

A Christian Theology of Giving

Edward P. Meadors

A theology of giving arises from the biblical call for God's people to tithe, be generous, and be productive with financial resources. Jesus' parable of the talents in Matthew 25:14-30 and the parable of the minas in Luke 19:12-27 challenge Christians to be strategic, productive, and aggressive in using resources for the King's work. Jesus' theology of giving arises from the awareness that if God is our treasure, we will steward our resources with the goal of contributing the most that we possibly can for his kingdom. This does not mean a life of ascetic destitution, but one of wise stewardship exercised in generous Christ-like *agape* love.

In 2 Corinthians chapters 8-9, Paul provides five theological reasons for advancing the ministry of Jesus through giving.

1. First, Paul challenges the Corinthians to give as an expression of the sincerity of their love: "I am not speaking this as a command, but as proving through the earnestness of others the sincerity of your love also" (2 Cor. 8:8). Lip service is common in our world, but anonymous financial giving is a genuine expression of love for the less fortunate in our world and for God, who created them as he did everyone.
2. Second, financial giving imitates Jesus' own personal sacrifice: "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, that you through his poverty might become rich" (2 Cor. 8:9). Christian discipleship is by definition the imitation of Christ. Giving, Paul explains, is a specific way that Christians are called to reflect the character of Jesus.
3. Third, giving authenticates the believer's faith: "Now this I say, he who sows sparingly shall also reap sparingly; and he who sows bountifully shall also reap bountifully. Let each one do just as he has purposed in his heart; not grudgingly or under compulsion; for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed; as it is written, 'he scattered abroad, he gave to the poor, his righteousness abides forever.' Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food, will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness; you will be enriched in everything for all liberality, which through us is producing thanksgiving to God. For the ministry of this service is not only fully supplying the needs of the saints, but is also overflowing through

many thanksgivings to God. Because of the proof given by this ministry they will glorify God for your obedience to your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for the liberality of your contribution to them and to all, while they also, by prayer on your behalf, yearn for you because of the surpassing grace of God in you” (2 Cor. 9:6-14).

Giving demonstrates that our faith is ultimately not in earthly securities but in God who sustains our health and secures our eternal well-being. Earthly resources and physical health will pass away, our relationship with God is permanent and our work in his behalf has eternal value.

4. Fourth, giving contributes to the worship of God: “For the ministry of this service is not only fully supplying the needs of the saints, but is also overflowing through many thanksgivings to God” (2 Cor. 9:12). Giving is every bit as much an act of worship as prayer, singing, and preaching; it is participation in the ministry of Christ and evidence of our atonement with him.
5. Fifth, giving results in unity in the corporate, universal body of Christ: “Because of the proof given by this ministry they will glorify God for your obedience to your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for the liberality of your contribution to them and to all, while they also, by prayer on your behalf, yearn for you because of the surpassing grace of God in you” (2 Cor. 9:13- 14).

The Christian theology of giving is not motivated by selfish “health and wealth” incentives, but by the realization that God is our ultimate inheritance and our true health and wealth—individually, relationally, and corporately. Jesus came that we might have life and have it abundantly (John 10:10), and so we do and so we shall. The joy of giving is one essential dimension of true wealth and true health.

Suggested Bibliography

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