

FOLLOWING AN EXAMPLE OF CHEERFUL GIVING

By Terry Jones, October 26, 2008

Christ's Church at Tiffin, Ohio

2 Corinthians 8:1-6

CENTRAL SERMON THEME – Following the example of the giving of New Testament churches will make us cheerful givers.

INTRO. - Did you see the program on TV about the Duggar family? Jim Bob and Michelle now have seventeen children and are pregnant with the eighteenth child. The Duggars live in a 7,000 square foot house. Their transportation is a bus. The TV program showed the family grocery shopping. In one month the Duggars spend \$6,000 just for food. A small family costs big money. Imagine what a family of 18 children would cost. This church is a big family. We are a family of about 400 children. We have expenses in providing for the spiritual needs of our big family.

We leaders wish to be open and honest with you about the financial department of the church. Unless the power company has changed its policy, the electricity for this building is not free. The propane and natural gas to heat these facilities is not free. Materials for our discipleship small groups are not free. Staff members comprise a major expense for the church's budget. Both part-time and fulltime staff have not found free groceries, free gas for their vehicles, free medical care, free homes, free transportation, free housing, etc. On behalf of the staff we thank you for your provisions for us. Our church family costs money to maintain and grow.

Our weakened economy will test us in the future. Does the preaching and teaching of the faith deserve a priority in our finances? Do we surrender to the pressures of budget shortfalls? We can face this financial challenge with a spirit of determination instead of retreat and defeatism. Jesus said, "What does a man profit if he gains the whole world and loses his soul?" According to Jesus nothing compares to the value of your soul. Consider how much God values us. Jesus left Heaven to live on our planet. He lived a perfect life and died on the cross. Why? Jesus is not just a martyr for the cause of justice. Jesus is not a victim of a corrupt political and judicial system. Jesus came to give us the hope of salvation.

We as leaders of this church believe we must plan to meet the challenge of next year's budget. We have not met our church budget this year. The good news is that the giving in 2008 is slightly above the giving of 2007. We ask you to respond to the financial challenge before us during the coming year. We are so confident you will respond we are not only inviting your involvement but we are challenging each other to be cheerful givers.

We learn quicker through following an example. We learn to talk from hearing others talk. We learn to sing by hearing others sing. We learn to drive by observing and practicing how others drive. Be careful about who you imitate. We learn to work by watching others work. We learn to give from the example of others who overcome major obstacles to support God's work.

Paul the Apostle feels a deep compassion for the original church back in Jerusalem. The church became a powerful movement among the Jews who were visiting on Pentecost in about 30 AD. Some of these early church people gave everything they owned to the church. About twenty five years had passed since the mother church was established. During that period of time, a persecution struck the church like a hurricane strikes a community. A hurricane devastates its victims emotionally and financially. Persecution struck the first church driving people into poverty. A famine also hits that area. As a result Christians in Jerusalem became destitute. Paul appeals to the non-Jewish churches to support fellow Christians in Jerusalem.

Paul writes to the church in Corinth, Greece, to solicit their help. His appeal is the example of the churches in Macedonia, a region north of Corinth. The people of Macedonia were also very poor from a persecution. Though they were very poor the Macedonians gave money to the church in Jerusalem. Paul appeals to the Corinthians, who were more prosperous than the Macedonians, with the example of churches in Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea. I present his appeal to you.

I. GIVE FROM THE GRACE OF GOD, Vv. 1, 2

A. Paul - We wish to make known to you the grace of God in the churches in Macedonia.

1. The churches of Macedonia received the grace of God.

2. The letter to the Philippians speaks of the grace of God, 2:5-11.

Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, *and* being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

3. Illus. - When Billy Graham was driving through a small southern town, he was stopped by a policeman and charged with speeding. Graham

admitted his guilt, but was told by the officer that he would have to appear in court. The judge asked, "Guilty, or not guilty?" When Graham pleaded guilty, the judge replied, "That'll be ten dollars -- a dollar for every mile you went over the limit." Suddenly the judge recognized the famous minister. "You have violated the law," he said. "The fine must be paid--but I am going to pay it for you." He took a ten dollar bill from his own wallet, attached it to the ticket, and then took Graham out and bought him a steak dinner! "That," said Billy Graham, "is how God treats repentant sinners!" That is God's grace. *Progress Magazine*, December 14, 1992. There is always the danger of trivializing a gift because we did not earn it. Salvation is free.

B. Paul used "grace" to describe the Macedonian churches' giving.

1. Illus. - The church at Philippi sent money to Paul while he was in prison in Rome. At other times this church supported Paul in his ministry. The short book of Philippians is Paul's thank-you letter sent in gratitude to this church.
2. The Philippians' gift had deep meaning because these Christians who supported Paul were very poor.
 - a. These churches were very poor maybe from persecution and opposition.
 - b. Illus. - Gifts from poor people humble us. A poor widow in the church in Suriname is a faithful Christian woman who helped start the church. She lives in a rented shack attached to similar buildings in a poor section. She earns money by cleaning houses for people with a salary of about five to ten US dollars a day. She gives one tenth of all she makes. On one of my visits she gave me a gift with a nice letter of thanks to communicate to the supporters. That gift cost her about two days of work. I imagine she did not eat for those two days.
3. This Philippian church gave to the suffering people of Jerusalem though they needed help.

C. Though they gave out of affliction and poverty, they gave with joy.

1. These people in poverty found joy in giving to others.
2. The amount we give is secondary to the attitude we have in giving.
3. Illus. - You receive a gift from a family member or friend. When you receive the gift the giver says to you, "I want you to have this gift. I must tell you I spent a big amount on this gift. I really do not want to give you this gift. It makes me very sad to give up all the money it cost me. Enjoy your gift." If you accepted the gift, you would not be happy with it.

D. Applic. - These Macedonian Christians were wealthy with generosity which made them happy.

1. God's generous gift of His grace and mercy is our motivation to give.
2. Give from the grace of God.

II. GIVE OF YOUR OWN CHOICE, V. 3

A. Paul testified they gave of their own choice.

1. These believers gave of their ability.
 - a. Giving of one's ability is giving from what they now possess.
 - b. They gave from some of what they had stored up for their future use.
2. Many of them gave beyond their ability having little or no money.

B. No one manipulated or tricked them into giving money to the poor in Jerusalem.

1. Paul first refused their offer to give to the poor in Jerusalem.
2. To Paul the Macedonian Christians needed help and should not be giving to others.
3. Paul agreed they could help with his campaign.
4. Example - At the Jews Feast of Purim there is a regulation which says that, however poor a man is, he must find someone poorer than himself and give him a gift. It is not always those who are most wealthy who are most generous; often those who have least to give are the most ready to give. A common saying is, "It is the poor who help the poor," because they know what poverty is like.

C. Paul's refusal to accept support from the Corinthians may have fed vicious rumors that he schemed to steal some of the money from the funds he collected.

1. Paul had people in place to insure the funds were handled to remove any suspicions he was dishonest.
2. When Paul arrived in Jerusalem to present these offerings he was arrested, spent two years in jail in Caesarea by the Med. Sea, and later taken to a jail in Rome.
3. To insure integrity in handling church funds, we have two or three people count our offerings, a Finance Team looks at the finances monthly and the Elders look over the record of giving and spending each month.
4. A summary of those records are posted for you to see in the Foyer.

D. We choose to support God's work on earth.

1. Our nation's founders wisely chose to disconnect the government from collecting taxes to support churches.
2. I am pleased our taxes do not support our churches.

III. GIVE FROM AN EAGER HEART, V. 4

- A. A church bulletin said, "The Lord loves a cheerful giver. He also accepts from a grouch."
- B. The Macedonians begged Paul to be able to give.
1. V. 4 - Begging us for the favor of participating in the support of the saints.
 2. We want to pattern ourselves after the church in Philippi.
- C. After much urging Paul agreed for them to help.
1. We are eager to give for a great cause.
 2. If every person in the US could give \$100 to permanently cure all kinds of cancer, would you give? Would you give \$100 to permanently cure heart disease?
 3. Our cause is great; build a healthy faith as we are discipled to become like Jesus Christ, witness to those who will not go to Heaven unless we lead them to a personal, lifelong relationship with Jesus Christ, and to support mission efforts in various places in the world, and help the needy in our community.
 4. Illus. - The town's richest man asked the minister after the Sunday service, "Why does everyone call me cheap and stingy? I've told everyone I'm leaving half my money to the church when I die." The minister nodded. "It reminds me of the story about the pig and the cow. The cow was much loved by the farmer and his neighbors, while the pig was not popular at all. The pig could not understand this and asked the cow about it. 'How come you are so well liked, cow? People say you're good because you give milk and butter and cream every day. But I give more than that. From me they get bacon and ham; they even pickle my feet. Yet I'm not popular and you are. Why do you think that is?' The cow looked down at the pig and answered, 'Perhaps it's because I give while I'm still alive.'"

IV. GIVE YOURSELF FIRST TO GOD, Vv. 5, 6

- A. They first gave themselves to God.

1. We have confused the issue of giving to God.
2. We think we can substitute our giving for ourselves.
3. Phil. 4:17 - I do not seek a gift but the profit to your account.
4. If we have not given ourselves to God, he has no record of what we do.

B. Illus. - The church service turned into a humorous event when the offering plates were passed one Sunday. The minister told everyone to give something that day as the offering was being received. If you cannot give, give God yourself. A family with little funds had started attending with children who did not understand all the church language. One of the boys asked his father for some money to put into the offering. His father had nothing to give him. This child placed the offering plate on the floor. With everyone watching him, he stood in the offering plate. The family was embarrassed but the preacher understood the little boy. He said to the people this child told us he had given himself to God.

CONCLUSION - Bob Russell, who for forty years ministered at Southeast Christian Church in Louisville, tells a story of being with the billionaire, Paul Meyer. Paul has paid for the college education of over 500 young people. One day he and his accountant were traveling in the south when they entered a construction zone. A young woman, one of the construction crew, stopped him as the flagger. Meyer started a conversation with the young lady. "Why are you working for the construction company?" She answered, "I am trying to save some money to go to college." He asked, "What are your dreams?" She said her goal was to become a nurse. Meyer gave her his card with this invitation, "I have helped many young people go to college, give me a call." The months went by before she called Paul Meyer. When Bob Russell met Paul Meyer, he and his accountant were rejoicing over the fact that this former construction worker had now graduated from college with a nursing degree. What if we could help people as he did!

We are helping people. You help the young people learn about Jesus Christ in Cx2, WAVE, discipleship groups for our youth. You are sponsoring us when we counsel young couples who are getting married, comforting and praying for the sick in the hospital, witnessing to people interested in Christ, Small Groups where transformation is taking place, and other ministries of this church. Thanks for your work.