

May 24, 2020

## Worship?

***"Therefore, I urge you brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is our reasonable act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind..."***  
Romans 12:1-2

***"Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each man should give what 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 about to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work."***  
II Corinthians 8:1-9:15

Unlike our singing and the Lord's Supper, there seems to be little disagreement about giving among churches. Nearly every church has some sort of collection of funds for its different ministries and for the support of the local congregation and most congregations 'pass the basket' at some time during their meeting.

It might be good, however, to consider the context of Paul's directions about giving, particularly in his second letter to the Corinthian believers. If we understand the time and circumstances under which the Apostle seems to write it might help us better understand the situation being addressed in the Apostle's writing.

In Acts, chapter eleven, Luke records a visit to the church in Antioch by some prophets from Jerusalem and one of them named Agabus foretold of a famine over the whole Roman world. Luke tells us that the disciples in Antioch determined to send what support they could to the believers in Judea where, apparently, the famine would strike the hardest. Paul and Barnabas were detailed to carry this gift to the elders in Jerusalem.

It would seem then, that the Apostle Paul made the continued collection of funds for this purpose a part of his missionary travels. This collection of funds from the different congregations seems to be what Paul is addressing in both of his letters to the believers in Corinth.

In the first letter he commands, ***"On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up so that when I come no collections have to be made..."*** (I Corinthians 16:1-2) In the earliest church in Jerusalem Luke tells us in Acts, chapter four, ***"All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had...there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales, and put it at the Apostle's feet and it was distributed to anyone as he had need."*** (Acts 4:32-35)

This sharing of possessions among believers was certainly common in the first century church so much so that the Macedonian churches ***"...urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service..."*** (II Corinthians 1:5) This common thread of generosity seems to run through all the early believers and reflects, the Apostle says, that ***"...they gave themselves first to the Lord..."***

The purpose of our congregational giving should, I believe, meet certain standards. First, I would suggest, that our congregational giving should be needs driven. Certainly there are some expenses that go with owning a meeting place and there expenses that go with supporting a

minister/pastor. But beyond these commitments there should be no unmet financial needs among a congregation of God's people.

The church should, in fact, be the first place we turn to when need arises, instead of the very last. Of course this would assume that we were willing to share our needs or burdens with one another, which all of us find very, very hard to do.

Ultimately our giving has to be, I believe, a clear reflection of the degree of our faith. The widow who gave all that she had completely trusted that God would provide for her needs. Others held some back because they were not confident that our Father would keep his promises. Our generosity then, is a direct reflection of the depth of our faith.

