“Dear Mr. Chicken, Please Send Money”

Read 2 Corinthians 8:1-14

Key verse: “Be the best in this work of grace in the same way that you are the best in everything, such as faith, speech, knowledge, total commitment, and the love inspired in you” (2 Corinthians 8:7).

Christian author Philip Yancey shared his experience in receiving fund-raising appeals:

“For one month, I have tossed every fund-raising appeal from the day’s mail into a large box. I emptied the contents onto my floor: 62 separate appeals, weighing a total of 3.5 pounds. The Passionist Monastery assures me that for a minimum $10 contribution I can have 12 loved ones in purgatory remembered in a special mass on All Souls’ Day.

“A group soliciting money for Bibles for Russia has a catchy red ‘Approved: Government of the USSR’ stamp on the envelope. One Christian television station promises me a miracle if I will give a multiple of seven: $7.77, $77.77, or $777.77. (The largest amount also earns me a framed original page from a 1564 Bible.)

“One charitable organization also graciously sent me a check for $1500. Alas, I discovered the check was made out not to me, but to the organization who sent it, as a crafty way of underscoring a challenge grant. ‘This facsimile check is valid only if accompanied by a check of equal or greater amount from Mr. and Mrs. Philip Yancey.’

“Many fund-raising letters are personalized, for example, with the salutation, ‘Dear Mr. Yancey.’ I once received, by mistake, a fund-raising letter sent to my next-door neighbor, a Popeye’s Chicken restaurant. Their letter opened with the words, “Dear Mr. Chicken.”

This passage from 2 Corinthians contains one of the longest fund-raising appeals in the Bible. Fortunately, there are no gimmicks here, just sound teaching about Christian giving. Four points stand out as motivation for our giving:

1. The example of generous Christians. To encourage the Corinthian church to give, Paul cites the example of the believers in Macedonia: “Brothers and sisters, we want to let you know about the grace of God that was given to the churches in Macedonia. While they were being tested by many problems, their extra amount of happiness and their extreme poverty
resulted in a surplus of rich generosity. I assure you that they gave what they could afford, and they did it voluntarily. They urgently begged us for the privilege of sharing in this service for the saints” (2 Corinthians 8:1-4).

2. The power of self-surrender. In 8:5, Paul gives a key reason for the Macedonians’ generosity: “they gave themselves to the Lord first.”

I have always liked the story of the little girl who, when the offering plates were passed at her church, said to the usher, “A little lower, please.” The usher was puzzled by this request, but he dutifully lowered the offering plate. The little girl then said, “A little lower.” Again, the usher lowered the plate, only to hear the girl say to him, “A little lower, please.”

At that, the usher placed the offering plate onto the floor. The little girl then stood up, with both feet in the offering plate. When asked why, the girl said, “Because I want to give all of me to the Lord.”

Whenever we truly give our all to the Lord, giving back a portion of our income won’t be a problem. Here is a third motivation for generous giving:

3. Giving as a means of grace. In 8:7, Paul writes, “Be the best in this work of grace in the same way that you are the best in everything, such as faith, speech, knowledge, total commitment, and the love we inspired in you.” In other words, generous giving is both a sign and a means of Christian growth. Generous giving is at least as important to our growth in grace as are faith, speech, knowledge, total commitment, and love. In fact, in many ways, giving governs growth. If we’re not giving, we’re not growing in Christ.

4. The example of Christ. “You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Although he was rich, he became poor for our sakes, so that you could become rich through his poverty” (8:9).

On the occasion of the annual stewardship campaign, a pastor wrote to the members of his church. One man immediately replied with considerable rancor. “According to your concept, Christianity is just one continual GIVE-GIVE-GIVE!”

Disturbed by this reaction, the pastor sat down to write a blistering rebuke. But as he thought and prayed about it, he found himself agreeing with the man. So, the pastor wrote to him:

“Dear Friend,

Thank you for the finest definition of Christianity I have ever found. Christianity is one continual GIVE. That is the way it all began. God GAVE! He GAVE His only Son. The Son GAVE! He GAVE His life upon the cross for our sins. His disciples GAVE! They left their homes and businesses to devote full-time to telling the Good News. Most of the twelve GAVE their lives in a martyr’s death. Down through the centuries the work of Christ has prospered in proportion to the extent that Christians have learned to GIVE!”

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