

VIEW

“THE COMMANDMENT OF THE LORD IS PURE,
ENLIGHTENING THE EYES.” PSALM 19:8

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Misguided Giving

There has always been controversy surrounding the way churches use money from the “church treasury.” Some have even questioned the authority for the existence of a treasury. Since this is not the main purpose of my article, I’ll simply quote brother Robert F. Turner on this, and let the reader decide for himself.

If I didn’t believe God had a full time work which He wants His saints to do collectively, I certainly would not consider a continuous “collection” or treasury necessary. 1 Cor. 16:1-2 stipulates purpose for the “laying by” on the first day of every week. They had a treasury to help the needy saints. The “collection” of vs. 1, and “gathering” of vs. 2, are from *logeuo* and refer to a “religious collection” as for a god or temple. This was what some today sneeringly refer to as a “church” collection; but it had a specific purpose as we have seen. Phil. 4:15 and other passages show there were other purposes for the pooling of funds, such as supporting preachers.

Saints who work and worship together scripturally have divine purposes, either specifically or generically, for all they do. It is to the end that these divine purposes may be carried out — collectively — that the treasury exists, is used, and must be replenished. Thus when a saint gives, he does so to meet certain purposes.

To question the whole idea of a “church treasury” is to question the God-given privilege and obligation of saints to function collectively. It is a shameful end to which some of my brethren have come” (*Plain Talk*, Vol. 4, No. 1, February, 1967).

The Scriptures guide us to give on the first day of the week, as we have been prospered (I Cor. 16:1-2). But when does our giving fail to meet the test of Scripture and thus become “misguided”?

I Cor. 16:1-2 gives clear instructions on how our giving is to be carried out. Failing to follow the

instructions in any aspect would cause our giving to be out of sync with Scripture and therefore “misguided” at best, sinful at the worst.

Churches can, and often do, engage in faulty collection practices. For example, collecting on



days other than the first day of the week; hoarding funds, with no specified purpose for the use of the funds; using other means besides free-will offerings to raise money (e.g., fundraisers) are all examples of unscriptural collective collection practices.

But those unscriptural practices are rare in churches of Christ. It is more helpful for each of us to examine his or her own giving in light of the instructions given in I Cor. 16 and in II Cor. 8-9.

In I Cor. 16:1-2, Paul instructs individual Christians to “put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper.” Therefore, if we prosper in any given week, yet fail to “put something aside,” we are failing to keep a clear commandment of the apostle. By “prosper,” Paul simply means that one is to give in proportion to one’s income (and probably, too, *as* one prospers. In other words, if I’m paid twice a month, I would give twice a month. Some disagree with that idea, but it is implied by Paul’s statement). We violate the command if, in our giving, we ignore the level

of prosperity we have enjoyed. In other words, if we decided five years ago that we would give \$50 per week and are still giving \$50 per week, even though we have enjoyed a greater income since then, our giving is “misguided”; it is no longer “as we have prospered.”

II Cor. 8:1-5 and II Cor. 9:6-7 add another layer of instruction to the giving mix. These texts describe the proper attitude in giving, through the example of the Macedonians. Our giving may be “misguided” if our attitude falls short of theirs.

In II Cor. 8:1-5, Paul holds the example of the Macedonians before the hearts and minds of the Corinthians. Whether this was to shame them or not is debatable, but there is no question that Paul found the attitude of the Macedonians commendable and wanted the Corinthians to emulate it.

It appears that the Macedonians were not content with giving “as they had prospered” but gave well beyond what they had prospered. Out of their extreme poverty, they gave “beyond their means” (v. 3). That this was “of their own free will,” suggests that Paul is not imposing their example on others as law, but simply as an exemplar of a superior attitude. It seems to fit well with the example Jesus gave of the widow with her two mites. “She gave all she had,” showing that her trust was not in money, but in God (Mk. 12:41-44).

The main application for us, perhaps, is found in v. 5: “they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us.” All of our giving — whether of money, time or effort — must proceed from our prior commitment to the Lord. Failure to give ourselves to the Lord first may suggest that we have fallen into a kind of works righteousness, thinking our giving is

earning us some points with God. That may be reading too much into the text, because Paul says they went beyond his expectations (v. 5). But that shouldn’t affect the power of the example. Jesus tells us to “seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness” (Mt. 6:33). There is no question that any giving that is not motivated by our love for God is “misguided” (cf. I Cor. 13:1-3).

I Cor. 9:6-7 provides one other requirement for the Christian giver: we must give “cheerfully.” This doesn’t mean, as some apparently suppose, that one is laughing out loud while he gives (the “hilarious” giver). I’ve heard of cases where churches actually laugh hysterically during the offering. No kidding.

But the idea in the context is simple enough: God doesn’t

want us to give out of “pain” or because we feel we have to. He wants us to be joyful and happy that we can contribute to the needs of other saints or the work of the church. Giving under duress or with a grimace is “misguided” giving and the giver will not be blessed.

The admonition in v. 6, that the one who sows sparingly will reap sparingly seems to include, then, the notion that we sow sparingly not only when we give too little, but also when we give with an improper spirit. God is not pleased (does not “love”?) the reluctant giver.

We’ll end with this positive appeal: when we give as we should, both in the amount we give and the attitude we bring to the enterprise, God blesses us. “And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work” (II Cor. 9:8).

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