

Like the impoverished but liberal Macedonians, they are "willing of themselves." If a way of conveying their gifts is not at hand, they seek one out, as Paul describes the Macedonians: "praying us with much entreaty that we would receive the gift, and take upon us the fellowship of the ministering to the saints." Thus, according to the inspired plan, the urgent solicitation is not on the part of the agent of benevolence to draw charity from the giver, but on the givers' part to find the agent to receive and disburse their charities. Let this system be adopted, and the funds of benevolent societies would flow in unsolicited, and the expense of collecting agencies would cease.

The scriptural rule requires *frequent and stated appropriations*. "On the first day of the week, let every one lay by him." If it is allowable sometimes to depart from the letter of this law, the spirit of it must be regarded. Having adopted his plan of giving, the giver is required at frequent and stated times to examine his income, assess on it the prescribed proportion, and set aside the amount sacred to benevolence. His appropriations must be *frequent*, to keep pace with his earnings and with the constant calls of benevolence; *stated*, that they may not be forgotten. This is inconsistent with giving a large sum, and then for a long time nothing, and with the intention of giving only or chiefly at death.

The text cited requires that charities be *proportionate to the income*. In the laws regulating the Jewish tithes and offerings, God prescribed precisely what proportions should be given. This was practicable in a system of laws for a simple agricultural people, among whom every family was entitled to an inalienable inheritance in the soil; but the gospel, designed for all nations and ages, could not with equity fix the precise proportion. And it fits the entire character of the gospel—free grace from God, free love from man—to leave the decision of this point to the unconstrained love of those who have freely given all to Christ; for "God loveth a cheerful giver." But the principle by which the proportion to be given is determined, is most explicitly stated. "Let every one lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him." Nothing can satisfy God's claim less than a consecration to benevolence of an amount proportioned to the prosperity God has given. Do you think yourself benevolent because you give something—much? If you give less than "according as God hath prospered you," yours is but the benevolence of Ananias and Sapphira.

This principle of proportionate benevolence is repeated in various forms in the Bible. "If any man minister, let him do it as of the ability that God giveth." "As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God." "As we have opportunity, let us do good unto all men." "I am debtor" to put forth benevolent efforts "as much as in me is." "Honor the Lord with the first-fruits of all thine increase." There are three points in this requirement of benevolence proportioned to the income.

1. *All must give.* "Let every one." The gospel does not release the poor from giving. The smallest income can pay a proportion. Nothing short of the total cessation of God's gifts can exempt from the law, "As God hath prospered him." The Macedonian church were praised for giving in "their deep poverty." The story of the widow's two mites settles for ever the acceptableness to God of offerings from the poor. And one dollar thus given, has often a moral power greater than a thousand. The benevolence of Louisa Osborne, the coloured domestic, who, from the wages of one dollar a week, paid twenty dollars a year to educate a youth in Ceylon, as it has been brought to light by the missionary who witnessed the unusual benefits of her donation to the mission, has thrilled the hearts of American Christians. The widow's two mites, which were all her living, lifted to the gaze of the universe and illuminated by the Saviour's commendation, have exerted and will exert a power which no mine of gold can equal—as if a dew-drop, expending its whole being to refresh one tiny flower, had been transformed, as it exhaled to the skies, into a star, and fixed in the brightness of the firmament to bless the creation for ever.