

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

How much is enough? Last week we learned that our answer hinges upon the context of the question. Who is asking it? Who is being asked and when? What does the “much” refer to? It is an easy enough question to answer when we have clear directions on how much or how little to use. It is when we apply it to things we cannot see or touch that difficulties arise. Even so, it is a question Christians dare not ignore, for our answers will reveal much about our faith, love, and trust in God.

The answer to questions such as how much we should love God, how much we should love those who don't love us and how much we should forgive are clearly found in the Scriptures. We are to love God all our heart, soul, and strength. Deut 6:5. We are to love our enemies and do good to those who hate us. Jesus reminds us that we are to bless those who curse us Luke 6:27-28. and forgive others as much as we want God to forgive us. Ephesians 4:32.

Our relationship with each other largely reflects our relationship with Jesus. If we are truly in love with Jesus, we will also be in love with one another. John 13: 34-35. That applies to us individually and corporately, both in the holy and secular realms. The good news is that we can never love God too much. The more we love God, the more we become like His Son Christ. The more we are like Jesus, we will love one another more and forgive one another. Our love for Him transforms us into the person God designed and intends us to be. The question is not how much love is enough, but how will we know that our love for Him is genuine? The words of Jesus in **Luke 12:34** give us a clue.

Our willingness to share the treasure we have largely reflects our love for Jesus. Notice I did not say share “our” treasure with others. Little or great, all that we have is only ours in the sense that God has given us temporary custody of it. Paul gives us a practical example in the first five verses of chapter 8. The churches of Macedonia were not the wealthy churches of the day. They weren't megachurches with multi-million-dollar budgets or churches relying upon large endowments to keep them afloat. In fact, financially speaking they were some of the poorest churches of the day, suffering oppression by the Roman government.

Yet in response to the grace of God, some of the poorest churches of the day willingly gave of their treasure to meet a great need outside of their immediate church family. Paul says their extreme poverty overflowed into a wealth of generosity. That does not mean that God suddenly blessed them with a lot of money to give away. If you hear a pastor teaching that or something similar flee from that church as fast as you can. They were not compelled or tricked into giving, they willingly gave according to their ability, and beyond. The word that comes to mind is sacrifice. Such a thing doesn't make sense to many 21st century minds.

Never forget that Satan's primary mission is to separate us from the love of Christ and to divide us from one other. We cannot love God too much, but it is possible to love God too little. When that happens, the affection shifts to us and to the ways of the world. When we are guilty of that sin, it becomes much more difficult, perhaps even impossible, to share treasure with others. It prevents us from loving our enemies and forgiving those who have hurt us. It puts our soul at great risk.

Division is the result of loving the world more than we love Jesus.

What divides us? There are almost too many things to count. If we were to make a list, it could easily be several pages long. Envy and greed would certainly make the top of the list, for few things are more effective or destructive. Strangely enough, noble things like equality, equity and fairness would be right there with them. Indeed, sermons on those E, F and G words and those related to money and giving often lead to the cynical observation that all the church wants is your money. To make matters worse, a misunderstanding of Acts 4:32-35 leads some to believe that Marxist socialism is a Biblical concept, and the church wants all your money. Those are deceitful lies of Satan that drive us further away from God and each other.

Some things will never change. Until Jesus returns in glory, there will be an unequal division of treasure among people and even among churches. Satan will continue to use greed, envy, equality, equity, and fairness to make some feel cheated and others feel shame. Even a devout atheist like Karl Marx recognized how government can use those sinful things to effectively divide one segment of society against another for political gain and power.

Unfortunately, equality of opportunity does not bring equality in outcome. Equality in outcome or equity always comes at the cost of freedom. Giving is a matter of the heart. It is our love for God and not manipulation, coercion or guilt that will have us do what those poor Macedonians did-voluntarily give according to our ability and beyond. They were poor in wealth, but rich in faith and love. Paul lifted them up as an example of how we should respond to God's grace. Giving according to their means meant no fixed percentage but rather giving according to what they have. Giving beyond their ability meant giving sacrificially, putting others needs ahead of their own, even though their own needs were great. And then he goes on to remind them of the love of Jesus Christ, who gave up everything He had, including His life, so others might become rich.

As a nation and perhaps even as a church we must once again acknowledge and affirm that it is only by God's grace that we rise to greatness. It is not government but His grace and love that will mend our every flaw. Government is not our friend. God will bless America when America chooses to bless God. Until then, the evil crossfire between the haves and the have nots will remain. The haves are those that have embraced the life-saving faith of Jesus Christ and the have nots are those who have not yet said yes. I pray that our abundance may meet their lack. Amen