

**PAUL'S CONCEPT OF GIVING: AN EXEGESIS OF
2 CORINTHIANS 8:1-9 and PERSONAL REFLECTIONS**

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by

Paulino B. Articulo, Jr.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Pastor Rodolfo Palmerola Acosta says that “the principles of giving and receiving make things work in the universe. Without this ‘give and take principle’ life would not be sustained on earth. The roles of giving and receiving are interchangeable. In other words, one does not only receive but also give.”¹ In the light of this, principles and models of giving are presented in this paper.

Giving is one of the ministry gifts of the church given by God. It involves the giving of one’s earthly goods (usually money) for the support of God’s work. The givers must be honest, sincere and humble. They must be sensitive to the Spirit and gifted with wisdom. Only then can the right amount be given to the right people, at the right time, for the right reasons.² Giving is a part of the person’s nature. Deuteronomy 16:17 issues a command for men to give according to God’s blessing in their lives. Some of their blessings may be financial and their gifts of cash or items of high value are ways that they can give back. But what if they are not financially blessed? They are still commanded to give as they are able.³

¹Nestor Distor Bunda, Rea Angelica Dime Faulan, eds., “Unity Between giver and Receiver,” *A Moving Faith* (Jaro, Iloilo city, Philippines: Life and Ministry of Pastor Rodolfo Palmerola Acosta, First Edition: 2000), 150.

²Robert Frost, “The Leaders calling: Ministry; Giving,” *The Shepherd’s Staff* (Burbank, CA: Wolrd MAP, 1993), 39.

³Marita Littauer, “What is Giving Back” *Give Back Creative Ways to Make Your world a Better Place* (San Bernardino, CA: Here’s Life Publishers, Inc., 1991), 14 .

Giving back is for everyone and it does not require a special anointing, nor do they have to have obvious abilities. They just need to be willing and available for the Lord to use them.⁴ Giving is not God's way of raising money. Giving is God's way of raising children. Every time people give sacrificially they give a little of their selfishness away.⁵ Love and concern are best expressed through giving. It is the heart and the attitude of God Himself (John 3:16). God is the author of giving by creating for humans a beautiful world to live in and to enjoy. He provided them everything that they need in order to live. The land, water, sunlight, air, abundance of food and herbs for healing are also provided. For their salvation He provided His one and only son for man's redemption from sin. God showed to men the history of giving. With this end, people will also share in life the attitude and the practice of giving.

Giving is not of little value but a precious spirit that has its highest value. It may appear unattractive but it is an attitude that is attractive of the giver and no amount could compensate for the heart that is willing to give.

The most precious valued possessions are invincible and it is the greatest strength people may possess. No one can take this from them and they alone can manage it. And with this they will receive abundance in their giving. The more they give... the more they will have! ⁶ Paul tells, "Whosoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whosoever sows generously will also reap generously. And God is able to

⁴Ibid.

⁵John F. Mac Arthur, Jr. "Giving God's Way," *Speakers Sourcebook* (Mandaluyong, Metro Manila: OMF Literature Inc., 1988), 45.

⁶Robert Strand, "Be Generous," *365 Moments to Cherish* (Naga City: Acts 29 Publishing, June 2009), 12, 25.

make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work” (2 Corinthians 9:6, 8).

Giving may refer to generosity, the habit of giving freely without expecting anything in return.⁷ Most of men can relate with the proverb that says, ”It is more blessed to give than to receive.” The offering given on Sunday morning, for Paul (Acts 20:32-35) as well as for Jesus (Mt. 10:8), is a guiding principle for the Christian worker rather than the Christian giver.⁸ When they willingly give from their resources, regardless how small the gift may be, to help alleviate the dire circumstances in another person’s life, would be great. But what is more important to consider is that selfless giving has a spiritual value.⁹

Early Christian Churches practiced giving in the attitude of grace. “All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as some might have need“ (Acts 2:44-45). Barnabas called the Son of Encouragement sold his own field and brought the money at the Apostles’ feet. Some sold also their acres of land and houses and distributed the money to anyone as needed (Acts 4:34-37).

Today, this attitude can hardly be found. There are also, however, many who give money, material possessions and also some portions of land as donation for church

⁷Smith 2009, “Giving,” *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, Google*, Accessed March 6, 2012.

⁸Rick Warren “Guidelines for Giving,“ *Google, http://www.generous giving . org./* accessed March 6, 2012.

⁹“*Commentary on Giving,*” *Google, Jesus–the word .org/commentary*, accessed on March 6, 2012.

use. This kind of Spirit is still active and alive among God's people and among some philanthropic people or institutions (civic and private organizations).

Background of the Study

Every church member has the responsibility to support the church ministry through the giving of financial resources. There are many advantages when everybody supports the cause of the gospel, but when only a few give their support and some do not even respond to the call of grace, the ministry becomes unproductive.

The reason perhaps why some do not give is because they do not understand the true meaning of giving. Biblical understanding may have been insufficient because of poor spiritual insight and lack of fellowship and involvement in church activities. Grace giving has not been discovered because their lives were not yet fully surrendered to the Lord, so they were unresponsive to the need of (progress in) building the Kingdom of God and church structure. Their situation can result to financial difficulty of the gospel workers, lack of finances to pay important bills and sustain basic needs. This can also lead to poor physical church structure and ministerial functions.

It is true that the power of God has no limitations to move in any of this situation. God can work without the financial support of people. The working of miracles and wonders will only appear in accordance to His own purpose just like what happened to the five loaves of bread and two small fish from the hands of a little boy (John 6:9-12). The five thousand people were fed and plenty were left over. Today God still uses people as His partners in doing miracles and wonders.

Giving is God's way of blessing people no matter how small the gift is because big things usually come from small things. Small things are used by God through

His wisdom. When God blesses small things that they become big, the impact on people is great. When God favors or blesses small things, it becomes an effective testimony of His power. It is a challenge to people that no matter how little their possession is, when it is given to the Lord, then the Lord will honor their gift and increase it in due time. His blessing is given to those who are obedient to His word. His word is true and it stands firm forever in heaven (Psalm 119:89-93).

Giving is not done for the sake of giving. Giving is done because of self-giving first to God. This was modeled by the Macedonian Christians. They gave themselves first to the Lord, and then to the ministry of God's will (2Corinthians 8:5). The act of giving implies first, obedience to God; second, that the love of God is in the people; and third, it is the expansion of God's kingdom through His people.

The Church is poor when people do not give but when they contribute the Church becomes rich with many things. There will be many workers, productive ministries, improved material structures, acquisition of facilities to be utilized, and personal needs are met abundantly. This concept was shown in the feeding of the five thousand people. God showed the abundance of His nature to encourage the church to enjoy giving and God's blessings.

Giving is obedience to God. It is in giving that receiving is also experienced. Luke affirms, "Give, and it will be given you, a good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measures you use, it will be measured to you" (Luke 6:38). So the measure of obedience to God is giving. God uses the act of giving as the measure for His provisions of needs. The word says "pressed down, shaken together and running over."

A rice land illustrates this matter. If the farm is given the needed seeds for planting, it will multiply the seed into grains during harvest. If the rice field is not given seeds, it will not yield anything for food. God has ordained the law of nature, law of sowing and reaping. What has been sown that shall also be reaped (Gal 6:7).

The law of sowing is applied to the land. It is a concrete example of what God is doing in the practice of giving. If people give to the church, their gifts will be multiplied, although how God does it remains unknown. In the same way that no one knows exactly how the seed grows as time passes by. What is known is that at the end of the season there is a time of harvest. The same principle applies to giving. Giving to the Lord is like sowing and harvesting in due time.

Giving is a means of God's love. 2 Corinthians 9:7 states "God loves a cheerful giver." However, reactions to giving may vary. These include the following: 1.) sadness; 2.) pain; 3.) anger; and 4.) joy. The first three reactions will not elicit God's favor. What is needful is joyful attitude when giving. God does not expect any reaction in giving except cheerfulness. God loves the cheerful giver, according to scriptures. God's favor or more blessings will be upon those who give joyfully.

God's love is for everybody as specified in John 3:16 but for a cheerful giver, God's love has a different degree. God's love motivates people to excel in their giving to the ministry of the church. Wesley L. Duewel says, "You were created to love. You were created in the image of the God of love. You were created like God so that you can have the capacity to respond to and understand the love of God. Your whole being,

when touched by the Holy Spirit, can receive and, to be a blessed degree, transmit God's love to other.”¹⁰

Giving is expanding God's kingdom. The territories of the unreached will be reached out when there is sufficient funds, and sending out missionaries and workers to some parts of the world is very possible, and creating and establishing new communities for the Lord is accomplished. Training and building up people to be new leaders of His kingdom and reaching out continually the unreached people for the Lord can be done although it will take a long process. It takes patience and another generation to do it. Nevertheless as long as there is solidarity and cooperation in building the kingdom for Christ, many people who are lost will be reached for the Lord.

Paul, the author of 2 Corinthians, is a concrete example of a missionary who was able to go to the continents of Asia and Europe for the sake of the Gospel and of planting the churches. With God's help, Christian communities continued to grow and to labor for Christ.

There are three kinds of giver: The flint never gives till it is well hammered, and then it yields only sparks. The sponge gives only when you squeeze it and keep on squeezing till it is dry. The honeycomb gives freely and keeps on giving.¹¹ The last view of a giver is a great challenge for all people in obedience to God. It is from this view that supporting the ministry of the gospel should be done. The love of God is experienced more in the life of that person and His Kingdom will continue to expand.

¹⁰Wesley L. Duewel, “Love-The Secret of your Leadership” *Ablaze for God* (Manila: Christ for Greater Manila , 1989), 95.

¹¹Source Unknown, “Giving,” *Speaker Source Book* (Mandaluyong, Metro Manila: OMF Literature Inc., 1988), 45.

Objectives of the Study

This study aims to explain Paul's concept of giving in 2 Corinthians 8:1-9 and personal reflections.

Specific Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives of this study are the following.

1. To define giving according to Paul's concept in 2 Corinthians 8:1-9.
2. To exegete Paul's theology of giving in 2 Corinthians 8:1-9.
3. To formulate personal reflections from the exegesis of the passage about giving.
4. To assess and come up with a position as the basis for further study and action of the church in relation to the concept of giving.