

Principles For The Offering
II Corinthians 8:10-15

INTRODUCTION

Giving is a vital part of the Christian faith. Since it began with God's great love gift, it has been assumed that those who follow Him will be givers.

The background of Second Corinthians eight and nine was a special offering. The Apostle Paul had made an appeal to the churches of the Roman world for a special offering for the suffering saints in Jerusalem. Great poverty and need had come upon these Jewish believers. It may have been the result of some natural happenings, or it may have been the consequence of their commitment to Christ. Evidence seems to be that both were involved. Paul felt the Gentile Christians were responsible for giving assistance to these believers. He writes this portion of the letter to both to encourage the offering and to give some basic guidelines for the believers to follow. He was concerned about "how" the people gave as well as "what" they gave.

Ye have been challenged by a special offering too. After the council with our Church Council and deacons, I issued the challenge that we receive a special offering for some urgent needs. We have set a minimum goal of \$500,000. The needs are three-fold. Our mission church on Indiana Avenue urgently needs added educational space. They have been appealing to us for months for help. They cannot acquire such a building without our help, and our budget giving just does not give us the funds with which to help them. The only way we can aid them is through a special offering. We need at least \$100,000 for this.

Our indebtedness is also a challenge to us. Even though we are caring for it adequately through our budget, two factors seem to make it a wise decision to pay it off. First, is the relatively high interest that we are having to pay on most of it. It will mean a large savings in interest. But second, it will clear the dust in preparation for some bold steps into the future. I sincerely believe that God is seeking to open a door to a new day for FBC. It will help to have all obligations from the past behind us. This will require approximately \$225,000.00.

The rest of the challenge relates to many unmet needs in our facilities. We are stewards of these beautiful buildings. We need to be doing some things to improve them, and some things to maintain them. Surely, this will be pleasing to the Lord since the buildings are here to honor Him and to serve His people.

How shall we receive such a challenging offering? Paul sets forth three principles that we need to follow.

I. WE SHOULD FOLLOW THE PRINCIPLE OF ABILITY

This is a basic principle set forth in the Scriptures repeatedly. God never asks for more than you are able to give. Evidently, the Corinthian Church had made a bold beginning in the offering. They had been the first to bring the offering and to show a desire. "Last year you were the first not only to give but also to have

the desire to do so." But, for some reason they had become negligent in completing the offering. So, Paul gives this word, "Now finish the work, so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it, according to your means." The literal translation is "out of what ye have." This agrees with the instructions Paul wrote to them in the first letter, "Now concerning the collection for the saints upon the first day of the week let everyone of you lay by him in store, as' God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come." (I Cor. 16:1-2) God's guidelines calls on us to give according to what we have.

There is a word of caution here however. We should not limit our assessment of what we have. This is not to be limited to cash on hand, but should also include for the construction of whatever we have of value. When Moses took the offering for the tabernacle, those recently released slaves were really short on cash. But they did have things of value. The women had gold jewelry that had been taken from the Egyptians on their departure. They had some precious stones, and things that they had made with their hands. It was out of this that they brought their offering. This same thing was true of Mary who gave her alabaster box and the lad who gave his lunch. If we follow this principle in the offering before us, there might be some unusual gifts given. Especially, if we add to it the next principle.

II. WE SHOULD FOLLOW THE PRINCIPLE OF WILLINGNESS

This again focuses upon "how" we give more than upon "what" we give. The Apostle states this principle like this: "For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what he does not have." Paul is commending the eagerness and the willing mind that the Corinthians had revealed earlier.

We need to understand this principle. The opposite of this willingness is reluctance, begrudging. God does not want the gifts that are brought under pressure or out of a sense of duty. He wants those gifts that come out of a willing heart. We want to follow this principle in this offering.

The greatest example of this principle found in Scripture was at Mt. Sinai. Moses was instructed to receive an offering for the construction of the tabernacle. He gave to people a list of the things that would be needed to complete this sacred project. With the list he gave one specific word of instruction it was to be brought with a willing heart. "Everyone who is willing is to bring to the Lord an offering." (Ex. 35:5) Like us, they had reason to be willing. They had recently been delivered from Egyptian bondage. Furthermore, even more recently they had experienced the mercy of God when they had showed themselves before the golden calf. With this fresh experience of the mercy of God, most of them had willing hearts.

A most unusual thing happened in connection with that offering. Even though the circumstances of those people would discourage your expectations, they gave so much that Moses found it necessary to stop the giving. They gave more than was

needed. "And so the people were restrained from bringing more, because what they already had was more than enough to do all the work." (Ex. 36:7)

How could we follow this principle? Let me make a suggestion. Give careful consideration to the need. Give careful thought to the goodness of the Lord upon your life. Then invite the Lord to reveal to you what He would have you give to this offering. When He has impressed you, then act on it. Surely, you can do with a willing heart whatever the Lord puts in your heart. This means then that our offering will be the composite of our obedience to the Lord. This is the principle of willingness.

III. WE SHOULD FOLLOW THE PRINCIPLE OF EQUALITY IN THE OFFERING.

Paul states this third principle rather clearly. "Our desire is not that others be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality. At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. Then, there will be equality, as it is written, "He that gathered much did not have too much, and he that gathered little did not have too little (vs. 13-15).

Evidently, the Corinthian Church was knowing a measure of prosperity while the Jerusalem saints were hungry. They were to give so that things might be equalized between the two. Behind this passage is a suggestion that there is a rhythm to the economic patterns of the world. The strong possibility seems to be that one table will be turned some day and the Corinthians will be aided by the people of Judea. We prosperous Americans should remember this possibility as we relate to the needs of our world. God does not mean for the Judeans to become dependent upon the Gentile Christians, but He does want there to be a voluntary equalization through giving. This means that if I have more than I need for my basic necessities, I should seriously consider whether or not there may be a place where some of the extra is needed.

This is the principle set forth in the quotation from Exodus. When you gathered more than your daily need of manna, you were to divide it with someone who did not gather enough for their needs. You must not attempt selfishly to hoard it. The principle is that of equal sacrifice, if not equal gifts.

CONCLUSION:

We have three weeks to prepare for the offering. I sincerely believe that God wants this to be a fresh spiritual experience for each member of this fellowship. It will be if we translate into action the principles we are finding in this text. Are you ready to follow His leadership?