

August 12, 2018
Lesson 11: Global Economic Justice
Scripture: 2 Corinthians 8:7-15

Context:

Our scripture lesson today jumps from the church in Rome to the church in Corinth. The writer attributed to the writing is Paul as he writes to the churches while on his missionary journeys. In the New Testament, there are two chapters affiliated with the church in Corinth. However, if one reads both chapters, the different breaks in the chapters suggests that multiple letters were put together as someone collected and stored them as correspondence.¹ Due to the length, those who assembled the canon decided to make the letters into two books instead of several.

This particular chapter in Second Corinthians references a previous conversation in which Paul mentions the church in Macedonia.² Macedonians, as impoverished as they may be, are giving what they can to help the mission of the church. The Corinthians are not being as generous from what we can gather. Paul is very wise though and does not set up the Macedonians as the standard for giving; instead he asks the Corinthians to come forward in a similar manner to show their love.³ As one reads the chapter, there is the impression that in the previous year there had been a pledge to give a generous amount. However, the Corinthians could not meet their goal and conceded to draw back altogether.

Paul wants them to reconsider and to give what they can. Throughout other letters Paul echoes similar ideas of people sharing what they could. For example, the Jerusalem Christians could share their spiritual wealth and heritage and the Gentile Christians could share their material wealth and secular connections.⁴ The case here is not to pressure the church in Corinth to give just as much or more than the Macedonians or other churches. Instead, they are to look to Jesus who gave his whole life for others. Therefore, the Corinthians do have things that they can share. Their bank accounts are not as low as they would have others believe.

The important part is that the Corinthians give just as everyone else in the early church is giving. Hoarding their wealth and also insisting that others give more than fair share is not in line with Christ's example. The amount is not as important as is the reasoning behind giving. As one gives their fair share with an eager heart, then everything falls into place. Everyone has their needs met and everyone feels like they are part of the body of Christ with support from those around them. In the Christian

¹ Ernest Best, "Second Corinthians," *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, (John Knox Press; Louisville, KY, 1987), 2.

² See 2 Corinthians 8:1-7 in which Paul references the generosity of the Macedonians.

³ Best, "Second Corinthians," 79.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 80.

community the Corinthian church was discovering that new life in Christ meant a new kind of wealth. This wealth was not in money or power but in fellowship with new ties, new homes with new mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, possessions, land, and eternal life.⁵ Such a new life meant new understandings of giving and generosity.

Application

This letter to the Corinthians does not just belong to the first century church. The themes of the letter speak to the church today especially when there are so many different size churches in proximity to one another. We are never as alone as much as we may think we may be.

Giving and generosity can often be issues that people like to avoid. However, Jesus nor Paul seemed to back down off the issues. In fact, it was one of the things that they stressed the most throughout their ministry. Even if people complained, Jesus and Paul would continue to preach and teach on how one was to give and be generous.

My personal experience has been that those who complain the most about any financial matters within a church are those who do not give nearly as much as others. When it comes to apportionments, the loudest voices are those who give nowhere near a ten percent tithe. They do not complain because they are in poverty or because they are strapped tight. They complain because they do not directly benefit by paying the apportionment, or so they think.

When it comes to the annual stewardship campaign, those who criticize the “money” sermon or even the series often do so as they buy new homes, cars, or vacation spots. They like belonging to the church, but paying for its upkeep is a different story. Aren’t there wealthier people who could just write a check so everyone else can enjoy the amenities of the church? The Joneses clearly have more than everyone else and they should pay for it so that others can keep up with them and have their membership at the country club too.

This letter makes very clear that those mentalities are deficit for our spiritual development. When we think only out of what we benefit when it comes to giving, it is more about us than it is about God. When we think more about someone’s financial wealth than our own, than we are telling God that we deserve more. In this case, the writer articulates an ethic of gratitude in which the giver is blessed in giving because they are a follower of Jesus.

For us, this means giving to others and not asking, “But what about me?” It also means that we pay our fair share. We do not stand on the shoulders of others and we do not compare ourselves to those who are wealthier than us. Instead, we give because we want to be like Jesus and be a part of something larger than ourselves. As we do, we touch multiple lives without realizing the full effect.

My other experience with people who give to the church is that those who tithe and do so without complaining are some of the happiest and most generous servants of our Lord. They may not drive the nicest cars, belong to the country club, or go on as many vacations as others. Yet they genuinely love Jesus and love their church. It becomes evident in the kindness they share with others and the light that comes on their face when they talk about their church. They understand they are a new creation in

⁵ Ibid., 81.

Christ, those who are transformed and do not need the powers of the world to define them. They give because they understand what our Lord and Savior gave for all.

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