

6. Building up the Body of Christ by Giving

It is difficult to see how we can build up the body of Christ separate from the material means that makes growth possible. The local church, just as any other corporate body, needs resources in order to grow. The New Testament is very prescriptive on how the church is to raise money to carry on the work of the Lord in this present world.

How the Church Is to Raise Money

How the church of Christ raises money is a distinguishing feature of the church. The New Testament speaks clearly on how the church does its money raising. One feature of the church of Christ is the manner in which it is to raise the money necessary for the work of the Lord. Paul tells us how to support the work of the Lord in 1 Cor 16:1-2, "16:1 Now about the collection for God's people: Do what I told the Galatian churches to do. 2 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."

The first day of the week collection is the only means that the church has to raise money to support its work—the work of the Lord. There are no raffles, auctions, or suppers. Nor is there tithing, pledging, or coercing. But each Christian puts aside on the first day of the week in keeping with his income. Paul provides the motivation and power for this free will giving in 1 Cor. 15:58 where we are charged to give ourselves fully to the work of the Lord: "58 Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain."

Each Member to Give in Keeping with His Income

In order to build up the local church, each member must give in keeping with his income. In other versions of the New Testament, *how much* is included in the phrase, "*as he has prospered.*" There is no direct answer given in the Bible as to exactly how much a member is to give. Even human wisdom tells us that it depends on the circumstances of the person giving. Jesus tells of a widow who gave all that she had in Mark 12:42-44:

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."

Members to Give Even of Their Poverty

The Macedonian brethren gave out of their deep poverty. Paul praised them for giving even though they had deep poverty in 2 Cor 8:1-5:

8:1 And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. 2 Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. 3 For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, 4 they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints. 5 And 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.

One can imagine how strong a local congregation could be, if it gave of deep poverty in order to carry on the work of the Lord.

Attitudes That Dominate Giving

What attitudes should dominate our giving? The Bible is clear. Our gift will measure our reward. 2 Cor 9:6 teaches, "6 Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously.

In addition, 2 Cor 9:7 teaches that we should decide in our heart what to give, do not give reluctantly, and give cheerfully: "7 Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver."

The Lord spares us from passing judgment on others, making each of us responsible in our own hearts.

Conclusion

In order to build up the body of Christ and in order to build up a local congregation, elders and preachers should teach the truth on giving. When individuals and congregations meet this responsibility, our giving and labor in the Lord are not in vain. The congregation and the church worldwide will grow.

Finally, the lesson of the parable of the talents should measure our giving. The Master expects us to use what he has given for work in his kingdom:

14 "Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property to them. 15 To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. 16 The man who had received the five talents went at once and put his money to work and gained five more. 17 So also, the one with the two talents gained two more. 18 But the man who had received the one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money.

19 "After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. 20 The man who had received the five talents brought the other five. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with five talents. See, I have gained five more.'

21 "His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'

22 "The man with the two talents also came. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with two talents; see, I have gained two more.'

23 "His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'

24 "Then the man who had received the one talent came. 'Master,' he said, 'I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. 25 So I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.'

26 "His master replied, 'You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? 27 Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest. Matt 25:14-27