

November 19, 2017

The Most Excellent Way

"All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need." Acts 2:44-45

"Now about the collection for God's people: Do what I told the Galatian churches to do. On the first day of every week, each one should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up so that when I come no collections will have to be made."

I Corinthians 16:1-2

"And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints. And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will."

II Corinthians 8:1-5

"Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each man should give as he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work."

II Corinthians 9:6-8

Since we are nearing the Christmas season it seems appropriate to share some thoughts about giving. The Apostle Paul writes about giving in both of his letters to the believers in Corinth. It is, I think, important to understand the context of what the Apostle writes about giving as we apply the principles he shares to our own efforts.

First, it is important to understand that Paul's *"collection for the saints"* was need driven. In Acts 11 while Paul and Barnabas were working with the believers in Antioch, a prophet named Agabus came there and foretold of an empire-wide famine that was soon to hit the Roman world. We are told in verse 28, ***"The disciples, each according to his ability, decided to provide help for the brothers living in Judea. This they did, sending their gifts to the elders by Barnabas and Saul."***

It is within this context that Paul writes to the believers in Corinth about giving a gift to the Judean believers who are experiencing some of the worst effects of the famine. I am convinced that in the same way our giving needs to be, first and foremost, needs driven. Yes, we need to pay for the upkeep of our building and yes we need to take care of our other financial responsibilities, but primarily we should be giving to support our ministries and our service to one another and to others.

It is also important to take, I believe, a lesson from the Macedonian churches to whom Paul writes, ***"Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity...they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability...they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of share in in this service..."*** These

believers were moved, because the Apostle says, "...*they gave themselves first to the Lord...*" to beg for the opportunity to share what they had with others.

Finally, it is this generosity of spirit which should, I am convinced, mark our giving. Yes, we should give regularly, but beyond that our giving should reflect our relationship with God. The more we depend on God to provide our needs as he has promised he will, the more compassionate and giving we can be. Giving is, and should always be, a very private function. Individually we have to decide what we can do and make the commitment to do it.

