

How Much Is Enough? Part 1 2 Corinthians 8: 1-15

That short passage of Scripture we just heard provides one of the clearest and most detailed models of Christian giving in the entire New Testament. The principles the apostle Paul outlines are timeless and relevant to the church at Millcreek. Lord willing, this Sunday and next we will learn together how they will be helpful in our efforts to heal our divided communities and nation.

The message this morning is related to the one many of you heard last week entitled "Enough Already". I trust we have had an opportunity this past week to find that Jesus is beside us as we weather the storms of life and how a bit of holy fear from those storms will help us grow in our faith. My prayer is that we will be like those we heard about last week who would never again be afraid to get into a boat with Jesus-no matter how small the boat or how great the storm.

Once they discovered just who this Jesus was that had called them to be His followers, they were changed people. They began to lose their affection for many of those earthly things that were once extremely attractive, perhaps even their own lives. The fancy theological word for this kind of transformation is sanctification. Sanctification is not something that happens in an instant, but something that develops over time. It is a process, and as we grow in our faith and yearn to be completely transformed and sanctified Christians one of the most important questions we will have to consider is the one on the front of the bulletin. If our wills are to be completely and perfectly conformed to the will of God as revealed to us in Jesus Christ, it is a question we dare not ignore.

How much is enough? There are at least three things that will affect how we answer that question, and our response will hinge upon who it is that is asking, when it is being asked and what the "much" is that is being asked about. How much is enough? Chances are good that our answer will also be in direct proportion to how enjoyable or unpleasant something is.

For example, I really like elderberry pie. In fact, if I wasn't on my way to being a sanctified Christian, I might even say I love elderberry pie. So how much elderberry pie is enough? If I ate a whole pie at one sitting, I would be rightly judged guilty of gluttony, so the correct answer is enough to satisfy my appetite and not a spoonful more. The problem is, as my mother used to tell me is that there are times when my eyes are bigger than my stomach. The biblical sin of gluttony can easily affect all of us, no matter what the scale may say.

It's also true that a little of something can go a long way. An amateur gardener will quickly learn that doubling the amount of fertilizer the directions call for is not good for the lawn or the garden. Or if you are baking and a recipe calls for one teaspoon of vanilla and you put in two, chances are good that the cake will taste a little strange. If the doctor says take your medicine twice a day, and instead you take it four times a day, you shouldn't be surprised if you experience unintended results. How much is enough? It is an easy enough question to answer when we have clear directions on how much or how little to use.

Determining how much is enough is often a matter of using our minds, applying Biblical principles, and following directions. The apostle Paul said it this way to the church at Rome and it is more relevant today than ever. Romans 12:2 Do not conform to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. In other words, become Christ-minded. It is not an easy thing in a world filled with sin and temptation. Learning our limits with food and fertilizer is one thing, but what about the more difficult things in life? What about those times when there are no clear directions, or you do not have a recipe to follow? How do we know then how much is enough?

Take love for instance- how much love is enough? Since the love we have for each other is a gift from God as well as a fruit of the Spirit it is certainly a good thing. But can too much of a good thing be a bad thing? Can we love someone too much or be loved too much? The wisdom of the world tells us no, and there is little doubt that many of society's problems are related to a lack of love for one another rather than an overabundance. But once we think about the question biblically, we must conclude that too much love can be a bad thing. If we love someone or something more than we love God, we are guilty of idolatry and certainly in danger of falling from God's grace.

Too much love or perhaps better stated misdirected love can be a very perilous thing which often leads to disaster. We don't have to look far to find examples of people not knowing how much is enough- those who love power more than righteousness and justice, those who love darkness rather than light, those who love fame and fortune more than God and other people.

On the other hand, not loving enough is equally damaging. **One way to measure our love for each other is in the way we manage money.** If we have the resources to help another brother or sister in the faith that is in need and we fail to act, we hurt them as well as ourselves. That is the essence of the Scripture passage that we heard earlier.

8:8

Speaking of freewill giving, Paul says that it is a test of the genuineness and sincerity of the love we have for each other. He lifts up Christ as our example.

8:9

Jesus willingly gave up all the riches and privilege of being God and died like a common criminal on the cross so that others might live. He freely gave everything he could give, including His life. There is no better example of freewill giving.

So, when we apply the question "how much is enough" to money, several things should come to mind. For instance, how much should we earn? How much should we save? How much should we spend? How much should we give? Discerning the answers to those questions is not as easy as listening to your stomach or following the recipe or the directions on the pill or fertilizer bottle, but nonetheless important. Just as too much food or water or medicine can affect our physical health and too much fertilizer can kill the grass, too much money can adversely affect our spiritual health. It is a matter of finding the correct balance and in His wisdom, God has provided the instructions we need to help find that balance in the Scriptures.

John Wesley once preached a sermon entitled “The Use of Money”. He answered those four questions quite simply using Biblical principles. How much should we earn? He said “gain all you can”. Be diligent and take advantage of every opportunity to earn an honest dollar, without exploiting another person in the process. How much should we spend or save? Wesley said save all you can. Speaking on spending our money he said the Methodists should expend no part of it merely to gratify the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eye, or the pride of life. Ouch. How much should we give? He said give all you can. “For all that is laid out in this manner is really given to God”. Freewill giving reflects our love for God.

Can we love God too much? Of course, the answer is no. It stands to reason that the more we love God, the more we will become like His Son Christ, and the more we will love one another. Obviously, we can never love God too much. How much love for God is enough? It’s enough when we give all that we have. Deut 6:5. God is the only one deserving all of our love.

In our quest to be completely transformed, sanctified, and made perfect in love, let us model and pattern our lives after the one who demonstrated love perfectly: Jesus Christ. Next week, if the Lord is willing, we will take a closer look at this short and essential passage of Scripture. I pray we will see how Satan uses money, greed, and envy to divide us. Until then, may the Holy Spirit be our guide in all we say and do. Amen.