

## **GIVE BECAUSE YOU CARE NOT BECAUSE YOU CAN!**

**Today's Text: 2 Cor. 8:1-24; 2 Cor. 9: 1-15**

### **Extracts:**

- a) ***For if there is first a willing mind, it is accepted according to what one has, and not according to what he does not have. For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened [2 Cor. 8: 12-13]***
- b) ***So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver... Now may He who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food, supply and multiply the seed you have sown and increase the fruits of your righteousness [2 Cor. 9: 7-10]***

*Samantha Lamb (41) and her husband, Andy (45), are a British couple living in Ivybridge, Devon, England.<sup>1</sup> Soon after their marriage in 2007, Andy's kidneys began to fail and he had to be placed on a thrice-weekly dialysis sessions. To save his life, Samantha donated one of her own kidneys, after a rigorous regime of dieting and exercises to reduce her own weight. In October 2009, both operations were successfully carried out. Her feat was featured in a BBC1 documentary, "Diet or my husband dies," on Monday, 15 March 2010. In her own words, Andy was not only her husband but her soul mate. But, soon after the operation, she began to suspect that her husband was cheating on her. Her mother and sister even allegedly caught him with her best friend. But Andy has denied all such cheating charges against him. Now, Samantha has sued for divorce and is asking for her kidney back!*

*Samantha may not legally be able to get her kidney back but she feels hurt because her husband has not appreciated her sacrifice. That raises a bigger question about why she gave her kidney in the first place. Was it because she could afford it or because she cared? That is the subject that Paul has addressed in his Second Letter to the Corinthian church and it is quite germane to our circumstances today. Do you give because you care or because you can? Do you have to have before you can give? Why should some people always expect from others but never themselves give to others? Those and more are the issues that we shall examine in this week's study.*

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<sup>1</sup> Story is based on the following sources: Elise Sole, "Scorned Wife Who Donated Kidney to Husband Wants it Back. Whaa?" Tue. 28 Jan. 2014; <http://shine.yahoo.com/healthy-living/scorned-wife-donated-kidney-husband-wants-back-whaa-214900174.html> ; and "Devon wife's battle to shed weight for kidney donation," Mon. 15 March 2010; [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk\\_news/england/devon/8568236.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/england/devon/8568236.stm)

## 1. Background: Of givers and takers

According to a Ghanaian proverb, a giver's hand is always open while a taker's hand is always clenched. The taker must clutch tightly what s(he) is receiving from givers. On the other hand, by constantly releasing to takers what they are holding in their hands, givers' hands are bound to be open or free. This ties with the Biblical truth that it is more blessed to give than to receive [Acts 20: 35]. If that is the case, *why do some of us resent giving to the needy? Why do some people think that they are "born" to receive and not to give? What should guide our giving practices if we want to receive the best reward from God? Those and more are the questions that we shall attempt to answer in this week's study.*

For a good guide, we shall use the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Chapters of Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians. The following principles of giving are therein well articulated:

### a) *Giving is a grace*

Paul wrote, "But as you abound in everything- in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all diligence, and in your love for us- *see that you abound in this grace* [of giving] also" [2 Cor. 8: 7]. Grace means unmerited favour. Therefore, it is a privilege for God to put us in a position to give instead of the other way round.

The word of God says, "The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to men of understanding, nor favour to men of skill; but *time and chance happen to them all*" [Eccl. 9: 11]. That hungry and limping child on the back of that unkempt beggar under the bridge in your neighbourhood did not choose to be born that way. That brat occupying a first class seat on a luxury plane did not choose to be born into a rich family. Yes, there will always be poor people in our midst [Jn 12: 8] but it is God that gives the rich the power to get wealth for His own purpose [Deut. 8: 17-18]. That is why it is a privilege for us to open wide our hands to our less privileged brothers and sisters, to the poor and needy in our midst [Deut. 15: 11].

*Poor or needy applies to material as well as spiritual lack.* For example, the message from Jesus through John for the lukewarm church of the Laodiceans said, among others, "Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing' - and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked- I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see" [Rev. 3; 17-18]. That is why Paul told the Corinthians, "I do not mean that others be eased and you burdened; but by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may supply their lack, that their abundance also may supply

your lack- that there may be equality” [2 Cor. 8: 13-14]. So, *since we are all needy one way or the other, we should thank God for the grace to also give*. Giving is a grace and it is for us ALL.

b) *Giving is voluntary*

Paul made it clear to the Corinthians that they should give “as a matter of generosity and not as a grudging obligation.” They should give as they purposed in their hearts, “not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver” [2 Cor. 9: 5-7]. Unlike taxes and tithes which you must pay, no matter how you feel, the giving we are talking about here is voluntary. *It is not compulsory. You do not have to do it. But, if you want to do it, you must follow the rules*. It is not out of necessity; it is not out of obligation; it is voluntary and must come from a generous heart.

Take the example of the children of Israel in the wilderness on their way from Egypt. When they wanted to construct the tabernacle in accordance with the LORD’s instructions, Moses called for gifts from the people, saying, “Take from among you an offering to the LORD. Whoever is of *a willing heart*, let him bring it as an offering to the LORD” [Ex. 35: 4-9]. *Some people who were stirred in their hearts willingly brought materials and gifted artisans brought their skills* [vv. 20-35]. Soon, the craftsmen complained to Moses, saying, “The people bring much more than enough for the service of the work which the LORD commanded us to do.” So, Moses had to restrain them “for the material they had was sufficient for all the work to be done- indeed too much” [Ex. 36; 1-7].

c) *There are enormous blessings attached to giving*

Paul lists a number of blessings that go with *giving from a willing heart*. They include:

- *We make others rich*, just as Christ made Himself poor in order to make us rich [2 Cor. 8: 9];
- *We make ourselves available to receive supply for our own lack* [v. 14]. Whatever we give to the poor and the needy is a lending to the Lord and He will repay us sooner than we think [Prov. 19:17]. For example, David gave food and water to an abandoned starving Egyptian who, on recovering, showed him the way to the Amalekites who had burnt Ziklag and carried away his and the families of his men [1 Sam. 30: 10-18].
- *Our generosity may glorify God*, in that it brings people who may never have known Him to embrace the God of cheerful givers [2 Cor. 9: 12-15]. For example, the healing through Peter of a lame beggar at the temple gate in Jerusalem provided an occasion

for praise and worship among the skeptical Jews in that temple [Acts 3: 1-11] .

From the foregoing, it is clear that giving is for everybody, and it need not be material. ***You do not know what you have until you know what others need.*** When you give willingly and cheerfully, the reward can be enormous. Jesus Himself summarised it as follows [Lk 6: 38]:

*Give, and it shall be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you.*

So, what is your attitude to giving? Do you give because you care or because you can?

## 2. Assessing your giving attitude

Giving is both a matter of the head (ability) and of the heart (willingness). However, from our analysis so far, ***divine reward for givers is tied more to the latter (caring) than to the former (ability).*** Where do you yourself stand on the scale of giving? Here are typical profiles of givers that we are quite familiar with:

### a) *Some givers are self-centred*

For some people, giving is a means for pursuing their selfish ends. They use the opportunities at their disposal (wealth, power, etc) to win or keep loyalty for their personal goals and aspirations, legitimate or otherwise. Examples of such givers are:

- ***Shylocks*** – They want to remain the tallest trees in the forest or the most powerful in their trade or profession. Therefore, they will only give if it will make the takers more beholding to them or less powerful. The name comes from Shakespeare's play, *The Merchant of Venice*. Shylock lent money to another merchant who out of desperation signed a contract to repay with a pint of the lender's blood should he default. When the borrower's ships were delayed at sea, Shylock insisted on being paid with a pint of his blood for defaulting. What he actually wanted was to get rid of one major competitor! ***When you use your position in the church, office or business to reward those who are loyal to you and to punish those who are potential rivals, you are a shylock.*** No matter how generous you may appear to be, your motive(s) cannot be godly.

Satan himself is a good example of a shylock. For example, during his temptation of Jesus, he brought the Lord up to an exceedingly

high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. Then, he said to Jesus, “All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me” [Matt. 4: 8-9]. Of course, he failed because he was dealing with a superior force. Ordinary mortals looking for power and wealth could easily have taken that bait only to find themselves in a death trap.

- **Robin Hoods**- They steal from the rich and well-to-do and distribute to the poor, the oppressed and the needy in society. The name comes from a famous outlaw in English folklore who forcefully took from the rich to give to the needy and the poor. For that, he became so famous among the poor who made it impossible for him to be caught. Politicians in developing countries, especially in Africa, are Robin Hoods. They steal state funds and “spread” the wealth among their poor supporters, especially during election campaigns. The beneficiaries of such largesse then turn around to frustrate any attempts to bring corrupt politicians and their collaborators in the public service to justice.

See, for example, how David’s son, Absalom, stole the hearts of the people by giving them the impression that he would make a better king than his father. He would divert people that brought lawsuits to his father and offer them quick and favourable justice. We are told, “In this manner Absalom acted toward all Israel who came to the king for judgment. So Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel.” In no time, he staged a rebellion against his father who had to escape for his life [2 Sam. 15: 1-14].

***Self-centred givers can only reap temporary rewards. Sooner than later, they lose control over their victims.***

*b) Some givers are merely weight-shedders!*

Most of us have a hoarding instinct. For example, if you look at your wardrobe, there are clothes and shoes that you have not used for years! Then, one day, you are tempted to decongest the wardrobe by either throwing away unused items or giving them to charity. Some pharmaceutical companies give away free drugs to health institutions, especially in developing countries. But, if you look carefully, you will find that such medications are close to their expiry dates! Givers who clear space to remove trash or unwanted items are mere weight-shedders. It is akin to putting food we no longer need in the waste bins (trash cans).

When God asked King David (through his prophet, Gad) to build an altar for Him at the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite, the king insisted on paying for it even when Araunah offered it free of charge. David said, “I will surely buy it from you for a price, nor will I offer burnt offerings to

the LORD my God with that which costs me nothing” [2 Sam. 24: 18-24]. To give trash away is like that. *If you have no value for something, it has no reward value for you when you give it to others.*

c) *Some givers are sacrificial lambs*

Some people may have little or nothing but they are ready to share or give it away. *They are parting with what they badly need for themselves.* Such people are sacrificial lambs. The story of the widow’s mites best illustrates this. As Jesus watched people putting money into the treasury, the rich put much but the poor widow put all she had. Jesus drew attention to what she had done and said, “I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all those who have given to the treasury; for they all put in out of their abundance, but she ... her whole livelihood” [Mk 12: 41-44]. In like manner, the poor widow at Zarephath gave the prophet Elijah the handful of flour and little jar of oil she had left for herself and her son during a severe drought but God turned her caring into a season of abundance for her and her household throughout the three-and-a-half year famine [1 Kgs 17: 8-16; Jam. 5: 17]! *When you give away what you badly need for yourself, God will replenish you in fuller measure!*

There are, of course, people who have in abundance and also give much of it away to others. For example, the Queen of Sheba knew that she was coming to visit the richest man on earth, King Solomon. Yet, she came with a large entourage carrying gifts of spices, “very much gold and precious silver” and “she spoke with Solomon all that was in her heart” [1 Kgs 10: 1-2]. In return, Solomon gave her “all she desired, whatever she asked, besides what [he] had given her according to the royal generosity” [v. 13]. She received more than she had expected. That is what we also get when we give to others and to God out of a willing heart. *God who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food, will supply and multiply the seed we have sown and increase the fruits of our righteousness* [2 Cor. 9: 10] That is Paul’s message for us this week.

### 3. Conclusion: God the Father cares for you!

God so loved us that He sent His only begotten Son, Jesus the Christ, to die for our sins and so gain us eternal life [Jn 3: 16]. We were still sinners when Christ died for us. Some people may die in the place of righteous people but how many do you know that will die for the guilty [Rom. 5:7-8]? That shows love. That shows caring. God gave His only begotten Son for you because He cares for you. Can you reciprocate by giving to the poor and needy around you? In the words of Jesus, whatsoever you do to the least of His brethren, you have done it to Him [Matt. 25: 40].

Give because you care, not because you can.