

An Example of Giving, Part 2—Romans 15:26-29—3/17/2013

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Open your Bibles to Romans 15 where we pick up our study of Paul's letter to the church at Rome from some time around AD 56-58.

We saw last week that Acts 18-20 records Paul's travels during that time as he wrote from Corinth and headed for Jerusalem.

We tied together various points in Acts with Romans and Paul's other letters by tracing the mention of Paul's trip to Jerusalem to deliver a gift and his desire to get to Rome and go on to Spain.

Let's begin by reading in Romans 15:22-29 to refresh our memories—follow along in Romans 15:22-29. [READ]

This section brings us to the topic of money.

We all like to spend money, but most people in our society do not want any accountability about how we spend money.

Many people, including government leaders & even Christians, do not want anyone telling them how to spend or not spend their money.

They don't want oversight of finances or questions about why you did this or why you didn't do that.

But if we have integrity, such questions should not threaten us.

Yet statistics about the finances of American Christians show that many do have something to hide or be ashamed of.

And from your feedback after last week, that applies here too.

So I urged you last week to take some serious time to sit down and make a budget and evaluate your budget and commit to the biblical applications and changes needed in your finances.

Even you kids can do this—if you earn money from an allowance or small jobs—you can be learning how to worship God by your giving.

Parents—lessons on money are not only for later when kids find a dream job when they can supposedly 'afford' to give.

We can teach our kids now to worship God in the small things.

The principles are the same.

And by the way, I was asked about 1st Corinthians 16:1-2 where Paul instructed them to set aside money to begin each week with giving.

Is that kind of giving before the needs of the week hit—before the bills come in—is that wise or biblical to do?

The answer is yes—it's an act of faith to plan to give to God first.

It is like the OT giving of the first-fruits—the first part of the harvest was given to God as an act of faith that God would provide the rest of the harvest.

And that was also a right first response of gratitude to God for bringing the first harvest of the season.

That is part of faithful planned giving that's modeled in the NT—it's done in faith and with thanksgiving.

And it's done up front, not as a leftover or afterthought because the heart attitude should be one that wants to honor God first and best.

Some of the strongest rebukes in the Bible are from God in Malachi against Israel for offering Him their second-best gifts and leftovers and what they couldn't use otherwise.

Either God is first and most important and most worthy—or He's not—and our money and giving are vital indicators of that.

God cares about our stewardship of what He gives us.

And we saw that last week as we traced how often Paul's mention of this gift for the saints at Jerusalem came up throughout the NT.

Romans 15:25 taught us that this busy Apostle to the Gentiles who was ever taking the Gospel to new frontiers prioritized stewardship of this gift over continued evangelism.

Though Paul wanted to go to Spain by way of Rome, he first needed to insure that this gift was delivered with integrity & proper perspective.

Paul delayed his travel plans because this money mattered and that led us to make a 1st point of application for our lives today, that, #1, our giving matters.

So as we pick up from last time in our 5 points from Romans 15:25-29, we start with mention of that 1st point—#1—your giving matters.

We gleaned that point from Paul's example to be a careful, involved steward of this gift to saints in Jerusalem.

His example begs us to ask if we are that serious about stewardship.

Do you weigh out what the money God gives you could be used for in His purposes for your life in this world?

As I pondered this, I was struck by how little I think about Christian brothers and sisters without food in other parts of the world.

Paul presented this need with the Gentile churches he planted, but they most likely did not know the saints in Jerusalem.

Yet they gave to help meet their needs.

And again, we have to be careful in our day because many schemes claim to meet needs or support ministry and don't.

Some such ministries today support the lifestyles or red tape of a few people rather than feeding many or spreading the Gospel.

So we need discernment and we strive for that as a church in how we give help and select missionaries and have open books.

Paul's example encourages us to such serious stewardship.

And I thank God that for some of you, these truths are just reminders for why you do what you are already doing.

But we all should ask why God has given us the money He has given.

Today we find answers as we move on in Romans 15:25-29.

But first let me remind you also from last time of our 2nd point—that your attitude about giving matters.

Our 2 points last week were, #1—that your giving matters, and #2—that your attitude about giving matters.

We got the first point from verse 25 and how it fits in the overall flow of the NT and Paul's travels.

We got the 2nd point from verse 26 so read that again. [READ]

The Macedonia and Achaian Christians were happy to share.

They thought it good and took pleasure in the fellowship of taking on the needs of other believers as their own.

Last week we turned to 2nd Corinthians 8-9 for an expanded description of just how happy the Macedonians were to give.

They literally begged for the privilege of being able to give.

They were on fire for giving with joy here and treasure in heaven.

And they gave according to their ability & beyond their ability, meaning they calculated what they could afford & gave more.

That kind of generosity flowed out of the grace of the Gospel in their hearts so that they were glad to give.

Their giving was the overflow of their abundance of joy so that even their poverty could overflow with lavish generosity.

It wasn't that they had enough money to give—it was that they gladly and lavishly gave out of what they had.

2nd Corinthians 8:9 states the Gospel is what shapes the right attitude to have about giving.

2nd Corinthians 8:9 says—“*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.*”

Jesus stepped down from the eternal riches of heaven to become a poor 1st century Jew who lived perfectly and died sacrificially for all who would trust Him to inherit eternal life.

He paid the infinite debt of sin to offer full and free forgiveness and to secure that forgiveness for all who believe.

Jesus was incalculably generous and His grace to us is the motive for our response to meeting the needs of others.

That's how the Gospel shapes our attitude about giving.

And Paul also summed up that point in 2nd Corinthians 9:7—
2nd Corinthians 9:7 says, “*Let each one do just as he has purposed in his heart; not grudgingly or under compulsion; for God loves a cheerful giver.*”

Our giving should not feel forced and we should grumble or be stingy.

To experience the love of God in our hearts flowing out toward others, pray for and practice an attitude of cheerful giving.

If you want your heart overflowing with joy in God's love, then seek to learn and live the fun of being a funnel.

God made us to enjoy being funnels where He pours in and we pour it out—and that's the fun of being a funnel.

But what should give toward?

How should we weigh out how to spend and give money?

That's where we move to our 3rd point from this section.

Points 1 & 2 we covered last week, but your feedback moved me to review a little more than normal.

So remember, point #1—your giving matters; and #2—your attitude about giving matters.

Now #3—your responsibility for giving matters.

Point #3—your responsibility for giving matters.

Read Romans 15:27 again to see that 3rd point. [READ]

First here we see that their pleasure in giving is repeated—that this was voluntary, cheerful, planned, and happy.

And notice that duty is not in contrast with delight.

These Gentiles were in debt to the Jewish believers in Jerusalem because the Gospel was sent out from there.

So these Christians were giving because they owed it.

Giving was their duty, their debt, their obligation.

In other words, they had to do this—it was only right to do it.

Twice the verb form of indebtedness is used—the word for owing it, for being obligated to give, for needing to pay back a debt.

And the word for ministering or being of service to them or sharing with them is a religious term of public service.

Often we have been wrongly told in our times that duty and sacrifice and service are not things to be enjoyed.

But that's a lie—it's a false dichotomy to say you can be either dutiful or delightful because God's ways bring both together.

In Christ by the power of the Spirit, we can delight to do our duty.

In God's kindness, He designed delight to be part of our duty.

Just think of that in marriage—my wife is not very thrilled for me to show love to her if my duty to love her is not done with delight.

I am happy to obey the obligation to love my wife because it brings me joy to bring her joy and to spend time with her.

That's the way all of our duties in response to God should be—walking in His ways should always be a deep-seated delight.

It is a pleasure to follow the good ways of God by His grace.

And verse 27 very clearly repeats the pleasure of the Macedonians and Achaians in their giving and then seamlessly connects that pleasure with their response to a debt they owed.

Do you get that?

That's vital to get for how your approach giving and all obedience.

This is crucial to see for being a cheerful giver in God's love.

Paul probably shared the need of the Jerusalem saints and told churches they really ought to support their fellow believers & that the Gentiles owed it to the Jerusalem saints to send money to help them.

So just think of how you respond to that kind of appeal.

I began today by mentioning how most people don't like to be told how to spend or not spend their money or how to give or not give.

But that's exactly what Paul must have done with the Macedonian and Achaian churches he planted.

He must have told them how they were supposed to give and what they should give toward.

And they did not bristle against it or begrudge it at all.

2nd Corinthians 8 says they begged to be a part of such giving.

So here's the deal—they had a responsibility to give to the Jerusalem saints & they embraced that responsibility with joy.

And that's how we get our 3rd point of application from this section in Romans 15 that your responsibility for giving matters.

Let's examine that responsibility further to see how it applies today because the Jerusalem church is not there anymore.

That early Jerusalem church has long ago spread and been persecuted and those original Christians obviously died.

So what's the principle taught here?

It's clear in the verse—since the Gentiles shared in the Jews' spiritual things, they were indebted to minister to them in material things.

And share is the verb form of that word for fellowship again.

They received instruction and truth and blessing and fellowship from the spiritual foundation and source and investment of the Jerusalem saints where the church started and spread from.

And therefore, they owed material things back in return.

They owed literally the fleshly things, but fleshly here refers not to the sinful flesh but to the basic material needs of life.

So the principle is that those who receive spiritual blessings should respond by giving material blessings to those who give or provide or send the spiritual blessings.

Or as Paul said it elsewhere, those who preach the Gospel should get their living from the Gospel.

Have you ever wondered why pastors get paid salaries?

Here's the principle that is based on.

And though it's kind of awkward for any pastor to stand up and say it, it's biblical so I say it—if you receive spiritual blessing from this church & its pastors, you owe material blessings.

I would rather not say it that way because the Gospel is free and I always want to serve freely by grace.

And ultimately we as pastors must have the mentality that we serve God so that we're not crippled by man-pleasing.

But though it's awkward for me to share it, God has revealed in His Word that you who receive spiritual blessings owe material blessings.

And in our times, that has application also to the facilities where we enjoy spiritual blessings.

So wrapped up in this principle is the obligation to give to pay for buildings and upkeep and utilities and regular bills for property.

It may sound spiritual to not want to give money to take care of physical property, but it's not biblical or practical.

The material needs of this ministry include the facilities.

And for those in our times who try to make owning property sound earthly, I remind you that they pay rent somewhere.

And renting is often more expensive than owning and it is also a poorer long-term investment for the future of a ministry.

But lest it seem like I'm stretching this point from verse 27, I want you to turn to the one place in the NT where we find the exact wording of spiritual things and material things.

Turn to 1st Corinthians 9 with me & let's read Paul's teaching on why preachers and pastors should be financially supported.

Though Paul often chose not to take support because he also chose to live with the gift of singleness where he only had himself to support, he defended his right to be paid.

Follow along with me in 1st Corinthians 9:4-14. [READ]

1st Corinthians 9:11 is where we find the wording we saw in Romans 15:27 but this section expands the thought more fully.

Paul had the right to be paid and to have a wife.

But by the way, notice that even here he is clear to say that believers should only marry believers.

Catch that, singles and kids and teens—a Christian man should only marry a Christian woman & a Christian woman only a Christian man.

Paul had that right and did not exercise it and he also had the right to be financially supported and did not exercise it.

But he wanted it clear that it was right for others to be supported.

And by the way, since the Catholic Church in our times just appointed a new pope, it's a good time to note that their rule for church leaders not to marry is not biblical.

Paul made it clear here that a preacher or pastor could marry.

But he made it far clearer as the main thrust of this whole section from verse 4 through verse 14 of 1st Corinthians 9 that the one who works in ministry should be paid for it.

Just like an ox working in grain should eat the grain and just like a farmer eats from his crops and livestock, so also spiritual workers should earn their living from that work.

And to go back to the wording of Romans 15:27—those who share in that spiritual ministry owe it to support their ministers.

Most of you know this and I'm thankful to be supported by this church and to enjoy 2 other pastors freed up for full-time ministry.

Being freed up from other work to do the work of ministry full-time is really the right way to think about this as well.

Sadly in the past century and at other times, some people try to get into ministry to make money or to escape working in some other way.

But the point of being called into ministry is that God gifts and affirms to be supported and freed up to serve.

It's to be supported with the needed material things for life and family in order to be free to preach and lead and shepherd as God designed.

I praise God that I'm freed up to serve with such faithful fellow elders and such a loving congregation.

And I know that the pastors are not the only ones sacrificially serving because so many of you faithfully labor in relationships and ministries.

And we're also blessed with lay elders who work in other jobs and still work in pastoring and teaching roles in the church.

But I want to share how I praise God today for the privilege and joy that has been mine to be supported to serve here for over 12 years and I look forward to continuing for many years to come, Lord willing.

I need to say that as I also teach these truths about paying your pastors that may seem a bit awkward for me to share.

And I know that at least some of you believe and practice the truths we're studying today or I would not have been able to feed my family.

But we always need reminders and some of you need a freshly transformed perspective on the delightful duty of giving.

We all need to know that our responsibility for giving matters.

And by the way, we can find that same idea in 1st Timothy 5:17-18 with the same reference to not muzzling the ox.

1st Timothy 5:17-18 says, "*The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching.*"¹⁸ For the Scripture says, "**YOU SHALL NOT MUZZLE THE OX WHILE HE IS THRESHING,**" and "*The laborer is worthy of his wages.*"

Double honor in verse 17 means pay or support and we know that because verse 18 explains it as being worthy of his wages.

So 1st Timothy 5:17-18 also teach the principle of paying pastors.

And again, the need to care for material things also applies to the facilities we use.

And any expansion of ministry also requires that we have a mindset to invest in the future of this church and the global spread of the Gospel.

That's where our focus here is on what we call our Future Fund as we seek to respond to the need for space we already have.

And it's where our focus is evident when you walk in the door to see the missionaries we support around the world.

Paul used this root word for debtor in Roman 1:14 and other places to describe his obligation to preach the Gospel to others.

And that's the same obligation we have to preach and spread the Gospel here and around the world.

If the Gospel is going to be spread to more people in Roanoke and in the world, then it is also our responsibility to give toward the future and toward missionaries.

So we must also see that as part of our responsibility for giving.

To see that, turn back Romans 15 and let's read verse 24, which we covered a few weeks ago.

Read Romans 15:24 to see the need to support missions. [READ]

Paul was planning to be supported by the Roman church in his taking the Gospel to Spain.

If he was going to get to Spain, he needed travel guides or companions and he also needed financial support and supplies.

And he mentioned that he wanted the Romans help to provide for those areas to support his westward Gospel expansion.

So we see there the role of Christians in the local church to support the sending out and ongoing work of missionaries.

That is part of how our responsibility for giving matters.

That's point #3—your responsibility for giving matters—and that's the only new point we'll get through today.

But notice that the giving spoken of here spread across ethnic and cultural barriers and it also met the needs of the poor.

Those are two areas to be aware of in our responsibility to give.

If we can foster unity in the universal church in the world by our generosity, that is a demonstration of love globally.

That was especially needed between the Jews and Gentiles coming into the church from opposing backgrounds.

And since Gentiles were grafted into the tree of blessings promised first to the Jews as Romans 11 taught, it was only reasonable for Gentile churches to share with Jerusalem.

That giving also met the needs of poor believers and that was another area the early church emphasized.

Galatians 2:9-10 mentions it and Ephesians 4:28 even mentions it as the opposite of stealing.

In the section on putting off sin and putting on habits of new life, Ephesians 4:28 has an important put-off/put-on command.

Listen to Ephesians 4:28—*“He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with one who has need.”*

Let him who steals steal no longer—that's what to put off.

That makes sense—don't steal.

But then listen to what should replace stealing—what to put on—*“but rather let him labor, performing with his own hands what is good, in order that he may have something to share with him who has need.”*

The opposite of stealing is not just not stealing.

The opposite of stealing—and the way to fight the temptation to steal or covet—is to work so that you have something to give to others.

So the way to obey God's command against stealing is to work to earn money to be ready to share with those in need.

The opposite of thievery is hard work and generosity.

So there is a responsibility for giving in how we train our hearts in God's ways even against sin.

There are many areas where our responsibility for giving matters.

But you might even think of this principle by analogies.

You are responsible to pay for food when you eat out.

You are responsible to pay for products you get at stores.

You are responsible to pay for privileges at the gym or club or pool or course or to pay for lessons for your instrument or hobby or whatever.

So we should also be responsible to give to support the work of the church both here and around the world.

And we should do so gladly, not begrudgingly.

We should do so in faith, trusting God to provide for our needs even if we sacrifice to give beyond our comfort zone.

And we should do so with a faith that trusts God for eternal rewards because giving is how Jesus said we can store up heavenly treasure.

In those ways and more, our duty to give is then also a wondrous delight to give.

That's how we can be joyfully generous.

And that's point #3—your responsibility for giving matters.

As you think about applying that point, can I ask you a question?

If we all have a responsibility for giving that matters, what would the church budget and future fund and missionary wall look like if every gave at the level you give?

What if everyone responded to the biblical responsibility to give by giving at the percentage of income, for example, that you do?

I don't say that as a manipulative ploy to raise more funds and I told you last week that I don't know what anyone else gives.

I ask that as an honest way to evaluate our responsibility for giving.

I'd guess if everyone gave 20-25%, we could support far more Gospel ministry here and around the world, couldn't we?

And that would be really exciting to be a part of investing in more lives transformed and trained in the Gospel riches of God's Word.

If you think you could never give at a higher level than you do now, how do you know?

Have you ever tried?

Have you ever tried to cut your spending and prayed and asked God to enable you to give beyond what you imagined?

Have you ever asked for God to allow you greater joy in the fun of being a funnel for His glory?

After rebuking the Israelites for their robbing of Him in their tithes and offerings in Malachi, God told them to test Him and see if He would provide if they gave Him their first and best.

In Malachi 3:10, God said: *“Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in My house, and test Me now in this,” says the LORD of hosts, “if I will not open for you the windows of heaven, and pour out for you a blessing until it overflows.”*

Obviously that was in Israel under a different system of government and taxation and tithing and giving and so on, but the principle of trusting God is the same.

Are you really trusting God with how you give?

How does He want you to freshly trust Him in response to the truths we’re studying about giving?

Maybe you need to start by trusting Him for the eternal riches in Christ that matter most so that your heart is changed by His grace.

Or maybe you need to sit down and make some serious changes and big or small changes.

Or maybe you just need a reminder of how the grace of that glorious Gospel of Christ should motivate our generosity.

Whatever it is—know that #1—your giving matters; #2—your attitude about giving matters, and #3—your responsibility for giving matters.

Pray with me now as we close.