

Appendix 3:

Generosity: Underwrite the Cause of Christ

The Gospel empowers tremendous generosity. We see this in something the Apostle Paul wrote to the Philippian church in Philippians 4. Some background: Paul and his team were at work preaching the gospel and planting churches. These activities needed more than just the Holy Spirit's power. They also involved a lot of overheads. The workers needed to live. Venues needed to be hired. Travels involved costs. New churches required some full-time leadership which involved costs. And in every church, money was spent on the most financially desperate. If you didn't know this, sorry to be the one to break it to you, God's work has always involved real financial costs! Of course, without the Holy Spirit, we can't do a thing, but without the generosity of God's people, the spread of the Gospel is hampered.

Anyway, the church in Philippi had been very generous in underwriting the Gospel's advance through Paul and his team. He writes, "it was good of you to share in my troubles. Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel (and) even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid more than once when I was in need."

Notice the phrase 'in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel' – Paul is connecting their giving to their love for the Gospel. In fact, earlier in the letter he commended their 'partnership in the Gospel' (1:5). They were not sending money to Paul out of their love for Paul, but out of their love for what Paul and his team were doing – advancing the Gospel and planting churches. Paul is grateful, of course, but next, he goes on to teach us four amazing reasons for giving to God's work... *Not that I desire your (financial) gifts; what I desire is that more be credited to your account. (Phil 4:17)*

1. Giving is an investment in eternity.

Your gifts are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God. (Phil 4:18)

God delights in our giving not because of what he gets from us, but because of what we get for our giving. See, Giving gets God's approval and reward. Using a financial metaphor, Paul speaks of our heavenly bank account. The more we give to the cause of Christ on earth, the wealthier we get in heaven! Jesus once spoke of this as storing up treasure in heaven. Giving may feel sacrificial, but is it really? Giving is an investment in eternity! It is the single best use of our hard-earned cash! We are rewarded in eternity. And we will meet people in heaven who came to faith because of ministry efforts we underwrote! I guess that every Christian will get to heaven, and realize, I should have given more to the cause of Christ! A second thing, he wants them and us to know that.

2. Giving is a form of worship.

And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus. (Phil 4:19)

Worship is the offering of our lives to God in response to his grace toward us. Jesus poured out everything he had to make us his treasured possession. Now we treasure him by offering up everything we have and are –our prayers and praises, our heart and mind, our time and talents, and as we see here our money and possessions. There is a reason that we take up the offering at a similar time to the singing – it's all worship. It's all saying, 'God you are worthy of everything I have and everything I am.' Now, look at this promise...

Now we see how Paul is marrying God's provision with our generosity. What comes first: the chicken or the egg? What comes first: God's provision or our generosity? The answer is yes. They both come first and second.

3. God's providing seed for giving.

He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion. (2 Cor 9:10-11)

God provides so that we can give. Paul understood that these Christians had been provided for by God and were thus able to give. He didn't think that most of them were flush - in 2 Cor. 8 he mentions that they gave out of their poverty. But still, they had something, and thus could give. Paul's point is that whether you have a little or a lot of money, some of it should be given away. In fact, Paul taught people that whenever God provides for you through your salary or any money that comes to you should be thought of as a combo of bread and seed. Bread, the part that meets your needs. Seed, the part that is to be given to Christ. (See 2 Cor 9: 10-11). So God provides through my salary or whatever provides the seed of my giving. But wait, it goes both ways (like the chicken and egg).

4. Giving attracts God's provision.

Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. (2 Cor 9:6)

In verse 19, God shows us that as we underwrite the cause of Christ, we become eligible for God's provision. That's what the word 'And' is all about. 'And God will meet all your needs.' As we have given to God, so God gives to us. Paul says this explicitly elsewhere in 2 Cor 9. Every bit of income is part bread and part seed. As you sow that seed, God promises that you will reap God's provision. It's a promise. The craziest thing to do would be to eat your seed! Rather sow it and you will reap. Okay, a step back, I know this should never be the main reason we give. Sure when you give, God provides. Sure, you can never outgive God. But the main reasons you give should be higher than that - as we saw, giving is an investment in eternity, giving is a form of worship! It is not the main reason we give, but it is nonetheless one reason to give. Else why would Scripture repeat this promise so often! God made a promise: sow and you will reap.

So many people have the same testimony: 'My finances have been so tight all these years. When I heard about God's plan that I would give a first portion of my income to the cause of Christ, I resisted. Until one day I just knew I had to do it. So I started to give 5% and then soon enough I was giving 10%. What I found is that my 90% seems to go further than my 100% used to! It's like my life has become marked with many financial mini-miracles.'