

HOW TO GIVE MONEY AWAY

by D.A. Carson

Second Corinthians 8-9 are a mine of godly counsel on how to give money away, and on how to ask believers to give money away. Perhaps by “priming the pump” with a few observations I may encourage you to meditate on these chapters at length.

1. *We must give ourselves before we give our money.* Rather unexpectedly (considering how young in the faith they were), the Macedonians first gave themselves to the Lord, committed themselves to Paul, and then gave generously within this framework (8:5). To give money without first giving yourself to the Lord sounds too much like a deed of self-righteousness that is meant to cover up a want of repentance.

2. *Christians who vow to give such-and-such should keep their promises.* The Lord destroys those who tell lies (Ps. 5:6). If the Corinthians indicated “last year” that they were eager to participate in this offering for the poor brothers and sisters in Judea (8:10), now they should get on and finish the job (8:11; 9:5). Of course, Paul is the first to recognize that sometimes one’s circumstances change. God takes that into account (8:12). But never use God’s gracious understanding as an excuse to cover up the subtle shift from initial enthusiasm to stingy performance.

3. *Christians ought to share with believers who have less.* This produces an appropriate “equality” (8:13-14) – not the kind of “equality” that is imposed by dictators and a corrupt bureaucracy, but the kind of equality that is nothing less than the mark of the Christian (John 13:34-35). Ideally this is done unself-consciously: the “sheep” who support the least of the Lord’s brothers are rather surprised on the last day when the Master says they have really cared for Him (Matt. 25:31-46). If the Gospel is having its proper course in their lives, love for brothers and sisters in Christ will inevitably seek out ways to help them.

4. *Christians who give money and Christians who administer such money must do so with transparent integrity.* That is why Paul sends not just one emissary, but three—and at least one of the three was chosen by the churches, so that no one could legitimately suggest that all the messengers were Paul’s stooges (8:16-19, 22). Paul’s motives have compelling relevance in our day: “We want to avoid any criticism of the way we administer this liberal gift. For we are taking pains to do what is right, not only in the eyes of the Lord but also in the eyes of men” (8:21). In many areas of Christian service it is enough to have the Lord’s approval, no matter what the world thinks. But in fiscal matters, where charges of corruption can do almost as much damage as corruption, we must be clean before God, and we must be seen by the world to be clean.

5. *Talking in the right way about the gifts that other believers have given may stir up some*

to godly emulation. Of course, it is possible to talk about gift-giving in an ungodly way: triumphalistically, perhaps, or boastfully, or manipulatively. But there are appropriate ways of talking about gifts. Paul tells the Corinthians about the extraordinary sacrifice and cheerful giving of the Macedonians (8:1 ff.), clearly with the aim of fostering the same excellence in the Corinthians (8:7). Once the Corinthians have come on board the plan with such enthusiasm (sometime “last year”), Paul tells the Macedonians about it to encourage them (9:1 ff.).

6. *In the case of large gifts, it is wise to plan ahead.* That is one reason why Paul is writing to the Corinthians: he does not want Titus to show up on their doorstep only to discover that they have forgotten about their pledge. They might scramble to pull something together, but almost certainly with resentment. A little planning and their donation will be “ready as a matter of generosity and not as a grudging obligation” (9:5; cf. 1 Cor. 16:1-4).

7. *Christian giving should be generous and cheerful.* “He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver” (9:6-7).

8. *God is no one’s debtor* (cf. Phil. 4:14-19). This is most emphatically not a promise that if you give away “X” dollars, God will inevitably give back to you “X + Y” dollars. The coin God dispenses is exceedingly varied and generous. But it is most precious and valuable when it comes as the fruit of the Gospel: grace that abounds in your life so that you overflow with good work (9:8), a harvest of righteousness (9:10), generosity (9:11), thanksgiving to God (9:11). How could anyone who has benefited from the Cross want more?

9. *Such Christian giving not only helps people but overflows in many expressions of thanks to God* (9:12). Informed Christians will not only thank God for the financial help, but they will praise God for the way obedience has accompanied the Corinthians’ confession of the Gospel of Christ (9:13). They will fervently love and pray for these gift-givers, primarily because of the “exceeding grace of God” given them if they are so generous (9:14). That grace is a fruit of the Gospel: it precipitates the closing triumphant shout, “Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!” (9:15).

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