

In Spirit and in Truth: Rooted and Established

Freedom Church of Denton

Giving

Volume 1, Lesson 11

- **In Devotion** (feel free to highlight, underline, and scribble notes. Take your time, working through the following material over the course of the next week...it would be better for you to get through one sentence with understanding than the whole lesson with no understanding!)

And all who believed were together and had all things in common, and they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing their proceeds to all, as any had need
Acts 2:44-45

One of the clearest proofs of a genuine move of the Spirit of God is the magnanimity of the affected community with its material possessions. Jesus said, “where your treasure is there will your heart be also!” This community’s giving was certainly magnanimous and was reflective of the generosity of the Spirit that was inspiring it.

That these were exceptional times in the annals of church history has less to do with the fact of their unrepeatability than they do the fact of the exceptional quality of the saints’ faith. A faith and an ethic that are as much to be emulated as they are to be envied. These early saints had a faith that was holy, and a faith that worked its way all the way from the abstract and ethereal to the intensely practical realm of personal economics. It was James who said that “if you see your brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food and you say to them, go in peace, be warm and filled, without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? Can this kind of faith save him?”

These saints’ exceptional and saving faith was due, in no small part, to their nearness to the glory, nearness to the model, and nearness to the superlative example of Christ’s perfect benevolence that all believers are called to emulate. Nearness in terms of faith more than mere chronology. For no one had been so separated from earthly gain and reward, so surrendered to an invisible kingdom than Jesus, the Son of Man who had no place to lay his head. No one had needed so little of the comforts that this world had to offer than the one that was born in a manger. No one had so successfully chastised the demands of the flesh than the one that had fasted for forty days in the wilderness. No one had so trusted in the provision of his heavenly Father than the one that had depended on the provision of a tiny band of women for his sustenance. No one had given so much for the least of these than the one that fed the 5000. No one had given more of himself than the one that gave of his own blood unto death, while the beneficiaries themselves scattered to the darkened recesses of cowardice and unbelief. And no group has perhaps perceived this more clearly, and put this into practice more fully, than the primitive

church.

With hardly a thought, under the compulsion of divine love, power, and compassion, they were together (without division) and had all things in common (nothing belonging to themselves). They were selling their possessions and distributing the proceeds to the needy as quickly, fully, and affectionately as a mother does as she cares for the cuts and scrapes of her tender children. Their response was much like that of the human body in dealing with the injury of one of its parts. Such as when the hand is burned, how quickly the entire body mobilizes to find the remedy and relief. The eyes search for the water while the legs run to it. The lungs supply the necessary oxygen as the head coordinates the entire affair. And finally, the arm plunges the hand in it as the other arm and hand apply the balm.

What was occurring here has been the dream of every utopianist and communist that has ever lived, and yet with a subtle but profound difference. This phenomenon had not been instituted and implemented by a human government under compulsion of the sword. This was the result of no human legislation. It had been birthed from the law and power of eternal love. And lest we are tempted to think that their example is too lofty for us, or that we are separated by too much time, or maybe born into the wrong time or the wrong place, I would remind you that they were mere men, with the same nature as ours. You and I have the same Holy Spirit that they had and that was ultimately the secret of their success. If we want to strive toward the same results we must strive toward the same quality of heart and the same quality of faith.

When a community of faith is touched so powerfully by the Holy Spirit, drinks so deeply of the grace, mercy, and freedom that comes from the gift of salvation, and unifies so intimately in personal and corporate devotion, it cannot help but respond from a heart of supernatural gratitude that manifests itself in extravagant giving. And such was the example of the early church.

Again, this New Covenant giving originates from the heart and not from a law. It's more about gratitude and love than it is a legislated tax. A tenth (tithe) is a great start, but giving cheerfully and sacrificially out of our substance is better. A widow's mite is to be commended more than a wealthy man's millions rendered in eye-service. A law would only serve to limit the offering that the saved, set apart, Spirit-filled heart wants to give. This is a new day, a new covenant, and a new standard. The law is love - the law of the Spirit of life, the law of Christ. Those touched by Christ's sacrifice want to give it all and give it freely, not under compulsion. They understand their responsibility and delight in exercising it. And such was the example of the Acts 2 church.

They laid it at the apostles' feet to be distributed accordingly. They were the elders that were given charge to oversee the business of the church, albeit a holy business. Their charge was to the household of faith first and to the lost second. We, as a church have interests. Interests from within and interests from without. Ministers must eat from the fields in which they are laboring. They are called to be shown double-honor, especially those that preach. There are works of compassion that require funding, such as the care

of bona fide widows and orphans. Some churches are to be “robbed” that less fortunate churches may find reprieve. The gospel should be advanced in fields that lack a witness and the poor should be remembered. All these things require mammon. Praise God that he provides seed to the sower and that he allows us to participate in his plans and purposes!

The early church was quick to rise to the occasion. Their example no doubt continued and echoed from Jerusalem all the way to Macedonia that would become the preeminent example of giving in the New Testament church. They, in their extreme poverty, overflowed in a wealth of generosity, giving according to their means, and beyond their means, of their own accord, begging earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints. They had learned valuable lessons of what it means to walk as a disciple of Christ in the area of their finance.

Biblical stewardship is a critical and yet fundamental lesson for the new believer. It allows him to become like the Father in the most treasured areas of his life. We learn not take things for granted, how to work with our own hands and not to steal. We learn the value of not expecting something for nothing, becoming givers and not takers, lenders and not borrowers.

Biblical giving requires faith because it defies our nature and sometimes even our rational sense. It requires us to give of our best, to give of our first, to give off the top. It requires us to acknowledge God in the blessing of financial prosperity, to seek his direction in all we do and all we are. Sometimes it is counter-intuitive. It requires the letting go of the security that we find in monetary gain and material things. It requires us to prioritize according to heaven’s values. It requires us to trust that God truly does supply seed to the sower.

Our giving should be cheerful. It should be regular. It should be systematic. It should be thoughtful and prayerful. It should be deliberate and proportionate. It should be accountable. It should be sacrificial, compassionate, spiritual, and even miraculous. It should demand more from us than we are comfortable with. It should be the object as well as the exercise of our faith.

New believer, put God to the test. Put the enemy to flight! Stewarding and managing God’s property and resource towards kingdom ends. For where your treasure is there will your heart be also! Nothing betrays the values, the wisdom, the motive of the heart more than a thorough examination of the ledger of your life. Do you plan? Do you give intentionally, thoughtfully, according to godly priorities? Do you save? Do you recognize the source of your wealth? All these questions are easily *divined* in a simple consideration of the flow of your pocketbook.

Saint do not neglect the gift of growing as a disciple of Christ in the wonderful pleasure of faith-oriented giving. The one that neglects giving when the means are minimal will no doubt neglect giving when the means are increased. It’s not a question of means as

much as it is a question of the heart!

- **In Meditation**

As you consider the following references, first pray and invite the Holy Spirit to come and teach you as only the Teacher and Comforter can. Admit to him your complete inability to understand anything spiritual apart from his grace and illumination. Then consider each of these verses, taking notes on anything that the Spirit brings to your attention; perhaps a **Sin** to confess, a **Promise** to claim, an **Example** to follow, a **Command** to obey, or a **Seed** of righteousness to sow. If successful, you are learning to read the Word of God with your **S.P.E.C.S.** on!

Matthew 6:19-21 _____

According to this passage, what values should inform the priorities of our personal economics? What should be our priorities? And how does our check ledger reveal the priorities of our heart? _____

Malachi 3:6-15 _____

How was Israel robbing God? Be specific _____

What was the consequence? What was the remedy? _____

What did God promise if they were obedient? _____

2 Corinthians 8-9 _____

Why were the Macedonians held up as an example to the Corinthians of giving? _____

What were God's promises to the one who sows? _____

What kind of heart is the Lord looking for in the one who sows? _____

Luke 21:1-4 _____

How has the widow's example become instructive to all believers? _____

Proverbs 3:9-10 _____

What are first fruits and how does their offering relate to the heart of the giver? _____

What did God promise to the giver of first fruits? _____

1 Corinthians 16:1-4 _____

What were Paul's specific admonitions to the Corinthians for collections to be made? _____

What does the phrase "as he may prosper" suggest? _____

How does Paul's admonition relate to the idea of first fruits? _____

Acts 4:32-35 _____

What does this passage suggest about church leadership's role in the administration of funds? _____

James 2:14-18 _____

What is the relation between faith and action? _____

Galatians 6:10 _____

What place should the body of Christ occupy in our giving? _____

2 Corinthians 11:8 _____

What do you think Paul meant by his statement here? _____

1 Timothy 5:16-18 _____

What are Paul's specific admonitions in this passage? _____

Galatians 2:10 _____

What was James, Cephas, and John's specific request of Paul? Why was their interest? _____

Romans 13:8 _____

What is Paul's recommendation in this verse? _____

1 Timothy 6:2-10 _____

What should the attitude of the child of God be regarding money? How does this relate to ambition as it relates to money? _____

Matthew 6:25-34 _____

Finally, what does this passage speak regarding our economic ambitions, the needs of humanity, and the place and promise of God regarding all the above? _____

In Application

Break into groups of 2-3 and discuss the principles above and what areas are going well in your life and which areas need attention. Try to list 3 adjustments that you will make moving forward. Your goals should be S.M.A.R.T., i.e., specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and timely:

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)

In Prayer

God, thank you for the opportunity to worship you in the stewardship of the wealth that you have entrusted to me. Help me to be as selfless and trusting as are the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and the example that Jesus has set for me in the entirety of his life and practice. Thank you for the power of your Holy Spirit and the gift of faith that enables me to trust you as you teach me to give as freely, cheerfully, and abundantly as did your Son and the excellent example of many in the early church. I want to be a child that has learned to seek the kingdom of God first, above all passing earthly concerns, storing up for myself treasures in heaven, that will never perish, spoil, nor fade. In Jesus' name. Amen.