that are particularly given to generosity.

So the last people that we have to turn to are the wealthy. And the wealthy are on every donor's list from Newfoundland to British Columbia and beyond and are daily done for money by everybody in sight.

So what are we going to do? How are we going to cope with the life of our parents? Do we need a Titus to come in and spot what Paul describes as the desire of their hearts to give which has never been brought to completion?

Maybe that's the kind of thing we need. Maybe we need, and I hesitate to suggest this, but maybe we need stress testing to discover the abundance of joy so that God can give us that sense of joy in giving which he gave to the Macedonians.

[8 : 48] And that that comes through stress testing. And that may very well be the case because very often people who haven't been subjected to stress don't understand the joy and they're still trying to protect themselves against what in our society is inevitable.

And that is the stress which comes from all sorts of sources, but the stress which comes particularly from the fact of our being prepared to be disciples of Jesus Christ.

Do we need to close the gap between the readiness we have and the completion of this? Do we need to be told to give out of what we've got, not out of what we don't have?

All those are possibilities. But you can see that part of the fullness of the Christian life is this spirit of generosity.

And ultimately, our problems are not going to be solved by your giving to the church. The problem is only going to be solved by God giving to you such joy and such gifts of grace that you will respond compulsively almost because of your awareness.

[10 : 23] Now, Paul ends this little talk about the Corinthian church and about the Macedonian church with one of the most powerful statements in the New Testament.

When he says, You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich.

And really it's unmistakable that the model of Christian giving is Jesus Christ himself.

And the central remembrance of that is the service of Holy Communion as we come to receive that free gift of God which he gives to us in Christ.

under the signs of the bread and wine so that he gives us that gift. And what it says of him was that he, being rich, became poor.

[11 : 40] Most of us live, I think, with the delusion of seeking to become rich when spiritually, I think what Christ wants us to learn is to seek to become poor so that we have an ever-increasing

