

Covenant and Generosity

by Neil Bradley

Why do we, as Christians, give?

We give to keep the church building warm and in good order, and that's important. Who can blame people for staying away from church if the pub is cosier? We give to help pay the Vicar's stipend and expenses; and to support world-wide mission, and to put in effect our Lord's command to tell the world and to make disciples of all nations; to help the needy and hungry about whom Jesus said: *inasmuch as you do this for these my brothers, you do this for me.*

We give to finance central organisations of the Church of England but the most important and our first reason for giving should be in thanksgiving for the generosity of God, for he so loved the world that He gave his only Son.

Giving is our response to the love of God. Only as Christians can we fully appreciate this, because it's in the nature of being Christian. We need to think about thanking God for that Generosity to us; His love for us, and for the fact that however 'busy' we are, and disobedient, He's always there.

In Genesis we hear how God made a Covenant with Noah, an agreement. The story of how his family was saved from the Flood. God made many covenants with His people in which He promises that He will never forget us.

The covenants God made with us are unconditional.

What then shall we say to this love of God, what shall we say about the signs of his love; the cross, the bounty he gives us in the food and drink which sustain us?

Christian Giving begins with seeing the awe and wonder of God in our lives; it's not about giving our fair share. That's great for Rotary or Lions, but it's not Christian Giving.

It's not about paying our dues; that's fine for the golf club or the PTA, but it's not Christian Giving. It's not just about turning up at the Christmas Fayre with some old toys or bric a brac that we don't want; that's not Christian Giving either. Christian Giving is risky because we have to understand the awe and wonder of God, and that can be uncomfortable; but that's where Christian Giving begins.

It's no good clamouring after all that this world can offer in the way of riches, of seeking to fill our coffers and ignoring the needs of others. God provides all that we need, but he asks us to put **His** needs first when we're spending our money or using our abilities;

His needs as seen in the needs of **others**.

We are asked, like the Corinthians, to be generous. As Paul says in 2 Cor. 8, "*For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich.*" The Macedonians gave beyond their means.

One of the greatest marks that a heart has been truly touched by the grace of God is that it counts giving as a privilege. God provides all that is needed to do his work and to live well. The problem is that some gather more than they need and others are unable to gather enough. God intends us to level things out. In other words, God had given the Corinthians more than enough now, so they should share it with the impoverished church in Jerusalem.

How do we approach giving our offerings to the Lord? Is this a task we're glad to do, or does this feel more like a necessary evil? Sacrificial giving is a tremendous act of faith. It has been said that the other problem with giving until it hurts, is that we have such a low threshold of pain. Anytime our Christian nature wants to commit to generous and consistent giving, our sinful nature is right there to squeal out its objections.

"But this will cut into our money for that cruise!" "But if we give this to church, how are we going to be able to afford payments for the new car." "With the economy slowing down, don't we need to cut back on the standing order to church, so we can maintain our standard of living?"

On the **one** hand, we can't give when we don't have; especially in tough economic times. But, we have to try and maintain our giving if we can, and offer God the 'First Fruits'. There's a tension between satisfying our 'needs', honouring God, and satisfying our 'wants'.

So, let's examine our lives, to look at all that we do, and ask ourselves if we are taking the easy way. Or is there something we can do to be more loving and caring, generous and committed people.

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