

II Corinthians 8-9 The Discipline of Giving

Introduction

In 1923 at the Edgewater Beach Hotel in Chicago it was reported that there was a meeting of nine of the world's wealthiest financiers. The President of the largest independent steel company, the Presidents of two of the largest utility companies; the most successful wheat speculator; the soon-to be President of the New York Stock Exchange; the Secretary of the Interior in US President Warren Harding's cabinet; one of the most prominent Wall Street traders; the head of one of the world's greatest monopolies, together with an individual soon to be appointed as the President of the Bank of International Settlements. The world appeared to be at their feet. They had so much power because they had control of extraordinary levels of finance. Yet when someone a quarter of a century later decided to check out what had happened to all these powerful men their findings were rather surprising. **Charles Schwab** (the steel magnate) had died bankrupt after living on loans for the last five years of his life. **Samuel Insull**, one of the Utilities bosses had an electricity, gas and railway empire that collapsed spectacularly. He fled to Greece on the run from the authorities, was brought back to face trial and died a few years later in a Paris subway worth the princely sum of twenty cents. **Howard Hopson** (Utility company President) had died in a sanatorium with serious question marks over his mental health in 1949. The finances of his corporation had been like a giant pyramid scheme that came crashing down once exposed. **Arthur Cutten**, one of the most powerful traders on the New York Stock Exchange, was suspected of being a prominent member of a syndicate suspected of contributing to the 1929 Stock Market crash. He died of a heart attack in Chicago while awaiting trial over serious income tax evasion in 1936.. **Richard Whitney** (later New York Stock Exchange President) had been released from Sing Sing Prison to live in reduced circumstances for the rest of his life. **Albert Fall**, appointed to his Government post in 1921 had faced trials for criminal misconduct between 1926 and 1929 when he was finally convicted of bribery. After conviction he was sent to prison. He was pardoned from prison on health grounds and died at home some years later. **Jessie Livermore**, the wheat speculator and possibly a significant contributor to the 1929 financial crisis on Wall Street, reportedly had made and then lost four multi-million dollar fortunes before his suicide in 1940. **Leon Fraser** former President of the Bank of International Settlements was President of First National bank of New York when he took his own life in 1945 as he was so unhappy with it; **Ivar Kreugar's** complex network of companies were based on a huge pyramid scheme which unravelled when discovered. Kreuger & Toll Securities supposedly worth more than \$250 million provided non-existent security for its investors. Kreugar too committed suicide as early as 1932 [A variety of written and internet sources provide versions of their stories]. They had all lived for their money. Its possession was their motivation and its loss removed their purpose for living. In I Timothy 6:9-10 Paul the apostle gave this warning to people who were obsessed with making or obtaining money. *Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction.* ¹⁰ *For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.* It is not the possession of wealth that is at issue rather the attitude towards it is what he is addressing. If this passage serves as a warning against a wrong attitude to wealth in II Corinthians he gives positive instruction about how to live our lives modelling generous giving and warm-heartedness to other people who could benefit from our support. What guidance does the apostle give us in this importance area of our Christian lives, one of the spiritual disciplines?

The apostle provides five principles for giving:

1. Give Proportionately (8:3a)

according to their ability (v3) The Old Testament principle was clear in its Jewish context. Malachi 3:8-12 makes it very plain that God expected His people to honour Him in the use of the funds at their disposal. 8 *Will a man rob God? Yet you rob Me. But you ask, 'How do we rob You?' In tithes and offerings; 9 You are under a curse— the whole nation of you— because you are robbing Me.10 Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house. Test Me in this, says the Lord Almighty, and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it.11 I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines in your fields will not cast their fruit, says the Lord Almighty.12 Then all the nations will call you blessed, for yours will be a delightful land, says the Lord Almighty.* In the Old Testament context it is abundantly plain that God expected the Jewish people to fulfil their obligations with tithes of money and of various crops and offerings at the time of visits to the Temple. In fact the blessing of God is portrayed as conditional upon the fulfilment of this responsibility – in that era material blessings were promised to the obedient son or daughter of the covenant. Yet on a spiritual level the same principle applies we as Christians will lose spiritual blessings if we fail to honour God in His claims upon our lives. Sometimes we wonder why expected blessings have not arrived – and we instantly think is there something I have said or done wrong- active sin- yet it is possible that there is some aspect of our Christian discipleship that needs to be addressed where we have failed to put the Lord first.

In Mark 12:41-44 Jesus drew the attention of His disciples to a person with whom God was pleased: 41 *Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. 42 But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a fraction of a penny. 43 Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. 44 They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything— all she had to live on.* God is not interested in the actual amount we put in the offering plate, more so in what we have left and how we use all the resources at our disposal. No-one forced this lady to do what she did –no emotional mail-shot each month. It was between her and God. In Texas in the mid-twentieth century the outstanding Baptist preacher, Dr. George W. Truett, minister of First Baptist Church Dallas, Texas for 47 years, was helping a struggling congregation raise money for their church building. They still needed \$6500. Truett found the response from the congregation rather weak. With only \$3000 pledged he said in exasperation, “Do you expect me to give the other \$3500 needed to reach your goal? I’m just a guest here today.” Suddenly, a woman near the back stood. Looking at her husband seated on the platform recording pledges, she said in a shaking voice, “Charlie, I wonder if you would be willing for us to give our little home? We were offered exactly \$3500 cash for it yesterday. If the Saviour gave His life for us, shouldn’t we make this sacrifice for Him?” Truett reported that the fine husband responded with equal generosity. “Yes, Jennie, I was thinking the same thing.” Turning to Truett, he said, “Brother Truett, if it’s needed, we’ll raise our pledge by \$3500.” Silence reigned for a few moments. Then some of the folks began to sob. Those who fifteen minutes earlier had refused to do more now either added their names to the list or increased their donations. In a short time, their goal had been achieved, and Charlie and Jennie didn’t have to forfeit their home. Their willingness to sacrifice had stimulated others to similar generosity [Leslie B. Flynn, in *Resource*, July/August, 1990]. In I Corinthians 16:2 Paul laid down this general principle: *On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made.* Planned giving and proportionate giving is commended here. Some Christians are under a false illusion that tithing was abolished under the new covenant –Jesus would beg to disagree. In Matthew 23:23 Jesus in the middle of a strong denunciation of the legalism of some of the Jewish religious leaders declared: *"How terrible it will be for you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you are careful to tithe even the tiniest part of your income, but you ignore the important things of the law--justice, mercy, and faith. You should tithe, yes, but you should not leave undone the more important things.* (NLV)

2. Give Sacrificially (8:3b-4)

even beyond their ability In Macedonia the Romans had imposed a dreadful tax burden and the local population lived in severe poverty. Yet these Christians were giving more than the Corinthians who had many times their income levels. They were not in danger of starving to death as people were in Jerusalem at that time in the 50s AD, but were only marginally better off, so much that Paul was hesitating about mentioning the needs of the Judean Christians to the believers in Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea, yet II Corinthians records some remarkable words in verses 3-4: *Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints.* In the words of John Chrysostom (347-407), bishop of Antioch (386-98) and Constantinople (398-404), ‘it was they not Paul who did the begging’. Across denominations proportionate to average national incomes giving has gone down in the last few decades despite increasing standards of living. I thank God for the sacrificial giving in my previous congregation. There were a number of crisis occasions over the years when bills had to be paid and the church bank account had too small a balance to settle the accounts. There were a number of times when I saw the treasurers with tears in their eyes –for two reasons. First of all when some of these appeals had to be made because bills could not be paid without one and they were aware of the already incredibly generous giving from the congregation. However, there were also tears of relief or joy or maybe a mixture of both when gift day totals were announced, that once again the Lord had provided through His people for their needs. The question is never how does my giving compare with another Christian or another Christian Church, rather how does it compare with the example of our role-model Jesus Christ? Too often individual Christians and congregations have looked at other people for comparative purposes regarding how they should live and serve as Christians –this is a big mistake, although a very natural one. II Corinthians 8:9 declares: *For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich.* Many years ago two young men were working their way through Stanford University in America. At one point their money was almost gone, so they decided to engage the great Polish pianist Ignacy Jan Paderewski for a concert and use the profits for board and tuition. Paderewski’s manager asked for a guarantee of \$1,000. The students worked hard to promote the concert, but they came up \$400 short. After the performance, they went to the musician, gave him all the money they had raised and promised to pay the \$400 as soon as they could. It appeared that their college days were over. “No, boys, that won’t do,” said the pianist. “Take out of this \$600 all your expenses, and keep for each of you 10 percent of the balance for your work. Let me have the rest.” Years passed. Paderewski became Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Poland following World War I. Thousands of his countrymen were starving. Only one man could help at that time—the head of the U. S. Food and Relief Bureau Herbert Hoover. Paderewski’s appeal to him brought thousands of tons of food. Why had there been such a generous response to Poland when it was not the only country facing hard times? It is not too difficult to work out. Later Paderewski met the American statesman to thank him. “That’s all right,” replied Herbert Hoover. “Besides, you don’t remember, but you helped me once when I was a student in college.” (Dennis J. De Hann *Our Daily Bread*) The principle of liberality set forth in Proverbs

11:25 (*A generous man will prosper; he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed*) finds its origin in God. He is overflowing in His goodness, lavish in His mercy, and abounding in His grace. How inconceivable that we His creatures, especially His redeemed children, could be greedy and selfish! Remember, liberality is part of God's way of taking care of us. God's people who honour Him in their giving will be honoured over their lifetime as this man of principle was, approximately a century ago.

3. Give Willingly (8:3c)

entirely on their own They gave not reluctantly or under compulsion (9:7b) The same spirit was evident in I Chronicles 29:17-18 David in his prayer declared: *All these things have I given willingly and with honest intent. And now I have seen with joy how willingly you people who are here have given to You, O Lord God, ... keep this desire in the hearts of Your people for ever, and keep their hearts loyal to You.* Proverbs 11:25 states: *Every generous soul receives a blessing*(LXX). In early May 2009 in coastal city of La Plata, Argentina, hundreds of people had made voluntary donations to a taxi-driver called Santiago Gori for his generosity to an elderly couple who had hired his taxi for a short journey. What was it that he did to cause such an amazing response? Unknown to him the elderly couple had been carrying a bag containing \$32,500 dollars (£21,600) which they proceeded to leave in his taxi. However, he did not have full details of their names or their address to return this large sum of money. After a few days spent searching he managed to locate them and return all the money to them. For Argentines used to corruption at all levels of society (according to the BBC), this was an amazing story. Two young advertising agency employees decided to set up a website to thank Mr Gori for his exemplary behaviour. Thousands of people have left messages of appreciation on the website and hundreds left a gift for him. By 8 May 09 \$14,580 had been donated; One recording studio executive offered to produce a song by Mr Gori free of charge –if he had a musical talent. Another offered free snow-boarding lessons in the Argentine ski resort of Bariloche. An Argentine abroad promised to purchase a second-hand GPS satellite for his taxi, which he would hand over on his next visit to the country. Mr Gori was overwhelmed by the response saying that he had only done what should be done in that situation [BBC News website 8 May 09]. Paul noting (8:7-8) that the Corinthians claimed to have great spiritual gifts, said *I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others* (in Macedonia), but supremely with respect to the self-giving of Jesus (8:9), the head of the Church. In Romans 8:31-32 there are some very familiar words: *What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all- how will He not also, along with Him, graciously give us all things?*

4. Give Thoughtfully (9:7a)

You must each decide in your heart how much to give. And don't give reluctantly or in response to pressure. For God loves a person who gives cheerfully (NLV). Planned giving is wise giving; for example if you pay tax then giving via gift aid adds around 25p for every pound you give; you have already paid the money to the Government, but they will give a significant amount back once you have filled in a modest form. Paul in II Corinthians 9:2-5 encouraged this metropolitan congregation to budget and plan their giving over the year so as to be wise stewards of the money at their disposal. *For I know your eagerness to help, and I have been boasting about it to the Macedonians, telling them that since last year you in Achaia were ready to give; and your enthusiasm has stirred most of them to action. 3 But I am sending the brothers in order that our boasting about you in this matter should not prove hollow, but that you may be ready, as I said you would be. 4 For if any Macedonians come with me and find you unprepared, we— not to*

say anything about you— would be ashamed of having been so confident. 5 So I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to visit you in advance and finish the arrangements for the generous gift you had promised. Then it will be ready as a generous gift, not as one grudgingly given (II Corinthians 9:2-5). God is not looking for the loose change of our lives or resources but of our best- as in each area of our lives. Following in the footsteps of his devout Christian mother, John D. Rockefeller was an active member of a Northern Baptist Church in America, and beginning with his first job as a clerk, he gave one-tenth of his earnings to charity. In 1864 Rockefeller married Laura C. Spelman. They had four children: Bessie, Alta, Edith, and John Davidson Jr. As his income grew, so did his benefactions. The total of Rockefeller's lifetime gifts to charity has been estimated at approximately \$550 million. Although he amassed an enormous fortune, Rockefeller preferred to live simply. His time was absorbed by business and later by organized giving. In both areas he imposed order, efficiency, and planning with extraordinary success and sweeping vision. He died on May 23, 1937, in Ormond, Florida, at the age of 97. John D. Rockefeller said, "**I never would have been able to tithe the first million dollars I ever made if I had not tithed my first salary, which was \$1.50 per week.**" [quotation from W. A. Criswell, *A Guidebook for Pastors*, p. 154.] Other information on Rockefeller from various net sources] King David when purchasing the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite and his equipment said: *I will not take what is yours and give it to the Lord. I will not present burnt offerings that have cost me nothing* (I Chronicles 21:24). Thoughtful planned giving is the best way to organise our financial giving to God's work.

5. Give Joyfully (9:7c)

God loves a cheerful giver. God is thrilled when He sees His children are similarly minded about their generosity to His work. Idea here is as someone is saying in their heart. 'Praise the Lord; it's the time for the offering!' It is a privilege to contribute to God's work in any way we can. He wants us to have that joyful spirit as we minister in His name. A mother wanted to teach her daughter a moral lesson. She gave the little girl a quarter and a dollar for church. "Put whichever one you want in the collection plate and keep the other for yourself," she told the girl. When they were coming out of church, the mother asked her daughter which amount she had given. "Well," said the little girl, "I was going to give the dollar, but just before the collection the man in the pulpit said that we should all be cheerful givers. I knew I'd be a lot more cheerful if I gave the quarter, so I did." [*Bits & Pieces*, February 4, 1993, p. 23] Proverbs 22:8a [9a Eng. Txt] states: *God blesses a man who is cheerful and a giver* (LXX). In II Corinthians 8:2 the words translated *rich generosity* includes the understanding in the mind of the giver of 'a singleness of purpose'. Romans 12:8 in a list of spiritual gifts, includes the gift of *giving*. *If your gift is to encourage others, be encouraging. If it is giving, give generously.* Another version renders the last part of this verse: *He that gives, let him do it with singleness of purpose.* However, there is a secret behind the Macedonians' generosity. II Cor.8:5 reveal it. *They did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will.* A God-centred and God-focussed lifestyle will inevitably have different priorities to that of a person with secular values. We must also remember the promise of God in Philippians 4:19: *And my God will meet all your needs according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus.* May He help each of us by His Spirit to give proportionately, sacrificially, willingly, thoughtfully and joyfully, for Jesus sake, Amen.

