

A.B. Simpson:

"Therefore, as you abound in everything, in faith and utterance and knowledge, and in all diligence and in your love to us, see that you abound in this grace also. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might be rich." 2 Cor. 8: 7, 9.

The eighth and ninth chapters of this Epistle unfold the Scriptural principles of Christian giving with a fulness and clearness nowhere else to be found.

I. The Place and Grace of Giving

The subject of giving to God is here placed on the very highest plane, not as a secondary and merely incidental quality and exercise of religious sentiment, but as one of the cardinal graces of the Christian life. He commences his argument by referring to the grace of God bestowed upon the churches of Macedonia as evidenced in their giving to God and their suffering brethren, and he places giving on the very same exalted level as faith, knowledge and love, so that one cannot be deficient in this grace without lacking the very essential qualities of the Christian character and life.

II. The Joy of Giving

But while it is one of the graces of the Spirit it is as free and spontaneous as every true fruit of the Spirit must be. It is not to be a mere matter of duty but of glad and heartfelt choice and even delight. "The abundance of their joy," he says, "and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality, praying us with much entreaty that we would receive the gift and take upon us the fellowship of the ministering to the saints." Ordinarily we expect to see a solicitor begging the people to give, but here we see the people begging with much entreaty that the apostle will accept their gifts and help them to distribute them to their needy brethren. Again in the ninth chapter and seventh verse we have a fine passage, "Every man according as he purposes in his heart so let him give, not grudgingly nor of necessity, for God loves a cheerful giver." It is a joy so great that it runs over in divine enthusiasm and hallelujahs of praise. Here we are distinctly taught that our giving is to be prompted not by our calculations of how little we can spare but by the impulses of our heart. Hence it is according to the purpose of the heart that our giving is to be gauged. The old proverbial exhortation that we should give until it hurts falls far short of the divine philosophy. Here we are taught that we should give until it doesn't hurt, and if we give enough to really reach and kill the core of our selfishness, it will slay the thing that hurts and make it a divine and eternal joy. The old farmer who gave five dollars, and after he had left the altar felt so bad and was so strongly tempted to go back and get his five dollars and give one for it, took the right course when he grasped his old selfish nature by the throat and marching boldly back said to the collector, "Here, give me that five dollars," and handed out a ten dollar bill instead, then turned on himself with a look of infinite scorn and triumph and exclaimed, "Now, old nater, squirm." He gave until it hurt and gave until it ceased to hurt. The people who give so grandly in these days for missions do it because of the overflowing joy that fills their hearts. It has ceased to be a sacrifice, for even sacrifice is swallowed up in love.

III. The True Secret of Giving

"They first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God." Personal consecration must ever be the spring both of beneficence and service. When we cease to own ourselves, then all the selfish bonds that hold us to our belongings are sweetly broken, and we rise into the glorious liberty of a life of unselfish love. It seems to be clearly taught in the Scriptures that God does not want either our gifts or our services until He has us. The Greek word for servant is a slave, and the idea suggested by it is, that God wants to own us wholly before He uses us. Just as in royal palaces and princely mansions every bit of table service and plate bears the monogram of the owner, so God wants His name stamped on every vessel that He employs in the heavenly household. Beloved, have you given yourself away to Jesus so completely that the gift carries with it all you call your own? Then you have entered into the riches of His infinite resources and it is easy to give anything to Him. Therefore, it is that in our Christian convocations we do not begin by asking people for their gifts but by leading them to an entire and joyful consecration of all to God, and then it is that these magnificent offerings follow, because they have first given themselves to the Lord and then their means follow as a matter of course. Oh, that the church of Christ would learn the true secret both of service and of beneficence. Then should it be true, "Your people shall be a freewill offering in the day of Your power." The day of His power would indeed come, and the world be speedily brought to Christ. No power less than love of Christ can lift a selfish church to the heights of sacrifice. Yonder iceberg floating in the Atlantic could not be lifted half an inch by all the hydraulic engines of the world, but yonder sun can lift it among the clouds in a little while by the power of

evaporation until it floats amid the blue depths of space in many tinted glory. The only magnet that can lift our hearts to God is the love of Christ, and, therefore:

IV. The Great Motive and Example of Christian Giving

"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might be rich." Here the Lord appears among His people as a great and infinite Giver. He gives not a part but the whole. He gives until He has exhausted all His riches and absolutely impoverished Himself, for we are told "That though He was rich, yet He became poor." He emptied Himself, He kept nothing back. He has nothing left but the heritage of His people. "The Lord's portion is His people." All else He has given away. There is no standard by which we can measure His infinite sacrifice and surrender. If a king should stoop to become a worm it would still be one creature becoming another, a lower gradation of the same class of being. But when Christ became a man and took upon Him the form of a created being He stepped out of His class completely and plunged to a depth of condescension which is absolutely without any standard of comparison. And He did this that we might be made rich and clothed with all the glory and blessing which He gave up that we might have it. With such an example and such an inheritance how shameful and how foolish that we should ever hesitate to let go the tinsel toys of earth for the infinite treasures of our inheritance in Him. It is only when we realize Christ's love to us that we truly learn and love to give. Let us reflect upon that love. What has He done for you? What has He not done? Has He redeemed you by His blood? Has He blotted out your guilt and sin? Has He brought peace to your troubled heart? Has He cleansed your soul from its pollution and its passions? Has He given you His Holy Spirit without measure? Has He surrounded you with the blessings of His providence? Has He blessed your home and filled your life with love and sweetness? Has He given you a thousand gifts of His providence and a thousand tokens of His care? Has He answered your prayers and filled your heart with joy and praise? Then beloved, you can say of the greatest and the most precious sacrifice that He asks from your love, as once a dear, dying woman whispered to us as we asked her if she could give up her husband, if she could give up her children, if she could give up even her life for Jesus. With a face lighted up with the glory of an opening heaven she stretched out her hands and cried over and over again, "It's little to give to Him, it's little to give to Him."

V. The Privilege of the Poor

We are beautifully taught in this passage that giving is not the prerogative of the rich alone but the joyful privilege of God's poor. There is a deep pathos in the second verse of this chapter, "how that in a great trial of affliction, the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality." They were not excused from giving because they were in circumstances not only of poverty but of indigence. On the contrary, this only enhanced the love, the sacrifice and the acceptability of their gifts. When God has some great work to do He generally calls for some noble act of sacrifice and for some gift that costs. And so when He would nourish and preserve the great prophet of fire, Elijah, during the days of famine, He sent him not to the court of Ahab, or even the friendly hospitality of Obadiah, his noble friend at court, but He sent him to a poor widow at Zarephath, and He suffered her to give her last morsel of meal and her last drop of oil for his support and then He multiplied the gift and made it sufficient to keep them both through all the days of famine.

So again, a little before His Passion, the blessed Master during His last visit to the temple sat down for a little over against the treasury to watch the gifts of the people as they passed by. He paid no attention while the rich and noble cast in their splendid offerings, but when a poor widow came up and put in all her living, His heart was so deeply stirred that He called His disciples and marked the act as an everlasting memorial and example. It was because it was her all and because she was so poor. Christ did not forbid the gift. He did not bid her to take it back, but He let it go, and He placed upon it a valuation which all the millions of earth could not outweigh.

Once, it is said, a splendid temple was built in Constantinople by the Emperor Theodosius. Millions of money and years of skill and toil were spent upon the cherished enterprise until at last it was ready for dedication. The architect had emblazoned upon its front the inscription, "This church Theodosius built for God," but when the curtain was removed that covered the facade, to the astonishment of the Emperor, the architect and the crowd of attendant princes and generals, the inscription read, "This church the widow Eudoxia built for God." The ceremonies were instantly stopped, and search was made for the presuming widow, but it was days before she could be found, and then it was discovered that she was a poor widow living far out in the suburbs who had done nothing for the splendid sanctuary but simply pull up the long grass from the roadside and spread it over the rough track to keep the beautiful stones as they were drawn to the temple from being scratched and effaced by the rocky road. The Emperor and his advisors when they found out all about her wisely concluded that she had not intruded, but that perhaps some angel unseen had changed that record in the night and put upon the

front of the splendid temple a little example of the records that God is writing every day in the books of eternity, when the gifts of the poor will be found to have outranked and outweighed the most splendid endowments of wealth and luxury whose gifts have cost them nothing.

Let us not forget that it is possible for the poorest to try to hide themselves behind their poverty. It was the man with the one talent that missed his crown. Because he had so little he did nothing. And it was the widow with the one farthing that won the Savior's love and the everlasting memorial of His approval.

VI. The Principle of Missionary Pledges

Is it right for Christians to make pledges in advance for their gifts to the cause of Christ, or should they only give of that which they actually have? Have we Scriptural authority for missionary pledges? It seems very clear from this passage that these believers at Corinth had arranged and planned for their giving a year in advance, and that the apostle had taken special pains in preparing their offering beforehand. In the tenth verse we read, "And herein I give my advice, for this is expedient for you who have begun before not only to do but also to be forward (or as the Greek might be translated) to will to do a year ago. Now therefore, perform the doing of it that as there was a readiness to will so there may be a performance also out of which you have. For if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that which a man has and not according to that which he has not." So again in the ninth chapter and the fifth verse he tells us that he "thought it necessary to exhort the brethren that they would go before unto you and make up your bounty whereof you had notice before (or as the margin expresses it), which has been so much spoken of before." It is very manifest from these passages that there had been much consideration, much preparation, much planning for this offering, and some of the most eminent brethren had even gone before to lay the matter fully upon the hearts of these disciples and make full preparation for their offering. For a whole year they had purposed to give these contributions, and now he appeals to them to make good their purpose and fulfill the performance of that which had been so heartily purposed. This surely is the very method which God has led us to adopt in these great offerings; namely, to lay upon the hearts and consciences of God's children, the claims of Christ, the needs of the world and the obligation of giving liberally to send the Gospel everywhere, and also encourage them to form the largest purposes and plans of giving and even sacrificing in the spirit of a generous love and a lofty faith, and then deliberately to go to work by labor, prayer and sacrifice to gather the means thus pledged day by day until the purpose shall have become an actual performance. There is something in such a principle and system fitted to give an inspiring motive and a glorious incentive to our whole business and life and to put into even our secular pursuits and daily callings a sacredness and sweetness that no language can express. As we go back to our homes and occupations we are carrying on our business for Christ and the world's evangelization, and we are encouraged to ask tenfold blessing on all our investments and enterprises and to throw our hearts into our work with a gladness and an energy inspired by the high purpose for which we are laboring. Our business becomes not a selfish struggle for existence but a noble partnership with God for the advance of His kingdom and the spread of His glorious Gospel.

At the same time we are faithfully reminded in these passages that the obligation of paying these pledges is as sacred as that of making them. "Now, therefore, perform the doing of it, that, as there was a readiness to will so there may be a performance also out of that which you have." But even here there is the utmost tenderness and consideration for those who have failed to fulfill their well meaning pledges. They are not to be discouraged and humiliated if they have really done it in uprightness of spirit, for God does not press us for more than we are able to do. If we have really done our best He will take the will for the deed, "For if there be first a willing mind it is accepted according to that which a man has, and not according to that which he has not."

VII. Proportionate Giving

"For I mean not that other men be eased and you burdened, but by an equality that now at this time your abundance may be a supply for their want that their abundance also may be a supply for your want, that there may be equality; as it is written, he that had gathered much had nothing over, and he that had gathered little had no lack." (2 Cor. 8: 13-15.) Here we have God's message to the rich just as we had it a little while ago to the poor. How often it happens that when our means are limited our hearts are large, and when our resources increase our desire shrinks. "How is it, madame," said the minister to a lady who had come into the possession of a great fortune, "that you used to give so much when you were poor, and now that you are so rich you give so little?" "Ah," she answered, "when I had the penny purse, I had a guinea heart. Now that I have the guinea purse I find that I have the penny heart."

Beloved, have your gifts to the Lord been increasing with your income? Has He shared proportionately the fruits of His blessing upon your business? "Will a man rob God? But you have robbed Me in tithes and

offerings."

The Bible has much to say of God's estimate of the gifts of the wealthy. When Moses received the offerings of the nobles of Israel they brought their wealth munificently, and the longest chapter in the Bible is devoted to the account of their gifts (Numbers 7) , and at the close of that day of noble giving God was pleased to manifest Himself in a marvelous way in the tabernacle, "And Moses heard the voice of One speaking unto him from off the mercy seat from between the two cherubims." Again in the twenty-ninth chapter of first Chronicles we have an account of the splendid offerings of David and his princes for the building of the temple. David's personal contributions amounted to over eighty millions of dollars on that one day, and the gifts of his nobles were over one hundred and twenty millions, and this was three thousand years ago, in what we are pleased to call the age of semi-barbarism. When Jesus Christ was crucified it was a rich man who gave Him a tomb, and when the infant church was organized the wealth of Barnabas was exchanged for the commission of an evangelist and the glorious work of planting Christianity throughout the world. The rich men of our day think nothing of investing millions in a new railway or a great trust. When will the day come that will show us the spectacle of a consecrated capitalist taking up a whole nation and providing for its evangelization. What a sublime sight it will be for the Christian men whom God has so splendidly enriched to come to the leaders of our great evangelistic movements and say, one by one, "I will give the Gospel to Annam." "I will evangelize Cuba." "I will send a hundred missionaries to the Philippines," until the whole world shall be parceled out for God as the commercial and political ambitions of our age are parceling it out for their own selfish aggrandizement.

VIII. Administration of Gifts

The administration of the gifts of God's people is a matter that should receive the most careful consideration from those entrusted with the executive work of the Church and her missionary plans. The apostle was most careful about this, "avoiding," he says, "that no man should blame us in this abundance which is administered by us providing for things honest, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men." Therefore, it is most important that the business of our missionary societies and Christian churches should be carefully and faithfully performed.

1. It stirs up others to give (2 Cor. 9: 2). "Your zeal has provoked very many." There is no doubt that the noble gifts at a great convention stimulate a vast increase of missionary liberality on the part of other churches and religious societies.

2. The blessing of God upon our temporal affairs is the certain fruit of our giving. "He who sows sparingly shall reap also sparingly, and he who sows bountifully shall reap also bountifully, and God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you always having all-sufficiency in all things may abound unto every good work." (2 Cor. 9: 6, 8). There is no doubt that this passage refers directly to temporal blessing and God's promise to prosper us when we give liberally that we may be able to give more.

3. Our giving enables us to have a partnership in the work of others and to sow the seed of the Gospel in fields which we personally could never visit. The men whom we support are simply the bearers of our own precious seed and "multiply our seed sown and increase the fruits of our righteousness." The businessman who never can visit China or Africa may be able to preach the Gospel around the world through the lips and hands and feet that he sends around the world. Some day groups of souls will meet him in the great harvest and be counted the fruit of his own direct ministry. If men could only realize in life what they will realize so fully after death, the joy of greeting in the heavenly world the souls whom they have brought home through their loving gifts, or on the other hand the anguish of seeing the means they might have left for God wasted by selfish heirs and turned into an eternal curse through their unfaithfulness of the disposition of the means which God had entrusted to them.

4. A great tribute of thanksgiving will be brought to God and a great cloud of prayer will ascend to the throne for you through the love that your generosity inspires and the blessing that your help shall bring. And it may be that in the coming years the blessing will flow back to you and God will lay upon these very hearts a prayer for you in some hour when your heart is sinking and your life is in need and peril, and by and by in the heavenly world Christ will show you how you mutually ministered the one to the other, while the glory redounded to Jesus' name?