

Giving: Take a Leap of Faith**Reading: 2 Corinthians 8:1-15; 9:6-15**

Surely we should be quick to defend our `right' to do with our money as we please: after all high taxes remove the need to surrender this part of our lives to God.

Yet when Jesus observed people offering gifts at the Temple Treasury he comments that the value of the gift didn't depend on how large it was – it's real worth depended on whether it was given out of what affluent people have to spare of their riches or out of what a poor person has to live on (Luke 21:1-4)

In the Corinthian Church (1 Corinthians 16) Paul has instructed each person in the early church to set aside an amount of money

- in keeping with his or her income
- so that time and energy would not be wasted with collections when Paul arrived to take the money to Jerusalem for the relief of the sisters and brothers in Christ there who were distressed. Here Paul urges them to continue this act of love.

In chapters 8 and 9 Paul reveals some helpful principles on Christian giving:

1. Generous giving arises out of God's love for us.
As the example of the Macedonians shows, generosity does not always arise out of wealth, but sometimes out of distress and poverty. Christian generosity may involve giving beyond our means (8:3).
2. Giving is a privilege, not a burden (8:4). The Macedonians asked to be included! It was a free-will offering! The compulsion comes from within asked they respond.
3. Giving is directed by God (8:5). The Macedonians were more generous than Paul expected because they had given themselves first to God.
4. Overflowing with trust, speech, knowledge and love is to be matched by overflowing generosity (8:7).
5. Generous giving arises out of following the self-giving example of Jesus (8:9). Although he was rich, for the sake of others he became poor.
6. If eagerness to please God is the motive for giving, the gift is acceptable to him in relation to what we have, not in relation to what we do not have (9:7).
7. Christian giving is not designed to bring poverty to the giver but to help those in need and to establish equality in the wider Christian family (9:13-15).

8. To give sparingly is to receive sparingly; to give generously is to receive generously (9:6). Paul probably has in mind both spiritual and material blessings (9:10-11).
9. Christians can trust God. To hang on tightly to our present possessions is a failure to trust God to supply our needs and to miss out on the liberating experience of his care.
10. Giving causes thanksgiving. It not only supplies the needs of others but causes them to give praise and thanks to God (that we have been obedient to him) and to pray for us (9:12-15).

Paul urges giving that is intentional regular, eager, cheerful and in proportion to what a Christian possesses.

In the URC we have got ourselves locked into thinking that what we pay for M&M (Ministry and Mission) entitles us to a portion of a minister. We have forgotten the prophetic hallmark of the early church that they held all things in common. Under the principle of the early Christian Church that all things are held in common (Acts 2 and 4) the Ministry and Mission Fund was set up to provide in partnership with local churches and Synods, financial resources needed to train, equip and remunerate ministry, to support centralised services, and the world-wide work of the Church. It is a fundamental belief of the United Reformed Church that congregations share in the financial cost of the programmes agreed by Assembly by making an annual commitment to the M&M Fund. This is fundamental to whom we are as a denomination together – a small church with a generous heart.

We have a generous heart because it's all about grace of God – God's attitude to, and actions for, us, and the response we make in gratitude and love for God. That is it: to live by grace in a way that is spontaneous and joyful.

In 1978 the writers of the URC's Christian Stewardship Study/Action Pack wrote: *Our churches need members. Our churches need ministers. But most of all our churches need renewal. Stewardship faces the Church with the Gospel and the Gospel invites response – joyful, grateful, responsible, yet with laughter and delight – to all that God has done, is doing, and yet will do for the word he has created and redeemed.*

Nothing has changed, has it? Except perhaps our need to respond to God's generous grace and take a leap of faith.

*Rev. Nicola Furley-Smith
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