

Eagerly Give from What You Have for the Sake of Fairness

Small Group Follow-up Study for 2 Corinthians 8:10-15

RE-READ

[10] And in this matter I give my judgment: this benefits you, who a year ago started not only to do this work but also to desire to do it. [11] So now finish doing it as well, so that your readiness in desiring it may be matched by your completing it out of what you have. [12] For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have. [13] For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened, but that as a matter of fairness [14] your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need, that there may be fairness. [15] As it is written, "Whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack."

RECAP

Does the Old Testament command to tithe carry over into the New Testament? I would argue no, it doesn't. Ray Steadman puts it well, saying,

Under the law the tithe was, unquestionably, the divine plan for supporting and maintaining God's priests in their intercessory and sacrificial work. This may be freely and gladly admitted. But it is quite another thing to take that which belonged to the nation, Israel, and which supported a group of robed and mitred priests, who offered daily bloody sacrifices for the remission of the sins of one nation, and apply it to a heterogeneous body of Jews and Gentiles in which each individual is himself a priest, who rest for eternity upon the once-for-all offering of the Lamb of God, and whose message is to be preached to every creature under heaven. This is, indeed, a different matter.

Besides, Thom Schriener points out that "It is difficult to work out the amount that was actually tithed." He notes how E. P. Sanders "describes two different ways of explaining the Old Testament texts on tithing. According to one view, fourteen tithes were to be given over seven years, while another interpretation sees twelve tithes given over seven years. [And so] It is ... difficult to know the exact amount that was tithed. In any case [he says], the amount totalled more than ten percent." So we wouldn't necessarily know how much to tithe today anyway. So what do we do? We look for principles in scripture to direct our giving.

Four principles, in particular, can be surfaced from what Paul says here:

1. Our giving should be voluntary.
2. Our giving should be regular. In other words it should not drop off and remain unfinished.
3. Our giving should be proportional (i.e. "according to" what we have).
4. Our giving should be for the sake of fairness in the body of Christ.

RESPOND

1. What caught your attention from Sunday's sermon? What are you still thinking about/mulling over? What questions did Sunday's sermon raise that remain unanswered in your mind?
2. In thinking about regular giving, Don Whitney suggests putting something in the plate every Sunday. What advantage(s) do you see in putting something in the plate every week?
3. We will not give voluntarily if we love money more than God. So we need to ask, "Am I diligent about keeping money from becoming an idol in my life? Am I consumed by financial worries or the desire for more money or material possessions? What steps can I take to ensure that the pursuit of God—not money—directs my life?"
4. In thinking about proportional giving, it might be good for us to ask the following questions: "Am I currently hiding behind excuses? What are the reasons I use for not giving at a greater level? Are these reasons in line with what Paul says about giving? What can I do to get rid of any invalid excuses and improve my attitude toward giving?"
5. In thinking about giving for the sake of fairness, I had someone ask me this week, "Is that communism that the Bible is promoting?" How would you answer this question? What lessons may we learn from the scripture Paul quotes in verse 15?
6. Do I really believe God owns it all? What things in my life are hardest for me to relinquish to God?