

Fourth—*A blessing to others.* Such gifts as do not make others rich, are not true gifts. A Christ-like gift will not injure the recipient, but bless him.

II.—THE EXAMPLE OF THE MACEDONIANS—chap. viii. 1-5.

1. They were afflicted, joyful and poor. Will such people give anything at all?

2. They abounded unto the riches of liberality.

3. They gave all and more than they were able.

4. They gave of their own accord. They were fountains. They didn't require to be pumped.

5. They gave eagerly, anxiously, beseeching the apostles to receive their contributions.

6. They first gave themselves to the Lord. That was the secret of all the rest.

The best way to read this record is to begin where Paul ends and read backwards. This gives the following order in giving:

First—Give ourselves to the Lord. When that is done the rest is easy. The reason so many Christians give so little to the work of Christ, is because they have not really given themselves to God.

Second—Anxiety to give of our possessions.

Third—A spontaneous giving, *in fact.*

Fourth—A liberal giving.

Fifth—An abundant giving.

Sixth—Giving in defiance of circumstances.

How such a course as this would startle the world, thrill the church, fill missionary treasuries, strengthen the hand of charity, and put to shame the cry of hard times and poverty.

III.—THE DUTY OF THE CORINTHIANS.

1. To abound in the grace of giving—chap. viii. 7.

2. Not only to will but to act—chap. viii. 11.

3. To give cheerfully according to purpose—chap. ix. 7.

This suggests that—

First—Stinginess in giving is not right. God abounds toward us in everything. He wants us to abound toward him.

Second—Good purposes are not in themselves sufficient. These will not feed the hungry, nor preach the gospel to the poor. We must "complete the doing also." Nothing can take the place of *the gift.*

Third—There's a blessing for us in giving; but it only comes when we give "cheerfully." The gift grudgingly given may bless others, but the "grudge" will curse the giver.

IV.—GENERAL PRINCIPLES AND TRUTHS.

1. Giving is acceptable according to ability—viii. 12. The "widow's mite" is acceptable from the widow. The man of means cannot cheat God with the widow's mite.

2. Giving is a proof of our love—viii. 24. Love is always giving. God loved the world and gave his Son—John iii. 16. Jesus loved us and gave himself for us—Gal. ii. 20. Our gifts to God are the measure of our love to him. Not how much we argue, but how much we give, is the test.

3. Our giving will determine our blessing—ix. 6, 11. We reap as we sow, as well as what we sow. If it is more blessed to give than to receive, then assuredly the more we give the more we will be blessed. It requires faith to be assured of this. But faith is one of the things a man is supposed to have if he is a Christian. Perhaps there is nowhere

that the distinction between the Christian and the man of the world is more emphatic than at this point. The man of the world says, "I want to increase my possessions; therefore I save all I get." The Christian replies, "There is that scattereth and yet increaseth, and there is that withholdeth more than is meet and it tendeth to poverty." "Give, and it shall be given, good measure, pressed down, and running over," etc.

4. Our giving is the proof of our obedience to the gospel of Christ—ix. 13. The "gospel" is more than first principles. Though a man "obey" the first claims of the gospel, if he rebel against the command to give, he has not the spirit of obedience. Can a man be saved who refuses or neglects to give to the cause of Christ? Put it in this way—Can a man be saved who does not obey the gospel?

5. Christian giving glorifies God—ix. 12-13. There is a good deal of the "glory" we give to God that is very cheap. It costs but little to sing hymns and speak his praises. This is really not the best proof of what God has done for us. When we give in Scriptural fashion, God's power over our selfish nature is seen and felt, and others glorify God for our obedience to the gospel.

#### HOW WE SHALL KNOW THE GOSPEL TO BE FROM GOD.

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Though the church of to-day has many defects, it is producing as grand an army of noble workers, Christians of as strong faith, and as earnest zeal, as at any previous period in its history since the days of the apostles. Yet any one who reads carefully along certain lines, will see under the specious designation of Biblical criticism, and more recently, higher criticism, that unbelief is exerting an influence, which is of a tendency to overthrow the faith of some who are not well grounded in the truth, and this doubt-producing work coming from those who claim to be the friends of the Bible, the danger is greatly increased.

There is, however, no reason to fear that the Bible will suffer any permanent injury. No weapon formed against it (and in the ages past there were many) prospered; nor will those of the present, or future, be more successful. As gold is all the brighter of the fire through which it passes, so will the truth be the more convincing, as it is seen to stand unharmed amidst the darts which are hurled against it. Yet evil will be done. Some will be led from the pure faith of the gospel into doubt and unbelief, and will make shipwreck of their faith. "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall."

Jesus says (John vii. 17), "If any man willeth to do his will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it be of God, or whether I speak from myself." (R. V.)

This is an authoritative statement, which is of inestimable worth to every one who desires to know the truth, or knowing it, earnestly seeks to live above the realm of peace-destroying doubt, or soul-ruining unbelief. Jesus had just said, "My doctrine is not mine, but his who sent me,"—of God,

and not of man; and that was precisely what those to whom he spoke were denying, and what some are saying to-day they cannot believe. Jesus here gives the true and only antidote for unbelief. Strange that we do not better understand and more fully believe him. It is a rule which, if followed, would remove all doubts and give instead a completely satisfactory faith in Christ.

When we approach the subject of scepticism we think of syllogism and of carefully formed argument. We marshal our forces for discussion, thinking that in that way we shall successfully defend the truth. How much we have said of the evidences of Christianity, external and internal; of prophecy, history and miracle. It seemed the doubter must have been convinced and led to Christ. But he stands unmoved, unconvinced, unsubdued, an unbeliever still; just where he desires to stand. We have missed the mark. We have trusted to our reasoning, our argument, and forgotten the words of Jesus, the rule which he has given, "If any man willeth to do his will, he shall know of the teaching." It is probable that Moody has removed more doubts from the minds of men in Boston and New York this winter than all other preachers combined, though he has said very little that would be classed with the evidences of Christianity, or in proof of the Bible. But from his earnest, soul-searching preaching of the doctrine of the cross, there has been produced in thousands of once unbelieving hearts the noble purpose of a new life, a will to do the will of God, with which has come the true knowledge that the doctrine is of God.

In the study of these words of Jesus, it must be seen:

1. *How important Jesus makes the will of the person who hears the truth.* Through it he must do for himself what no other can possibly do for him. The very great dependence of faith upon the human will, Jesus here makes apparent. He charged the Jews with unbelief as a sin and stated that they were under its control, because they resolved to be what they were. "You will not come to me that you might have life," was a clear statement of the fact that they had willed to disbelieve what he said, and to disobey what he commanded. The prodigal went away into a wicked life because he resolved to take the first step which led to it, and he came back to the path of virtue because he said "I will arise and go to my Father." Unbelief with those people who had continually before them all necessary proof that Jesus was the Christ was wilful, and what shall be said of the same great sin under all the light of the truth today?

2. *Jesus definitely states that the person seeking to know the truth resolves to do the will of God.* Moses long before told this people that the Lord would send them another Lawgiver, and strictly charged them to hear him. This could not mean less than a humble, obedient, trustful hearing. If men claim they cannot compel their faith, they cannot deny their ability to will a candid hearing of what Jesus in the gospel teaches,