

THE UPWARD CALL

*Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet;
but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead,
**I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God
IN CHRIST JESUS.***

(Philippians 3:13-14 NASB)

#03-0925

The Love of Money #2. God Loves a Cheerful Giver

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For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. (1 Timothy 6:10 NASB)

The point was made in the first issue of this two-part series that during economic hard times, we can expect the leaders of ministries and churches to turn up the heat, so to speak, on tithing and giving to their cause. True to form, this is, in fact, what is happening in this day of turmoil and uncertainty. I have read that giving has dropped off 50%. Of course, this spells trouble for those ministries that are loaded with debt or that support a lavish lifestyle of its founder and leaders. It should not surprise us if some of these ministries go bankrupt or enter foreclosure on their facilities if they have followed the way of mystery Babylon.

It seems that some of the big-name “sow your seed” ministries seldom cite a reason for giving to them other than to keep their ministry going in order to reach more and more people with the same “give to me” message. A test of the heart of such ministries is to gauge how often they ask for money for very specific needs that express the love of God, such as giving to help the widow, the orphan, and the poor. I realize that there are other types of ministries that seek to help those in need, but how many of “the give and get rich” ministries have a specific purpose that exemplifies the love of Christ for others, such as helping ones truly in need? After all, the poor were the one group for whom the first disciples of Christ were most concerned. The heart of the matter was the basic needs of the people, not the wants of the people, and most definitely not the propping up of one man’s ministry.

They only asked us to remember the poor—the very thing I also was eager to do. (Galatians 2:10 NASB)

For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. (Romans 15:26 NASB)

It is an unfortunate truth that some of the get-rich ministries are nothing more than **self-centered, cross-less ministries** that enrich themselves and try to lead others down the same unrighteous path. Mind you; this is not an indictment of all ministries, but those with spiritual eyes should be able to discern the ones that fall within this group.

I have heard it quoted many times that poverty is a curse, but few seem to quote James in regard to the ones chosen to be heirs of the kingdom. I know brethren who would be classified as poor by those of us in the wealthy nations, but I can assure you that these dear ones, at times, have more faith than many of us.

Listen, my beloved brethren: did not God choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? (James 2:5 NASB)

Or, consider how the sons of Israel were to treat their fellow countrymen that fell into poverty.

“If one of your brethren becomes poor, and falls into poverty among you, then you shall help him, like a stranger or a sojourner, that he may live with you.” (Leviticus 25:35 NKJV)

Now, let us turn to Paul, for he reveals the true heart of giving. Forget tithing for a moment and just consider the heart of God when it comes to giving. Simply, He loves a cheerful giver.

Paul saw a need in the ecclesia of God and he sought others to help in this need.

(3) But I have sent the brethren, in order that our boasting about you may not be made empty in this case, so that, as I was saying, you may be prepared; (4) otherwise if any Macedonians come with me and find you unprepared, we—not to speak of you—will be put to shame by this confidence. (5) So I thought it necessary to urge the brethren that they would go on ahead to you and arrange beforehand your previously promised bountiful gift, so that the same would be ready as a bountiful gift and not affected by covetousness. (6) Now this I say, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. (7) Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. (8) And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed; (9) as it is written, “HE SCATTERED ABROAD, HE GAVE TO THE POOR, HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS ENDURES FOREVER.” (10) Now He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness; (11) you will be enriched in everything for all liberality, which through us is producing thanksgiving to God. (2 Corinthians 9:3-11 NASB)

I realize that some will say that this is all well and good but Paul was not addressing the need to tithe to the church or a man's ministry. This is true, but it is also true that neither Paul nor the other apostles mention tithing in any of the epistles. Further, the tithe is only mentioned twice in all the New Testament (Matthew 23:23; Luke 11:42), and this is in reference to the religious leaders of the nation of Israel neglecting the weightier things of the law such as justice, mercy, and faithfulness. I believe that the reason the tithe is not taught to the Pentecostal ecclesia that has existed for 2,000 years is because the tithe is the tax of kingdom nations and the ecclesia is not a kingdom nation. Under Moses, Israel was a kingdom nation and the tithe was a national tax. Well, I will reserve further explanation of this topic for other writings.

Now, returning to the above verses, the Macedonians had a need and Paul sought the help of the Corinthians in meeting this need. Paul called it a bountiful gift. This was so important to Paul that he sent emissaries ahead to make sure that the gift was collected as a gift of love (love gift) and not one forced upon the people at the last moment. The motive of the heart was at issue in this bountiful gift, for Paul encouraged them to give not under compulsion but with cheerfulness, that is, with a willing heart. Why? God loves a cheerful giver.

You see, giving is an issue of the heart. This is what God is after. He is not after a people giving because they are forced or coerced to give. If we carry this forward to our present day and giving to churches and ministries, the principle does not change. If we see a specific need or a ministry that touches the heart of God who is love, and our heart is touched to give, then we give. If we are associated with a local assembly that is truly doing the Lord's will and expressing the love of God, then we will be moved to support the work, whether it is helping to pay the bills to maintain a facility or helping those in the assembly that are in need.

Using the agricultural metaphor of sowing and reaping, Paul tells us that this is the type of giving that is pleasing to the Father. We are to sow with what God has given us so that some good might be reaped. In fact, the Father provides the means to sow. He supplies the seed by His grace. Everything that is needed to be a cheerful giver is provided by God. However, notice that the harvest of the sowing is for righteousness. In other words, the Father is after righteousness in His people. He provides and we give; this is the type of righteousness that brings praise and honor and thanksgiving to God. May we be known for the surpassing grace of God in us! **Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift (2 Corinthians 9:14b-15). God loves a cheerful giver.**