

The Joy of Giving, Part 1

Philippians 4:14-19

January 23, 2005

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Countryside Bible Church

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Well, it's our joy to turn once again to this wonderful little epistle, Paul's letter to the Philippians. We've been studying it now for over a year together, and we're approaching the end. In fact, I was telling the elders this morning, I think that probably about ~~uh~~, three messages left here to finish up this little letter. And then we'll do some other things for a while. I'll tell you about some of those tonight. And then we'll return to another book study together. But it's been a wonderful journey to study this great letter of Philippians.

It's appropriate this morning as we come to the last of this letter and we come to the issue of giving, that we approach that topic on a Sunday when we're ~~gonna going to~~ be taking the Lord's Table because ultimately, our giving is an expression of the indescribable gift that has been given to us.

Now they say confession is good for the soul so as I get started this morning, let's just clear the air as we begin. The topic we come to this morning is probably the least favorite of most preachers to preach on, and it's probably the least favorite of most congregations to hear. ~~So~~So, we're even.

There are three primary reasons that many pastors don't like to preach on this issue of giving. First of all, we don't want to be put in the same group with those few pastors who hammer the issue of giving incessantly. I mean, we've all heard them - those who have the uncanny ability to go from any verse of Scripture to the issue of giving. We just don't want to be associated with that, and so I think there's a hesitancy because of that.

Secondly, for some pastors and their congregations, not talking about giving is an issue of pride. You don't, aren't exposed to this, but if you go to some pastors' conferences and you hear pastors talking, there'll be some pastors who'll say things like this, and they love to say them: "Well, I never have to mention money at our church. Our people are so committed that they just love to give." The clear implication is that either their church is so mature, thanks to their

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wonderful teaching, or their congregations love them so much thanks to their wonderful ministry that they never have to mention money, that money is never an issue.

Well, that runs contrary to the example of the apostle Paul. The New Testament epistles have a number of references to the issue of giving and to money. It's obviously a reflection of his ministry even when he was with them. Also, look at Christ. Christ Himself had much to say about money, more so in some cases than some of our favorite topics that Christ addressed. But I think the reason most pastors are tempted to ignore the issue of giving in spite of its importance, in spite of the space that's given in the New Testament, is primarily for fear – fear that their motives will be misunderstood. So let me just start out this morning by telling you what my motives are not for preaching on giving.

First of all, I'm not looking for a higher salary. I'm well cared for. The church has been very gracious to me.

Secondly, the church is not in financial trouble. The Lord again has been faithful to us as a congregation and through you and your giving.

Thirdly, I'm not planning to sort of begin now to make this a regular topic from this time forward. Those aren't my motives at all.

I have primarily two motives this morning for preaching on the issue of giving.

First of all, it's the theme of the next paragraph that we come to in Philippians, and I didn't think we should skip it. And I don't think it would be fair for me to ask Rocky to do it and skip town, although I did think about that.

The second reason, and seriously, the reason I'm eager to teach about this matter of giving is that, as you've often heard me say, it's one of the five activities that Scripture commands the church to do every time it gathers for corporate worship. You, perhaps you've noticed in our services we do certain things, and we do them routinely. That's because the Scripture commands them.

Essentially, those five things that must happen at every service are: the praise of God, singing to God, that's worship and music.

Secondly, the reading of God's Word: Paul told Timothy to give attention to the public reading of God's Word.

Thirdly, the teaching of God's Word: that's what we're doing now.

And finally: giving.

I think I left out prayer: prayer would be the fifth one.

And so those five elements – the singing of praise, prayer, the reading of God's Word, the teaching of God's Word and giving – are commanded of us every time we come together. And so, because of that, it's crucial that we understand what the Bible commands about this issue because it is one aspect of our worship to God.

So, with those caveats, let me read you the paragraph where Paul addresses this issue and we'll be looking at it, Lord willing, today and then two weeks from today. When I return, we'll finish up this paragraph on the issue of giving. Look at Philippians 4:14.

Nevertheless, you have done well to share *with me* in my affliction.

You yourselves also know, Philippians, that at the first preaching of the gospel, after I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving but you alone; for even in Thessalonica you sent a *gift* more than once for my needs. Not that I seek the gift itself, but I seek for the profit which increases to your account. But I have received everything in full and have an abundance; I am amply supplied, having received from Epaphroditus what you have sent, a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God. And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

You'll remember that the historical context of these comments, as I've expressed to you over the last several weeks, is Paul expressing his thanks to the Philippians for the gift, the financial gift that they had sent at the hands of Epaphroditus. And as Paul expresses his thanks here in this paragraph, he touches on the heart and core and soul of the issue of giving. This is his basic proposition: giving is an absolutely essential and greatly beneficial part of the Christian life.

As we go through this paragraph, you'll see that Paul outlines four principles of Christian giving. We'll look, Lord willing, at the first one today and part of the second. And then two weeks from today, we'll finish up number two and look at three and four.

But let's begin by looking at the first crucial principle, foundational principle of Christian giving and it's this: give with the right mindset. It's found in verses 14 and 15.

Nevertheless (he says), you've done well to share with me in my affliction. You yourselves also know, Philippians, that at the first preaching of the gospel, after I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving but you alone.

Now in verse 14, Paul transitions from his own gratitude and his own contentment, which we've looked at in detail in verses 10 - 13, he transitions now to their giving, the Philippians' generosity in giving to them. And as he, (to him rather). And as he thanks them, he provides us with some insight into their mindset. He says in verse 14 "you have done well." Interestingly enough, in the Greek text, literally it says, "you did good", you did good – which isn't of course good English, but it works in Greek. How did they do well? "By sharing in my affliction."

That word "share" is a key word. It means to become partners with, to participate with. The same Greek word with a little variation occurs in verse 14 where it's translated "share" and in verse 15 where it's translated "share". Now what does this word mean? The word "share" comes from a familiar Greek word, and I give it to you simply because you'll recognize it. It's one that's often spoken in Christian circles. It's the Greek word "koinonia". That's the word from which this word "share" comes. It means to become partners with, to be in the fellowship. We've run across this word several times in our study of Philippians.

And my favorite illustration of it to sort of bring it into focus in how it's used in the Greek language is how Tolkien used it in his book *The Fellowship of the Ring*. You'll remember, those of you who've read the book, that small group who bound themselves with Frodo Baggins to destroy the ring of power. They were partners. They were in the fellowship of the ring. That's how this word is used. That's how the Philippians saw themselves with Paul. They were partners in the fellowship, but not the fellowship of the ring. They were in the fellowship of the gospel joined together as partners. And that's why they gave. Their giving was an expression of their partnership. They knew that they were in the fellowship with Paul. They were partners together in the gospel.

And that's the mindset that should characterize our giving. You know, some Christians have the attitude in terms of giving: "Look, if God wants my money, He can take it after I'm gone. He can pry it from my cold, stiff hands," probably not a good challenge to offer to God. No, we should imitate the Philippians when we give. We should see ourselves as partners working together for the common cause of the advancement of the kingdom of Christ. Some people frankly don't give because they have never come to understand what the Philippians understood, that when we give, we become partners in ministry. Not just with those on staff at Countryside, not just with those who are our missionaries here from our church - we become partners with God Himself in the advance of the kingdom of Jesus Christ.

Turn back to Philippians 1. Notice verse 5. He begins by thanking them for their giving. He says: "in view of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now." That word "participation" is the word "fellowship". That's the noun form of the word that's translated "share" back in chapter 4. He says, "You're in the fellowship. You've participated as a partner with me in ministry."

Probably the passage in the New Testament where Paul most develops the theology of giving is in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9. He deals with it in a number of texts, but here is where he deals with it most extensively. Turn there for a moment, 2 Corinthians 8. I want you to see how he characterizes the Philippians. Here, he's writing to the Corinthians about their giving. And as he writes to the Corinthians, he uses the Macedonians (and remember, Philippi is in Macedonia, it's one of the churches he's referencing here) and he uses the Macedonians and the Philippians as an example. Verse 1 of chapter 8 of 2 Corinthians:

Now, brethren, we *wish* to make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia, that in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality. [By the way, this demolishes one excuse people have for not giving which is: "Well, you know, I just don't really have enough right now." The Macedonians were not wealthy people; in fact, he says they were poor. They were in deep poverty and yet, their poverty overflowed with liberality, with generosity.] Verse 3: "For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability [they gave sacrificially], they gave of their own accord (verse 4), begging us [by the way, that's a strong Greek word. He says they absolutely begged us] with much urging for the favor of participation in the support of the saints, and

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this, not as we had expected [watch this], but [they gave first or] they first gave themselves to the Lord.

You see, our giving is an expression of that reality. The giving of the Macedonians was simply another expression of the reality that they had given their lives to Christ, that they would become servants of God. And therefore, they realized that whatever they had, they were just stewards of. And so, it was no great ordeal on their part to surrender what they merely were overseeing for their Lord. When as an expression of our devotion to Christ, we give to others in need, we support the work of the church. We support the ministry of the gospel. It's as if we enter into partnership with God Himself to care for His people and for His church.

I think nowhere is this more profoundly put than in the words of our Lord in Matthew 25. Turn to Matthew 25. It's a very interesting passage. It's in the Olivet discourse. Matthew's the only one who records it of the four gospels. And in verse 31, He speaks of the time when He'll return in glory. He says,

“But when the Son of Man comes in glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. And all the nations will be gathered before Him.” [Now understand this is normally called the judgment of the nations, but it's not a judgment of nations as whole groups of people. It's a judgment of the individuals that make up those nations. This is at the end of the tribulation period and this judgment is to determine who will enter alive into the millennium, into the thousand-year reign of Christ. And it says,] “... He ... separate[s] them from one another (verse 32), as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats....” [Often, sheep and goats are allowed to graze together and the time comes, they have to be separated. And here, He uses that analogy.] Verse 33: “... He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the left.” “Then the King will say to those on His right [these are the sheep now], ‘Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.’”

This speaks of God's grace. In a moment, He's going to talk about the deeds, the works of those who are believers. But this phrase underscores that it's not because of their works that they're going to inherit the kingdom. No, it was all an expression of God's grace decided in eternity past. Their works are merely an expression of the change that God has wrought in their hearts.

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But notice how He describes them. Verse 35, these are the sheep, the believers, those who will enter from the tribulation into the millennial period. He says,

““For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty [I now remember this is the Lord talking, I was thirsty], and you gave Me something to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.’ Then the righteous will answer..., ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You something to drink? And when did we see You as a stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and clothe You? And when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?’” [They say, ‘Wait a minute. We don’t understand. We don’t remember that ever happening.’ And notice what the Lord says in verse 40: [I ...] the King will answer and say to them, ‘Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least ..., you did it to Me.’” [That is, that is a profound statement.] “you did it to Me.”

Listen, folks. When you and I give to those in need or we support those in ministry, Christ says it’s as if we were supporting Him. Get a vision for what it means to give. It means to become a partner in the gospel. It means to become one of the fellowship of the gospel and to become a partner, as it were, with Jesus Christ Himself. When we support those who serve on His behalf, when we support the work of the kingdom, Christ says it’s as if you did it to Me, it’s as if you gave Me the resources to perform the work of the kingdom.

So, the first principle of giving outlined in Philipppians 4 is: give with the right mindset, as a partner with other Christians and with God Himself.

The second principle is found in verses 15 and 16 back in Philipppians 4. It’s this: give according to God’s prescribed plan, give according to God’s prescribed plan. Verse 15:

You yourselves also know, Philipppians, that at the first preaching of the gospel, after I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving but you alone; for even in Thessalonica you sent a gift more than once for my needs.

Now here in these verses, Paul is obviously not teaching about giving per say. He’s reflecting the habits and pattern and mindset of the Philipppians. But as he does that, he hints at several aspects

of God's plan in giving, God's plan for our giving. And he develops them elsewhere, but some of them are implied here or a couple are actually directly stated. So, what are these parts of the divine plan? What has God prescribed for our giving? Well, we just have time to look at a couple of them this morning. We'll pick up this point two weeks from, from now.

But the first part of His prescription for giving is that our giving should primarily, and that's the key word, primarily, not exclusively, flow through the church. Our giving should primarily flow through the church. Now when you look at verses 15-18, the language here is filled with the language of Wall Street, the language of commerce. And he says, you'll notice in verse 15, "in the matter". It's an interesting Greek expression. It literally means "to the account of". It's used in Greek literature of business transactions. Paul is really saying, "You and I, Philippians, have opened an account together."

And then he uses the expression "giving and receiving". This refers to monetary transactions on both sides of a ledger. Now this sounds kind of cold to us, but this language was commonly used in the Greek world as warm and friendly discussion. It was a warm and friendly way in their language to describe the sort of mutual exchange of care and service and affection that occurred between friends. And Paul says to the Philippians, 'You and I have enjoyed that.' There's been a giving and taking is how we would describe it's a giving and receiving. We've both benefitted together from our relationship.

But listen carefully to what Paul says: "no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving but you alone." Notice that it was the Philippian church, singular, that gave to Paul. This hints at a principle that permeates the New Testament and that is our giving is to be primarily through the church. Now don't misunderstand. I'm not what is commonly called in some circles a storehouse tither. In fact, as you'll find out two weeks from today, I don't believe tithing is required of New Testament believers. We'll look at that in detail. So, I'm not talking about you have to bring everything you want to give to the church, but we're talking about this as a pattern that primarily our giving should flow through the church.

Let me show you this. It begins in Acts 5 - early in the life of the church, you remember of course this is shortly after Pentecost. And you can already begin to see how giving was accomplished. Verse, let's skip back to verse 35 or 34.

There [wasn't]... a needy person among them. [this is back in chapter 4 now, verse 34, Acts 4:34]. For there was not a needy person among them, for all who

were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales and lay them at the apostles' feet, and they would be distributed to each as any had need." [So already in the earliest days of the church, people are bringing what they want to give to the leaders of the church and the responsibility of those leaders is to disseminate it.]

You go to chapter 5. You have the familiar story of Ananias and Sapphira.

... a ... man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, and [they] kept back *some* of the price [for he kept back *some* of the price for himself, with his wife's full knowledge, and bringing a portion of it, he laid it at the apostles' feet [there again is that expression]. ... Peter said [to] Ananias, "Why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit to keep back part of the price of the land?" [The issue here isn't that he kept back part of the land. The issue is that he lied about what he was giving. He didn't have to sell it. He didn't have to give it. He didn't have to give all of it. The issue is he was trying to be deceptive.]

Verse 4: "While it remained *unsold*, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not under your control?" [The implication is now you're giving it to us, the apostles, to distribute it. It's no longer under your control. They were giving to the apostles to disperse.]

In the ministry of Paul, you see this same principle. Turn to 1 Corinthians 16. This is another important passage on the issue of giving. And in 1 Corinthians 16:1, he says: "Now concerning the collection for the saints..." [Notice there is a collection. And notice that this collection takes place in the church. He says this collection is going to be] "On the first day of every week." [Why is that? Because that's when the church gathers. And notice verse 1 again, he says, This isn't just something for you, Corinthians. This is for every church. It's exactly what I taught the churches at Galatia. These are common instructions that Paul gave for giving.]

Verse 2, ... [everyone] [and by the way, that's universal] "each one of you" [is an absolutely universal command. There's no Christian exempt from the issue of giving. The issue is what you decide to give. That's the part that isn't stipulated.] But he says: "...each one of you [everyone] [should] put aside and save..." [That's an interesting expression. That's the verb form of a word that means "chest" or "storehouse" where money and valuables were kept. In the first century in, in the temples, there were treasuries and repositories for cash and

valuables that were given as gifts. This suggests that the New Testament church had a similar chest or treasury into which offerings could be placed.]

Notice verse 3. [He says,] “... when I arrive, whomever you may approve, I ... [will] send them with letters to carry your gift to Jerusalem...” [Notice that all of the collections from all of the people in the church becomes one singular gift, the expression of their care as a church for the Jerusalem church.]

Now again, don't misunderstand. The fact that our giving should flow primarily through the church doesn't mean that you can't give outside the church. There are a number of examples of this in the New Testament, for example, James 2:15 and 16. James says, 'Look, if you know your brother has a need, then meet that need. You don't have to wait for the church to act to do that. Meet the need.' First John 3:17, the same thing happens. We're authorized to give directly to individuals to meet their needs. But the principle here is that primarily our giving should be through the church.

So, what should the church be doing with the money that we give? That brings us to the second part of God's prescribed plan. Not only should our giving be primarily through the church, but the second part of the plan is that we should direct our giving to accomplish God's established priorities. We should direct our giving not for our own purposes, but we should ask ourselves, 'What matters to God? What are His priorities?' And that's where we ought to give.

When you look at Scripture, there are three basic priorities God has for our giving, and this is what we as elders of this church try to maintain as a balance between these, these three issues. Number one: supporting missionaries, supporting missionaries. Look at verse 15 of Philippians 4. He's, that's what he's talking about here. He says, “You yourselves know, Philippians, that at the first preaching of the gospel [in other words, when I first preached to you there in Philippi], after I ... [left] Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving but you alone...” [He's talking about their supporting him in his mission work financially, his missionary needs.] In Acts 13:3, the church in Antioch that sent out Paul and Barnabas probably partially underwrote the expenses for at least Paul's first missionary journey.

Turn to 3 John. This is an epistle that we don't often look at, but it has an interesting comment on this issue of supporting those in the work of missionary enterprise. Third John is a letter about Christian hospitality, Christian hospitality specifically to those who minister the

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gospel, who are missionaries. He's writing to Gaius, the apostle John is. And he says this in verse 5.

Beloved, you are acting faithfully in whatever you accomplish for the brethren, and especially *when they are* strangers; and ... [have testified] to your love before the church; ... you will do well to send them on their way in a manner worthy of God [now who are these people?]. Verse 7. For they went out for the sake of the Name [that is, for the name of Christ], accepting nothing from the Gentiles. [In the early church in the first century, there were itinerant evangelists and missionaries sent out who couldn't be supported by their own churches and who needed the hospitality of the various churches into whose towns they came to support their work and that's what's described here.] Verse 8. Therefore, we ought to support such men, [so] that [here's that word again] we may be fellow workers with the truth.

Part of our giving should be to accomplish God's priority of the extension of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Whether you give through the church or whether you give individually, part of the priority of your giving should be for the advance of the gospel.

There's a second priority that God has however, not only supporting missionaries, but secondly helping those in need. Verse 14 back in Philippians 4, Paul says, "Nevertheless, you have done well to share *with me* in my affliction." The word "affliction" is a general word for pressure and trouble. Here, obviously it's a reference to Paul's imprisonment. He was in dire need. He was in one of those periods of life when he was hungry, without the sufficient resources to clothe himself and to eat. And they sent a financial gift. They cared for him in his need.

And you and I are to give to care for the needs of others. Now we have to be careful here because there are a number of pitfalls. There is an order of priority laid out in Scripture. First of all, the priority of our giving to help people in need is for believers. Romans 12:13 says we're to "contribute to the needs of the saints." But Galatians 6 makes it very clear. In Galatians 6:10, Paul writes, "So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of faith." Our first priority in caring for the needs of people begins with fellow believers.

And of course, that starts in our own household. You remember 1 Timothy 5:8 where Paul says the man who doesn't, the Christian man who doesn't provide for his own family is what?

He's worse than an unbeliever. So, caring for the needs of people, of Christian people, begins with our own families, with those who live under our roof, with ailing parents, aging parents who have needs, etc.

And then it extends to those Christians that are a part of the fellowship where we attend, where we have pitched our lot. Here in this church, it begins with the believers here. For example, in Acts 6 (we won't turn there, but in Acts chapter 6) you remember the Jerusalem church took offerings and, and then paid for food to pay, or excuse me, to feed the widows, both the Greek and the Jewish widows. The Jerusalem church cared for their own.

So, our responsibilities start at home with the Christians who are in our families, extends to the Christians that are in our immediate circle, the Christians in our church, and then it extends out from there to other believers outside of our immediate area. Notice Acts 11. You see one of many New Testament examples of this. In Acts 11 some prophets have come down from Jerusalem to Antioch. One of them is Agabus and Agabus indicates by the Spirit that there's a famine coming. So, in verse 29,

...in the proportion [Luke writes] that any of the disciples had means, each of them determined to send a contribution for the relief of the brethren living in Judea. And this they did, sending it in charge of Barnabas and Saul to the elders.

Do you see how it works? You and I are to care for the needs of other Christians. It starts with our own families. It circles out to those who are a part of our congregation. And it goes from there to other Christians whom we hear have genuine need and we can reach out and care for them. And then, of course, it goes beyond that to what Galatians 6:10 says is "all men" – that is, even unbelievers – in that order.

God's priorities for our giving is that we would support missionaries, the advance of the gospel, that we would support those in need, and the third priority God gives us for our giving is supporting the ministry of the local church, supporting the ministry of the local church. Turn to First Timothy 5, 1 Timothy 5. Paul addresses the issue here. In the first part of chapter 5, he's dealing with the issue of widows. In the early church in the New Testament times, there was no way for widows to support themselves. And so, the church took on the responsibility for caring for them. And so money was collected and widows who were approved, who were put on the list as it says in verse 9, "... a widow [is to] be put on the list only if

she's not less than sixty years old, etc...." and gives a bunch of criteria. They were supported by the church. There's the tending to those in need.

But notice verse 17. While he's on the topic of money, he says, Oh, by the way, "... the elders who rule well" [now this doesn't mean that there were elders in Ephesus where Timothy was that ruled poorly. He's simply saying there are those who, all of them rule well - there are some who rule especially well, who excel. And notice he identifies them] "especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching." He said these are "to be considered worthy of double honor." He's talking about paying them. Those who minister the Word of God, who labor at teaching preaching, at teaching and preaching, are to be paid by the church. In case you think I'm making that up, look at verse 18: "For the Scripture says, 'YOU SHALL NOT MUZZLE THE OX WHILE HE IS THRESHING,' and 'The laborer is worthy of his wages.'" This is the responsibility. When we give, we give to support those who give themselves to labor and teaching and preaching in the Word.

Turn to 1 Corinthians, 1 Corinthians 9. Paul is defending himself here. He's been under attack by some of his critics in Corinth. And in 1 Corinthians 9: 3, he says,

"My defense to those who examine me is this: Do we not have a right to eat and drink? [He says, 'Listen, don't I have a right to eat and drink and for you to support me in that? He says,) [Don't]... we have a right to take along a believing wife [in other words, for my wife to be supported to come along with me], even as the rest of the apostles and the brothers of the Lord and ... [Peter]? Or do only Barnabas and I not have the right to refrain from working? [Are we in a special class? he says.] Who at any time serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard, and ... [doesn't] eat from the fruit of it? Or ... tends a flock and ... [doesn't] use the milk from the flock?" [He said,] '... [Am] ... [I just making this up'] Verse 8, "... Or does not the Law also say these things?" [He said, 'You go back to] ... the Law of Moses [and it says,] "You SHALL NOT MUZZLE THE OX WHILE HE IS THRESHING."' [He said, 'Listen, that doesn't just have to do with oxen, does it?'] Verse 10, [No, he's speaking about us.] Verse 11, "If we sowed spiritual things in you, is it too much if we reap material things from you?" ... Verse 13, "[Don't] ... you know that those who perform sacred services eat the *food* of the temple, and those who attend regularly to the altar have their share

from the altar?” [And here’s the punch line.] Verse 14. “So also the Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel.”

In Galatians 6:6, Paul says: “The one who is taught the word is to share all good things with the one who teaches him.” So part of God’s priority for our giving is to support the ministry of the local church starting with those who minister and serve the word including everything else that is necessary for the functioning of that local church - in our case, obviously air conditioning and heat and a place to meet, other staff members because of the size of our church to make things function. But when we give, God says your giving should be for those things.

Now folks, there are a lot of wonderful things, a lot of wonderful causes in the world which constantly call out for our giving. But as Christians, we should direct our giving to accomplish God’s established priorities which are supporting those who expand the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, giving to those in need starting with believers and thirdly, the ministry of the local church. And when we give, we give not to pay God off. You and I can never pay back the debt we owe, and we shouldn’t even try. We don’t give to pay anything off. We give instead in obedience to God and we give in gratitude – gratitude certainly for the material blessings we enjoy, but, more than that, for the spiritual blessings that we enjoy.

Ultimately, we give in response to God’s great gift. Paul makes this point. In closing, turn to 2 Corinthians 8. Second Corinthians 8:9. Right in the middle of this section on giving, he says, “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich.” Why does he include that? It’s an incentive. It’s an incentive to give. Give like Christ gave. Give like God gave. In fact, notice how he finishes up these two great chapters on giving. Chapter 9:15. “Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!”

Listen, folks. You and I give because we have received so freely God’s indescribable gift. And that brings us to the celebration of the Lord’s Table. When we partake of the bread and the cup, we celebrate our Lord’s great gift to us, the gift of His Son sacrificed in our place.