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A Voice from the Past:

THE GRACE OF GIVING*

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*So let each one give as he purposes in his heart,
not grudgingly or of necessity, for God loves a
cheerful giver (2 Cor 9:7).*

I. Introduction

What a combination of doctrine and practice there should always be in the life of a Christian! Yet sometimes words and actions do not agree with professed principles. St. Paul soars aloft in his marvelous unfolding of the resurrection doctrine in the fifteenth chapter of his First Epistle to the Corinthians, and then stoops to "Now concerning the collection for the saints," in the beginning of the sixteenth chapter. And in this ninth chapter of his Second Epistle we have an amplification of his exhortation to give, which ends with "Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!"

II. Principles of Giving under Grace

Universal Giving

Paul says this giving should be *Universal*—"each one," and so every Christian's purse is involved, not by command of the Apostle but rather by his advice, that genuine love to Christ may be demonstrated and that abundant joy shall produce from the overflowing heart abundant benevolence, as was the case of the poor Macedonians.

Systematic Giving

Then, giving should be *Systematic*, not haphazardly, not impulsively, but according to principle. There is need of

calculation and care in one's giving that holiness of life may be expressed in practical conduct. A Scottish congregation whose members were poor, pledged itself to give one penny² a day for missions on six days of the week, and on the remaining day to go without meat and give sixpence,³ thus contributing one shilling⁴ a week to missionary work.

Regular Giving

Giving should also be *Regular*. There must be no forgetting, because to give constantly adds to the value. A member of my congregation in London was in the habit of placing a sovereign⁵ on the offertory plate every Sunday. When unable to be at church through failing health, for she was past ninety years of age, an envelope containing a sovereign was always left in the vestry to be added to the collection. The dependability of the offering enhanced its worth. The Apostle advises—"On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper." This is regularity.

Proportionate Giving

Then *Proportionate* giving is advocated. Let there be mathematical calculation. The NT supplies us with three principles:

According to Possession

In 2 Cor 8:12, giving is to be according to *Possession*—"what one has." If a man has much, he should give plenty and give it gladly and freely. If he has little, there is all the more opportunity for "cheerful" giving.

According to Power

The second principle is according to *Power*, as we see in 2 Cor 8:3, where it is recorded of the poor Macedonian Church that "beyond their ability, they were freely willing."

According to Prosperity

The third principle of giving is to be in accordance with *Prosperity*—"as he may prosper" (1 Cor. 16:2). Therefore, the amount can be variable. Yes, if my prosperity has been greater this year I will gladly give more; if prosperity has

passed me by I will sadly lessen my gifts, but, when I do this, let me not forget the widow's mites,⁶ which were "all the livelihood that she had." What did the Jew of old give? He gave a tithe of all, and in addition there were freewill offerings and special gifts. It has been computed that he gave about one-fifth, and frequently one-fourth, out of his prosperity.

Hearty Giving

After considering Universal, Systematic, Regular and Proportionate Giving, we next observe that liberality should be *Hearty*. It must not be of grief or compulsion or, as the Apostle puts it, "grudgingly or of necessity." What dignity is given to benevolence when we remember that He who owns all cares about our gifts! "God *loves* a cheerful giver"! The Greek word⁷ here translated "cheerful" is the one from which our English word "hilarious" is derived, and its use here suggests a spontaneous outburst of sheer joy in the service of giving.

A story is told of a Liverpool merchant upon whom a Christian worker called to solicit money.

Ten shillings was the amount given with the remark, "I am sorry it is so little—I have the heart but not the money."

A year afterwards, hearing that the merchant had fallen heir to half a million, the Christian worker again presented himself to plead for the cause he had in hand. He was met by a refusal to give anything at all, which looked as though the merchant now had the money but not the heart!

Let us each ask himself or herself, "What am I doing to make myself a hearty giver? Am I looking at my accounts to see how much I can give? Still more, am I examining God's Word to see what He expects of me?"

This chapter, a verse of which we have been considering, ends with the words, "Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift," which reminds us to look at the Cross if we would get even a faint conception of what that "indescribable gift" involved.

"I don't like your way of saying so much about giving," said a member of my congregation to me.

To this I replied, "Why should you be concerned about what I say if you are giving what you ought to give?"

III. Conclusion

In conclusion, let us consider seven ways of giving.

Careless Giving

First, there is the *Careless* way which pays no regard to the why and wherefore.

Impulsive Giving

Then there is the *Impulsive* way which is moved according to feelings, is irregular and uncertain.

Lazy Giving

The *Lazy* way gives because it is less trouble to give to a cause than to think out and explain a reason for not giving.

Self-denying Giving

The *Self-denying* way is good, as it saves the cost of luxuries that can be done without. Doubtless, too, there are those who deny themselves necessities in order to give.

Systematic Giving

The *Systematic* way of giving is excellent. Most Christians who tithe decide that one-tenth is the minimum and often go over this amount in their benefactions. There are those who give to the Lord's work one-fifth or one-third. Perhaps these are the ones who look at their check books with regard to their balance at the bank and who decide that in their cases one-tenth does not equal the giving of their less affluent friends.

Equal Giving

The *Equal* way of giving says, "I will give to God's work as much as I spend on myself." This plan has been carried out by prosperous Christian businessmen.

Heroic Giving

The *Heroic* plan of giving limits expenses to a certain sum and gives the rest to God. "I have put into bonds and securities sufficient to leave my family not penniless," said a certain man noted for his large benevolences, "And now I am going to give to God's work all that is left after expenses.

*"Give, give, be always giving,
Who gives not is not living,
The more we give, the more we live."*

*"Give strength, give thought, give
deeds, give self⁸
Give love, give tears and give thyself
The more we give, the more we live."*

Footnotes:

* This article was compiled from the author's sermon notes after his death. It was originally published in The Evangelical Christian, a Canadian journal. None of Dr. Thomas's own words have been changed, but the subdivisions with titles have been added for today's visually-oriented readership. Biblical quotations have been updated from the King James to the New King James for today's readers. Since the author's only offspring, Winifred Griffith Thomas Gillespie, worked on the English styling of this version, the editor is sure that her father would not mind this change of versions. As (lucky!) thirteenth proofreader of the first edition of the NKJV NT, she was the only one whose eagle eye noticed that we had capitalized a He referring to King Herod! Mrs. Gillespie, who is a member of the Editorial Board of JOTGES, also wrote the footnotes to this article to explain British terms to us benighted "Colonials"! Ed.

1. My father was born in 1861 at Oswestry, Shropshire, in England. He obtained his bachelor's degree from King's College, London, while acting as lay reader before his ordination as a deacon in the Church of England. After a curacy at an Oxford church while working for his master's degree at the University, he was appointed Vicar of St. Paul's Church, Portman Square in London's West End. Here he spent nine years, and then five years more on the faculty of Wycliffe College, Toronto. In 1919 we moved to Philadelphia, whence he carried on an extensive Bible

Conference ministry, thus becoming well-known in both the U.S. and Canada. When urged to consider a return to pastoral work in England, my father would often reply with a smile, "But over here a continent is my parish." He was a prime mover in the founding of Dallas Theological Seminary, and was to have been the Professor of Systematic Theology. Death cut short these plans just before the opening of the school in 1924. However, his extensive library became the nucleus of the new institution's library. His writings, some of which I have been privileged to edit since his death, have contributed his insights to Dallas faculty, students, and many other Christians around the world. I am certain that my father would have felt the warmest sympathy for the great purpose of the Grace Evangelical Society. Indeed, one of his recently republished books bears the word Grace in its title (Grace and Power, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1984).

2 A large British copper coin formerly worth two American cents (or "pennies").

3 The sum of six British pennies, sixpence is now an obsolete coin.

4 A former coin of the United Kingdom.

5 A former British gold coin worth about \$100 in today's dollars.

6 A very ancient coin (Gk. lepton). The name mite is often used in popular speech for a minimal contribution to a cause. N.B.: The widow gave two of them-all she had to live on.

7 The Greek word hilaros means cheerful, glad, or gracious.

8 An old English word for money, often used with contempt or, as here, to provide rhyme in verse.

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