



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

2 Corinthians 8:10-15

“Grace Giving, part III”

TRANSCRIPT

We’re turning again to 2 Corinthians chapter 8, and we’re reading verse 10 through 15 for our Scripture reading this morning. Mr. Pryor likes to mention that consecutive Bible teaching, and of course I like to do that, and that fits in very well with what we feel is, generally speaking, the most useful kind of ministry.

One of the problems with it, which I have often mentioned to you, is the fact that when we have great texts like the one that we had last week, 2 Corinthians chapter 8 in verse 9 is the concluding verse of our passage last week, “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that though he was rich yet for your sake he became poor, that you through his poverty might become rich.” Well, that is of course an outstanding text from the Apostle Paul’s writings and one of the most inspirational that the apostle has given in the book to this point, ranking with some of those in chapter 5 and 4 and also in chapter 2. But then there come the periods of the ministry, the parts of the chapters in which the apostle does not seem to be so inspirational. But when you are preaching through a book, you have to handle them as well as the others. It’s helpful for us to remember that divine inspiration touches the whole of the Bible and not certain outstanding texts.

If I had been there and were thinking about the things that I’m thinking right now, in the apostle’s presence, I might say to him, “Well, you reached heights of spirituality in

verse 9, but when you come to verse 10 you’re not so inspirational, helping us by reminding us that you too were human.” But the expositors of the word must handle these passages as well as the others. And so today we are looking at a passage which is not as inspirational but, nevertheless, has a usefulness and purpose in the will of God for us. And I hope that we bare that in mind as we go through the section.

I’ll not be able, from my preaching today, if I ever enable you to reach some heights, it won’t be today, although I do hope that with the Spirit’s help that we may be able to expound what the apostle would like for us to receive. So we’re turning to verse 10, and we’re reading through verse 15, and I think when we finish you will say, “Well, I think you’re right, Dr. Johnson, this is not as inspirational as some of those other passages. The apostle states in verse 10,

“And I give my opinion in this matter, for this is to your advantage, who were the first to begin a year ago not only to do this, but also to desire to do it. But now finish doing it also, that just as there was the readiness to desire it, so there may be also the completion of it (to your ability or) by your ability. (The sense is according to your ability.) For if the readiness is present, it is acceptable according to what a man has, not according to what he does not have. For this is not for the ease of others and for your affliction, but by way of equality -- at this present time your abundance being a supply for their want, that their abundance (and of course these pronouns their refers to the saints in Jerusalem and Judea,) that their abundance also may become a supply for your (that is Corinthians) your want or lack, that their may be equality; as it is written, ‘HE WHO gathered MUCH DID NOT HAVE TOO MUCH, AND HE WHO gathered LITTLE HAD NO LACK.’”

May the Lord bless this reading of his inspired word. And we bow together now in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Again, Father, we come to Thee in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and we ask Thy blessing upon us as we study the word together. And may the things that Thou dost desire that we receive be received by us today as we read and think and consider the word that the apostle wrote to the Corinthians so long ago.

We realize there are many lessons in the word of God that while directly for them are also indirectly for us. And we know that we need counsel in matters concerning the use and expenditure of the funds with which Thou hast entrusted us. We ask Thy blessing upon this hour together. May the Lord Jesus Christ be honored in what is said. May the whole church of Jesus Christ ultimately be blessed through the things that the apostle has written. And may our assembly also be blessed through it as well.

We pray for the whole church today. We ask Thy spiritual blessings upon them and material blessings as well where needed. We pray for our country. We ask in these days, critical days, with international relationships at tense points so often, give wisdom and guidance to the men who direct the affairs of the United States of America because we know that they are really unequipped to handle all of the things which we as a nation day to day face. Give divine wisdom and guidance, and may Thy providential hand be upon us for our general good.

We pray for this assembly. We ask Thy blessing upon our leaders and for all members and friends. And especially the visitors who are here with us today, we ask Thy blessing upon them. May they be responsive to the word of God and may they be blessed by it and helped by the ministry. We especially pray for those who have requested our prayers for those whose names are in our calendar of concern. And some of them with very serious physical problems, and we know Lord there are others too whose names our not on our calendar of concern but nevertheless who have great needs. We ask Thy blessing upon them. Give healing in accordance with Thy will. Give

comfort, give wisdom to those who minister to them, the physicians and doctors. And for family and friends, give encouragement and comfort.

And, Lord, as we sing, as we hear the ministry of the word, may this be an experience that we all treasure and from which we receive blessing from Thee. We exalt Thy name, our triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit by reason of the blood that was shed on Calvary’s cross for our sins. Accept our thanks.

In Jesus’ name. Amen.

[Message] This message is on Grace Giving, really an exposition of 2 Corinthians chapters 8 and 9, the normative passage on Christian giving in the word of God. We have been saying that the church has failed to follow the word and its principles and practices of stewardship. We commented upon the fact last week and I think the week before of the misunderstanding of the tithe, the transference of the tithe from its place in the Old Testament law, to the principles by which the church should give today. We pointed out that there is no New Testament justification for that, that all one has to do is to pull out his concordance and look up the term “tithe” and see that that is true. The tithe was and Old Testament income tax whereas in the New Testament we are exhorted to give gifts.

Now, even in the Old Testament that was recognized because in the Old Testament we have the expression “tithes and offerings,” which would seem to suggest that the tithe was not regarded as an offering to start with. We pointed out that there was more than one tithe. We pointed out also that the tithe was to be given in Jerusalem. That means, of course, that if we follow the principals of the tithe, we are two thousand years too late because that’s a legalistic. And I mean that in a sense it belongs to the Mosaic law. It’s a legal requirement and we are therefore two thousand years too late and five thousand miles too far away from where the tithes should be given.

Now, we also made the comment that there is a misunderstanding of what grace giving is. That is, grace giving is a gift and not a debt. It’s something that is to be done

according to varying proportions, depending upon the material funds that we have. We are not under some constant percent of giving. It is to be given out of gratitude and not because we feel a duty to give. And then, of course, ultimately our goal is to not satisfy the law of Moses but God’s heart, appreciating what he has done for us through the Lord Jesus Christ.

I’ve also made the statement that we are constantly deluged with the requests and appeals for funds. This past week I’d like for you to know that evidently they’ve been listening to my messages because I haven’t received as many appeals. And, in fact, on about Wednesday or Thursday I said to Martha, “You know we haven’t received so many appeals. I haven’t even received any today.” She said, “Well, the mailman hasn’t come yet today.” [Laughter] But I’m happy to report that I don’t think I had more than three or four appeals for funds this past week.

Warren Wiersbe, a well-known evangelical minister who was minister of a large church in Covington, Kentucky, for many years and then was pastor of the Moody Church in Chicago and now is the leader of the Back to the Bible Hour, a very fine man, in one of his books comments, “During my years of ministry, I’ve endured many offering appeals.” He now sends out a few incidentally. I’m on their mailing list, and I get them. “I have listened to pathetic tails about unbelievable needs. I forced myself to laugh at old jokes that were supposed to make it easier for me to part with my money. I’ve been scolded, shamed, almost threatened, and I must confess that none of these approaches has ever stirred me to give as more than I plan to give. In fact, more than once, I gave less because I was so disgusted with the worldly approach.” And then in a parenthesis he adds, “(However I’ve never gotten like Mark Twain who said he was so sickened by the long appeal that not only did he not give what he planned to give but he took a bill out of the plate when it was passed down in front of him)” [Laughter]. We’re sorry in Believers Chapel we don’t give you an opportunity to do that. Obviously we don’t trust you. [Laughter]

But anyway it is true, we all have been exposed to that, and we want to avoid that and that’s one of the reasons why, as you noticed of course in Believers Chapel, Sunday morning at our greatest opportunity to threaten, scold, and cajole, we pass it by.

But now saying all of that, as I’ve tried to say, we are not saying that Christian giving is unimportant. It’s very important. It is something set forth in the word of God. Stewardship is a legitimate theme of the word and even our Lord emphasizes that in addition to the apostle. And in this very epistle the apostle has said, “We must all stand before the judgment seat of Jesus Christ and be judged according to the things that we have done whether they be good or worthless.”

And so we will be judged at the judgment seat of Jesus Christ, we believers, and the test and the examination will have to do with how we have handled the funds, the property, the material blessings with which God has showered us. The Lord’s example spiritually is the supreme example of what it means to give. As the apostle has stated in the 9th verse using the term for money that is used here in this context he says, “You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. That though he was rich yet for your sake he became poor that you through his poverty might become rich,” the supreme incentive for the giving of ourselves.

Now, turning to our passage let me remind you, in case there are some here who have not been here, that the apostle who is writing from Macedonia. He has just expressed in the first part of the chapter the remarkable giving of the Macedonian believers in Thessalonica and Philippi. He’s writing to the Corinthians, and he’s urging them to give for the poor believers in Palestine, Judea, and Jerusalem.

Now, the reasons for this were obvious. When the early church came into existence, they immediately were out of favor with the religious establishment. And since, in the life of Jerusalem and Judea, the religious relationship was at the heart of everything, when a person became a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, he often was put out of the synagogue as we read in the New Testament. That meant not simply that he didn’t have a

church but all of his social life was built around that as well. Ideally they were living in the Mosaic law so that governed their simple relationships, their ceremonial relationships, or religious relationships, and also the moral law. So you can see the tremendous change that would take place when a believer -- a Jewish believer became -- a Jewish unbeliever became a Jewish believer; that is, became a member of the Christian church. His whole life was transformed.

And in many cases they lost their jobs or they lost their means of income. They were the subjects -- objects of persecution and things like this. And incidentally that has gone on down through the years. It was not simply a Hebrew response, but that’s true of Gentiles as well down through the years who persecute those who have become believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. It’s part of human nature. And as we know, even in our states in the United States, if you live in the state of Utah and you were not a Mormon you would suffer this kind of persecution. Social ostracism and economic benefits would be lost because Mormons are sensible, they do business with Mormons. And if you’re not a Mormon, you will suffer. So that’s a fact of life. And The Christians in Judea and Jerusalem were suffering.

So the apostle exhorted the Macedonians and those from Achaia such as in Corinth, to give, to give of their financial well being and possessions in order that the saints in Jerusalem might have some help.

Now, the thing that the apostle exhorted them to do was designed not simply to help them financially but also to create the viewpoint that the church was truly one church. The apostle evidently felt very deeply about this. He writes about it in Romans chapter 15. He felt that by this giving to the saints in Jerusalem it would be recognized by all that we are one body. The believers in Greece, the believers Asia Minor, the believers in Palestine or in Judea, we are all members of one body. And Paul in that way would be proclaiming the great truth of the one body of the Lord Jesus Christ. So that’s the background, and we turn now to verse 10. Paul has been telling them about how the

Macedonians have remarkably responded and have given beyond their capability. And now turning to the Corinthians, he wants to encourage them to continue to do what they started a year ago. He says, “I give my opinion in this matter for this is to your advantage who were the first to begin a year ago, not only to do this but also to desire it.” So he speaks about the good beginning that took place in the land of Achaia or the Southern part of Greece. He considers this as an opinion. Notice the 10th verse; “I give my opinion in that matter.”

Now, we’re not to think by that that the apostle didn’t think this was the will of God. As a matter of fact he uses his expression in connection with divorce. In 1 Corinthians chapter 7, verse 25 and verse 40 of that chapter he says in the midst of his instructions with regard to matters that touch divorce, he said I’m giving my opinion in this. And he will also say in that chapter, now the Lord didn’t saying that but I’m saying this. He’s not suggesting in any way that he doesn’t believe he’s writing something that is authoritative because he is an apostle, but he’s simply distinguishing between what the Lord Jesus said when he was here upon the earth and what he’s saying now.

In fact, he adds in 1 Corinthians 7, I think that I have the mind of God in this. And so that’s lying back of this when he says in verse 10, now I’m giving my opinion in this matter. He’s not suggesting that someone could say in Corinth for example, well, that’s only Paul’s opinion, and we have other opinions. No, Paul is writing as an apostle, and he’s expressing his opinion because there isn’t any specific thing that the Lord Jesus had said on this particular point. So he’s giving his opinion, and he justifies it. For he says, “For this is to your advantage who were the first to begin a year ago not only to do this but also desire to do it. You have been in the forefront of this matter a year ago. You desired to do this and you are willing to do it, and now the apostle will go on to say what you are willing to do you should go on and do.”

So after that statement regarding a good beginning in verse 10 he says, “What you need is a good ending,” in verse 11. But now finish doing it also that just as there was

the readiness to desire it so there may be also the completion of it to your ability. It’s always a sad thing in Christian experience when we feel we are willing to do something but we do not do it. So Paul is saying, if you’re the first and the willing of the giving to the poor saints in Judea, don’t be the last in coming through in doing it. In fact, that little word “now” suggests that he means don’t delay the matter but now finish doing it also. The willing to be followed by the doing.

We mustn’t confuse the two. Willingness is not a substitute for doing it. One must do and to be willing to do something and not to do it is really not to have the approval of the Lord God.

Now, coming to verse 12 through verse 15, the apostle sets forth several great principals of Christian giving. He’s already stated some of them. He’s set out, for example, the fact that giving should be dedicated giving. Notice in verse 3, “For I testify that according to their ability and beyond their ability they gave of their own accord. They first gave themselves (verse 5) to the Lord and to us by the will of God,” so it was dedicated giving. They gave themselves then they gave their funds.

That, by the way, is an important thing. It’s no doubt true that many Christians that put money in the collection plate, with never having given themselves to the Lord. That is, they have thought that by financial giving they may absolve themselves from the more fundamental responsibility of giving themselves to the Lord. And sometimes by giving large sums one thinks that therefore he can continue to live his life pretty much as he pleases and that gives him a reprieve from the responsibility to give himself to the Lord. It would be much better if we give ourselves to the Lord. All financial giving, all handling of our resources, which are trusts, would therefore take the proper place in our lives.

So the apostle says giving should be dedicated giving. It should be voluntary giving. Notice in verse 3 it says, “I testify that according to their ability and beyond their ability they gave of their own accord. It should be joyous giving.” He says in verse 2,

“That in a great ordeal of affliction, their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed and the wealth of their liberality. It should be sacrificial giving. For we read in verse 3, “I testify that according to their ability and beyond their ability they gave of their own accord.”

Now, there are some further principals and these are the ones that we want to spend the remainder of our time on. And the first is a rather simple one, I’ve already alluded to it. He says in verses 10 and 11 that that giving should be the completion of intentions. In other words, promises are to be fulfilled; intentions are to be realized. The giving should be completed. Not simply intentions but it should be completed, that should be actually done. He says now finish doing it also that just there was a readiness to it, desire it so there may be also the completion of it to your ability.

Now, I must confess I’ve been often guilty of this. I’ve often thought to myself, if I just had sufficient funds, I would really like to help such and such. And then God has giving me sufficient funds, and I have not responded. That’s what he’s talking about when he says, “Now finish doing it also.” All of those intentions that we have had, I speak for myself but I think perhaps there maybe someone else like that, “Those intentions that we’ve had which we have not fulfilled.” So Paul says, “Finish the doing of it.” And I raise a little question. The apostle has said in verse 8, I’m not speaking this as a command, but that sounds like a command to me, doesn’t it to you?

Commentators have had a little bit of a problem with this because in the original text the mood of this verb is an imperative mood, which is often used of commands. Well, it’s obvious Paul doesn’t mean it that way because he says in verse 8, I’m not speaking this as a command, but then he says finish doing it. So I’m going to get the apostle off the hook. I’m not sure that this is the right way to get him off the hook, but I’m going to suggest that what he is saying here is what we might call friendly advice. Now, I want you to finish what you are doing, it’s not as a command, but I would like to

see you realize the intentions which you have in actually giving. So the giving should be completed.

Now, the second principle is more significant. Giving should be proportionate. Verse 12, “For if the readiness is present, it is acceptable according to what a man has not according to what he does not have.” That’s a very important principle of Christian giving, proportionate giving. That is according as the Lord God has prospered us,” Paul puts in another place, so if we’re able then we have responsibilities, if we’re not able then we don’t have responsibility. Our responsibility is according to our ability in this respect. So for the wealthy, the willing is measured by the deed. For the poor, the willing is accepted for the deed.

Now, that’s a very important principle. That’s entirely different from the tithe. Under the tithe, the man had to give a certain proportion. At the breakfast table today someone said, “Wasn’t that proportionate giving?” Well, it’s proportionate only in the sense that a wealthy man who lived up to the tithe gave more than a poor man who lived up to the tithe but the percentage was a continuing percentage.

Now, this is different. Dr. Ironside, in his commentary on 2 Corinthians which I read many years ago, he makes a comment concerning this by saying simply that the individual who gives a dime may get credit for giving a dollar if he doesn’t have much, but the person who gives a dollar may get no credit at all if he ought to have given a whole lot more, so proportionate giving.

There is a story of a Scottish brother who was in a meeting in a church in Scotland and they were taking up a missionary offering, and there was one really close-fisted wealthy individual in this particular church, and in those days when pounds were really heavy. He had 50,000 pounds, so it was generally known which was in those days a fortune. And so as they were taking up the offering one of the deacons who was involved whispered in this rich mans ear, how much are you going to give? And he said, “Well, I think I’m going to give a widow’s mite,” and the brother, who was the deacon,

took advantage of this and announced to the whole congregation, “We have no further needs, this brother is giving 50,000 pounds.” And of course his reason in back of it was that the widow’s mite was all that you had, and therefore he was giving all that he had. I’m not sure how that brother took that; we only have one half of the story. But at any rate the point is that giving is to be proportionate. That means God sees the portion as incidental. It’s the proportion that is really important for God.

When I was going through seminary and then after I had become a teacher, I had a friend who is now a very well-known minister, Pastor Ray Stedman out of Palo Alto, California. He was in my classes for four years, and he had just come out of service in World War II. He was a little older than the other men there, and we became rather close through those days and furthermore I had him in a home Bible class as well. So I got to know him and his wife Elaine quite well. And he was a gifted fellow, even though he had not had a college degree when he came to the seminary. One could tell his intellect was beyond the average in the class by far and furthermore he had a real skill for writing. I can remember Dr. Charles Fineberg reading one of his papers in the Hebrew class and telling me specifically -- he said, we have a fellow in our first-year class who can really write very well, and it was Ray he was talking about. He showed me his paper.

Well, Ray, when he graduated, wrote a thesis on Grace Giving. It lies down there in the Dallas Seminary Library, and I don’t even know if Ray’s views are the same as they were when he wrote that thesis. But nevertheless, the thesis was a very good thesis, and I read it. In fact, I read it more than once. And in it he has a comment that I think is true to the point. He was trying to show that New Testament Grace Giving was proportional giving. And so he writes these words. He says that according to that a man hath and not according to that he hath not, these words provide a further reference to the basis of determining the amount we give. There is an added thought here that is worthy of comment. God does not demand any commitment to give what is not possessed. Does this not apply to the common practice of obtaining pledges from church members at the

beginning of each new year? Certainly it’s presumption to promise for the future when we know not what a day may bring forth. And this verse declares plainly that God does not require it.

In other words, the idea of giving a pledge is not really in the word of God. And so for him faith promises, pledges, matching gifts, all those kinds of things are simply gimmicks that we have devised in order to force individuals to give when Scripture says we should be exercised in heart with spiritual things and respond as God the Holy Spirit moves us. Ray also had a paragraph, which I think is appropriate, too, but you must understand this was in 1950. 37 years ago when a dollar is not quite what it is today, and furthermore you have to also remember that Ray was a student in theological seminary, and he was not really flush with money.

And this is what he writes regarding proportionate giving; he says, It’s fair, it neither lays a grievous burden on the poor at the one extreme nor permits the rich to give, but a penance at the other. Unlike the tithe, it asks more proportionately from the rich who are able to give than from the poor who are not. Based on the tithe, a rich man could satisfy his conscience by paying 1,000 dollars on a 10,000-dollar income. Now, notice he think 10, 000 dollars is a large income. Well, in those days it was. Faculty members at the seminary made 2,700 dollars a year. Not your really gigantic salary by any means. So he’s writing as a student. And then he says, leaving him 9,000 dollars on which to live, but a poor man paying 100 dollars on a 1,000-dollar annual income who have to struggle to live on 900 dollars a year. I certainly think he would have to struggle. As a matter a fact that’s precisely on what I lived. I was making 75.00 a month, and I had a gigantic raise to a hundred dollars a month. And went through theological seminary and to the grace of God and the anonymous gifts of some friends I graduated without a single dollars’ debt.

But in any rate he continues, if however the rich were asked to give as God had prospered him, he might well give six thousand dollars and live comfortably on the

remainder, the four thousand. Well, those were different days, and we might multiply this by ten and have something similar to what the situation is today, but the point, I think, is true, proportionate giving is something by which the rich have an opportunity to give liberally and the poor do not have an obligation laid upon them that embarrasses them that they cannot give. If a man does not have, according to the New Testament, he cannot give. And the fact that he cannot give is not held against him. In fact, as Paul puts it here, he says for if the readiness is present, it is acceptable according to what a man has not according to what he does not have. So this is New Testament principal by which we give, proportionate giving.

The apostle goes on to say that the last three verses that the giving should be for equality. Listen to the way he puts it, “For this is not for the ease of others and for your affliction but by way of equality.” He’s saying, look, I’m not saying that you should give proportionately so some of you rich people in Corinth, in Achaia should give and thus suffer because you give, and the others because they receive your large gifts they can live in ease. He’s not saying that. He’s no Sandinista. He’s no Marxist, who in effect say we want your money. We want to redistribute your wealth so that we can live by your wealth and furthermore we can have the influence and authority and power that goes with it. He’s not saying that. I would imagine a Marxist like the Sandinistas could look at this and say, “This is not for the ease of others.” Well, this is for the ease of others according to their philosophy and for their affliction not by way of equality.

Now, Paul is saying, no, I’m not suggesting that the rich are to be afflicted, nor am I saying that the poor, because we are ministering to them, should therefore feel at ease. We should work as God has blessed us. We should give proportionately remembering that we are the members of one body and all redeemed by the grace of God in Jesus Christ.

Now, the way in which the apostle sets this up is rather interesting. He says, but by way of equality. At this present time your abundance being a supply for their want that their abundance also may become a supply for your want, that there may be equality.

Now, there are two ways in which you can understand this. You can understand this to mean that the Christians in Achaia and Macedonia and all over Asia Minor, wherever the gospel had gone out from Jerusalem and Judea and the saints there that they had been blessed by the spiritual blessings of the preaching of the gospel, and they had been liberally blessed. They had received an abundance of spiritual blessings. And as Paul argues elsewhere, when we have received an abundance of spiritual blessings, then we should be free to give our material blessings to those who have been responsible for our spiritual blessings. In this case, you might understand this to mean that the Greeks had been blessed through the preaching of the gospel by Jewish believers, such as the Apostle Paul, and that therefore because of their abundance from them spiritually they should give from their material abundance for the poor saints in Jerusalem who are suffering persecution at the present time because of the very faith that the Greek Christians have come to possess. That’s one way.

Now, there is another way to understand this, and you can understand it in this way that it’s all together material. That is, at the present time the Greeks have lots. Those in Jerusalem and Judea have little. But the time may come when those in Greece may have little and those in Jerusalem and Judea may have lots. And therefore there should be a genuine ministry one to another in material things.

It’s very difficult to know precisely what the apostle has in mind. He says, at this present time. That might suggest that the latter interpretation is better, but we’re not certain. The other interpretation is true, If we receive spiritual blessings, we have responsibilities to help those who brought those spiritual blessings if they have material problems. The apostle says the principal is that there may be equality. Verse 13, but by way of equality; verse 14, that there may be equality.

And drawing an illustration from the Old Testament, for equality, the apostle reminds them of the gift of the manna. When the children of Israel came out of the land of Egypt went into the land preparatory in going into the Promised Land, remember they complained God gave them the manna. It was a peculiar-looking thing. After the quails had come and the sun had come up, and there was kind of a fore frost on the ground and they went over and looked at it and they said, “manna” or something very similar to that for the Hebrew expression means, “what is it?” Well, that’s what the manna means, what is it. They didn’t know exactly what it was, so that’s why they called it the manna.

And Moses gave instructions about it. He said in Exodus chapter 16 in verse 18, that’s the text that we read here, “He who gathered much didn’t have too much, and he who gathered little had no lack.” So they were told to gather up an omer of the manna, and they were to live by that.

The psalmist calls this angel’s food. He calls it angel’s food because it came down from heaven, and God fed them day by day with the manna. So they would go out, and they would collect the manna. And those who would gathered more than an omer discovered that all they had was an omer. And those who gathered less discovered that they had an omer. In other words, God gave the equality.

Now, Moses also told them, he said, look, if you try to keep the manna overnight - well, he didn’t say. He just said, Don’t keep it overnight. They discovered that if they tried to keep it overnight, it bred worms and stank.

Now, that’s the illustration that the apostle uses. He says that there should be equality. There was equality in the gift of the manna, and there should be equality among the believers. What that means, very simply, is that when fellow believers have physical needs, it’s our responsibility to give to them and help them.

Now, we’re not talking about people who waste their money. We are not talking about people who use their money foolishly. We’re talking about people who have legitimate needs. It’s our responsibility to help out. I’m grateful to God that our elders

have done that through the years. And when they have known of people who have had needs because of things that were beyond their power to cope with, our elders have helped. I think that’s the way we should act. It’s the way they have acted.

Now, let me sum it up because our time is up. Grace giving then is faith giving. We meet the needs of others believing that he will meet our needs. We pray as our Lord gave us to pray in the model prayer; “Give us this day our daily bread.” We look to him to supply our needs, and we look to him also to supply the needs of our fellow believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. It’s our responsibility, and God lays it upon us as our responsibility and God lays it upon us as our responsibility.

And at the judgment seat of Jesus Christ we shall have to answer for the way we have used our funds. We have all kinds of public exhortations dressed to the people of this country, the citizens at large, for the needs of the poor. Christian churches, truly believing Christian churches should respond to the apostle. And if they respond to the apostle, there wouldn’t be any need of these public appeals insofar as they’ve touched believers. Those responsibilities are legitimate responsibilities for us in the body of Christ, and we should well remember that.

There’s a wonderful little story of General Gordon who was in China for a number of years. Near the -- when he finished his ministry, the British Government sought to reward him for his brilliant service. He declined all of the money and the titles but finally agreed to accept a gold medal, and the medal honored his 33 engagements in the land. It was his most prized possession. He was a true believer in Jesus Christ, incidentally. After his death, when his family were going through his possessions, they couldn’t find that medal. Eventually it was learned that he had sent it to Manchester during a severe famine directing that it should be melted down and used to buy bread for the poor. And when they read his diary on the day that he sent it in there were these words, “The last earthly thing I had in this world that I valued I have given to the Lord Jesus Christ.” What a marvelous testimony from a Christian man. Grace giving is faith giving.

Now, when that woman with her two little lepta came to the temple area and she saw the nine baskets or containers which were for gifts to the Lord and the four which were gifts to the poor, she came, maybe she looked at them and she said, I’ve got two lepta. They make one quadrants. Those that were for the Lord, if she had put the two in for the Lord someone might have said, well, she had regard for the Lord but no regard for the poor. If she put them all in the four, which were for the poor, they might have said she has regard for the poor but she doesn’t have proper regard for the Lord. So she had two little lepta, and she put one in one and one in the other, just exactly as our Lord summed up the law. We should love the Lord our God with all are hearts, with all our minds, with all our souls and our neighbor as ourselves. And giving unto the Lord and giving in Israel she had something for the Lord, something for the poor. Grace giving is faith giving, and she gave everything she had and the Lord Jesus said, “Look, this lady gave more than all of those that have given.” I wonder if that means more than each individual or more than the whole bunch together, possibly the latter.

At any rate, we learned an important principle. It’s been put in poetic fashion in this way; Give all though canst, high heaven rejects the lower of nicely calculated less or more. In other words, heaven’s arithmetic is different from ours. May God help us as an assembly of believers to respond to what Paul has had to say to us. Incidentally that’s not all that he has to say. There’s more.

If you’re here today and you’ve never believed in our Lord Jesus Christ, your first responsibility is to believe in him who died for sinners, shedding his blood, accomplishing an atoning sacrifice sufficient for your sins. May God, in his grace, so touch you, if you haven’t believed in him that at this very moment you’ll bow your head and say, “I know, Lord, I’m a sinner. I hear that Christ died for sinners. I certainly am a sinner. And by Thy grace, I do receive him as my own personal savior.” May God help you to do that. Let’s stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for these words of instruction from the apostle. Not so inspiring perhaps as that great text. You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that though he was rich yet for your sake he became poor, that we through his poverty might be enriched, but nevertheless just as significant for us in our Christian life. May, Lord, by Thy grace we be enabled to respond to the needs of others and to the needs of our great God and give as we have been given life by Christ.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.