

Getting and Giving

2 Cor. 8: 1-9, 2 Cor. 9: 5-15; Heb. 13: 16.

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Our practical Christian life may be divided into two chapters, entitled, "Getting" and "Giving." We begin by coming to the Saviour with empty hands, as needy recipients of His grace. But, though that is the initial attitude, it is not the only one that should mark the Christian through life. We have to think also of *giving*.

Many times during past years have I heard this question raised: "How is it that we do not make more progress in our Christian life?" Do not scriptures like those cited at the head of this article supply us with an answer? They show us that one great reason why we do not get on is that we do not *give out*. We are too much like the Dead Sea, into which water continually runs, but out of which it never flows.

First of all let us notice that giving is not a matter of charity. In the passage from the Old Testament, quoted in 2 Corinthians 9: 9, we read, "He hath dispersed abroad; he hath given to the poor; his righteousness [not his charity, *his righteousness*] remaineth for ever." That expression clearly shows that for a Christian to *give* is not in any sense a matter of charity, but of common and ordinary righteousness. The fact is that God has poured in so much upon us, that it is only righteous that we should be dispensers of blessing to others. Further, in verse 10, the apostle speaks, not of increasing the fruits of their benevolence, charity, or largeness of heart, but of their righteousness. We must learn to regard the matter of giving as something that we are responsible to do, so that if we neglect it, we neglect that which is a matter of plain righteousness.

Taking the eighth and ninth chapters of 2 Corinthians in their context, they have reference to money. It had become notorious throughout the Gentile-speaking Churches that the believers in Judea were in great affliction. Famine had struck that portion of the earth's surface, as had been predicted (see Acts 11: 27, 28). The apostle Paul stirred up the believers in the Gentile assemblies, who had received so much spiritual blessing through the ministry of those who were nationally Jews, to minister temporal relief to their afflicted brethren in Judea. The whole of these two chapters is taken up with that matter. But the principle of it applies to much beside.

Now the Macedonian Christians, amongst whom were the Philippians, had become shining examples of Christian giving, and the apostle makes use of that fact to stir up the Corinthians. The Corinthians had gifts of a more showy order, but Christians of this sort are not always those who wear best. Apparently the Philippians, of whom we read no such striking things in regard to their richness of utterance, or the way in which they spoke with unknown tongues, were men who, when the test came, answered to it. Judging from the epistle written to them, things were very bright in the assembly, but there was persecution from without. To the Corinthians the apostle says in effect, "Now I want you to stop these senseless wranglings, this setting up of one man against another, and turning your teachers, pastors, and evangelists into leaders of parties." To the Philippians he says, "I want you to be encouraged, to strive together with one heart for the faith of the gospel, boldly confronting your enemies, knowing this, that the very fact that they are your enemies means that they will ultimately be destroyed, and you vindicated." Thus they were Christians who, though persecuted and having but little of earth, had a great grasp of the realities of eternity, and the result was that in the joy of the Father's love, the Saviour's grace, the Spirit's presence, and the imminent return of the Lord — they put their

money into the collection in a most astonishing way. The apostle says, "Beyond their power, they were willing of themselves." Nobody had to refresh their memories. They were praying with much entreaty that Paul would receive the gift. It was as though Paul said to them, "My dear brethren, I really think you are giving too much. Are you prepared to give all this?" Yet the Philippians insisted and pressed their gift on him. "This they did, not as we hoped." That means they did it in the way he hoped and far beyond it.

It says, "They first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God," This is very important: there is such a thing — or this verse would not be in Holy Scripture — as *giving your own self to the Lord*. You may say, "How?" By the true, the prayerful, the honest recognition of the claim that has been established over you by the Lord Himself. That claim has been established and it is a great thing to recognize it. If I confess that I myself am the Lord's, that necessarily carries with it all the rest. You see these Philippians did not give a tenth of their income, and leave the remaining nine-tenths to themselves, nor did they even say, "I will give nine-tenths," but they said, "I will give myself to the Lord. I am His bondman. I am under His directions." Then it follows that all I possess is the Lord's. Here we get the true beginning. "They first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God." They recognized they were wholly at the Lord's disposal, and therefore their money, their time, their opportunities, their gifts were all at the Lord's disposal.

Now I would like us to challenge ourselves as to whether that is the way we look at things. You may say, "What will help us to look at things like that?" Well, in chapter 8 we have a well-known verse: "Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that we through His poverty might be rich." That beautiful verse, sparkling like a diamond, is set in what at first might appear dull and uninteresting surroundings. These two chapters deal with a prosaic subject, a subject that sometimes we conveniently forget.

"You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ." This seems to me a tremendous lever. It is wonderful what can be done with a lever in mechanical matters; so also in grace. It would do everyone of us good to meditate much on the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

"Though He was rich." When was He rich? Not when He ministered among men, Not when He was brought up in the quiet home at Nazareth, not when He was born at Bethlehem, and cradled in a manger. When was He rich? For an answer we must travel back into the depths of the Godhead. "Though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor." Just as it is impossible to measure

the wealth of His riches, so it is impossible to measure the depth of His poverty. And He became poor that we through His poverty might be enriched with blessings that are infinite. We read the Bible with wonderful statements, but we often fail to see the marvellous meaning there is in them. But it is in the power of these things that we can give ourselves to the Lord. No wonder that the apostle says in the end of the next chapter, "Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift."

That is what we have *received*. Now we have to be givers. To do good and to communicate forget not. That is to hand on to others that which you have, to communicate a little money to a poor brother, or a little cheer to one who is downcast, or a little bit of gospel to a sinner. With such sacrifices God is well pleased. Have we forgotten it? I believe we have. You may ask, "In what way?" Well, one thing I believe is that we Christians in Britain and America suffer from fullness of bread, from over-feeding. When one goes to places abroad, somehow these things seem to be borne in upon one's spirit. These favoured lands are looked upon by the Christians in other countries almost with reverence. In their eyes they are wonderful places, places from which so many missionaries have gone out, but when one thinks of the actual condition of these countries religiously, with their vast number of factions warring against

each other, one can only blush! One asks one's self, What has been the matter with us? I verily believe that the matter is that we have thought too much of getting, and too little of giving.

Mark this, as you *give, you reap*. The apostle seems to say to the Corinthians, "You have said fine things about the great collection you are going to make, and while the Philippians have done it, you are still in the talking stage. I have thought it wise to send some of my brethren in advance. Don't you think it is time the thing crystallized into something definite?" The apostle sent on some brethren, so that all might be ready. He says, "I want it ready as a matter of bounty, not as of covetousness. I do not want to come down and drag the money out of your pockets. I want you to present it cheerfully and bountifully to the Lord. If you sow bountifully, you will reap bountifully." It does not mean that if a man puts a pound into the collection box, he will necessarily reap five pounds, or indeed reap any pounds at all. It means that when we are prepared to sacrifice ourselves for the welfare of the people of God, for the progress of the work of God, for the help of the service of God, *God is prepared to allow us to reap blessing in our own souls*.

A great many Christians today are starving spiritually. They attend meetings, they listen to beautiful expositions of Scripture, they enjoy Bible talks, and when they go home all evaporates. Like the mirage of the desert, their impressions disappear, and they go on year by year without growing. I believe it is because they have not been exercised about this. "He that soweth sparingly shall reap sparingly." He who is of a stingy spirit, who does not open his heart and hand, will reap in small measure. God always takes into account what a man has, and not what he has not; but let him give something, and out of his sowing there shall be a harvest.

Would to God that by all of us there might be some very rich sowing. We live surrounded by privileges unknown in other lands. What would they not give for some of you to go and live out there in the lands of pagan or Romish darkness! I mean going out and living there for Christ, and using the little bit you have for Him. When we think of what the gospel really is and its wealth, and when we consider the appalling need, we ought everyone of us to be on our faces before God, remembering that the Christian is not only a great receiver of all heaven's bounty, but he is the transmitter of it. He is not only the getter, but the giver.