

## WORSHIP

### The Avenue of Contribution

(Number nine in a series of ten)

The freewill offerings of Christians are usually considered to be an act of worship. In these modern times, or so it seems, many have lost sight of the real purpose for Christian worship and these offerings. Worship has become a thing of convenience, and many seem to view their giving as a traditional obligation or fee for membership in the church. Others view their giving as a huge burden and are unwilling to part with more than a token offering.

#### Worship and the One Body

When Christians assemble on the Lord's day, we offer homage to God. This is Christian worship. However, unlike what many have assumed in their ignorance, the general assembly of Christians to worship includes much more than what we see or hear. When the true and knowledgeable Christian worships in this assembly, he is acting not as an individual but as a part of the whole body. Christians join their voices in common singing. Jesus joining together with us as the one body offering praise to the name of God (Hebrews 2:11-12). Christians join as one body in singular prayer to God offered through Jesus as head of that body. Christians join in communion as a reminder and symbol of our fellowship with one another, Christ and his sufferings (1 Corinthians 10:16-17). When Christians join their minds and hearts in study and meditation upon God's holy word, they grow together in understanding, and as one body move closer to the perfection and unity of the one body in Christ (cf. Ephesians 4:1-16). Similarly, the freewill offering of Christians is nothing more than the church pooling her funds together to increase her ability to supply the needs of those she helps. Each act of worship in some way expresses the unity of the body, individuals joining together as one body. No part including only one member nor a small percentage of the whole body.

#### The Christian Offerings in the Bible

One of the most impressive characteristics of the church in the first century was her generosity and hospitality. From her beginning, we can read of Christian fellowship and common devotion to the apostles doctrine (Acts 2:42). The result of this fellowship in spirit was an unprecedented demonstration of selflessness and sharing.

Acts 2:44-45

*"And all that believed were together, and had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all, as every man had need."*

Hence, we see the beginning of free-will offerings made by the church. The motivation for this generous giving as described more fully in Acts 4, was not one of commandment but one of a loving spirit.

Acts 4:32

*"And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common."*

Furthermore, it should be noted that this giving was in response to a genuine need. They weren't giving just to be giving; simply because they were supposed to give. Oh no! That sort of giving is never so generous, so impressive or overwhelming. Hear the Holy Spirit describe their generosity.

Acts 4:34-35

*"Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need."*

More specific information is given about one particular need regarding the care of Christian widows (Acts 6:1). The ministering to their needs was "daily" and the church, following the apostles teaching, developed a plan to help carry out that ministry (verses 2-6). The seven men selected were performing a duty for which "deacons" (meaning servants) would later be appointed (cf. Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:8-13). In the new Testament, the care of widows and orphans was a common work of the early church, and specific instructions were given as to which widows the church should care for (James 1:27; 1 Timothy 5:3-16).

As the church grew and Christians were scattered, this fellowship of giving and receiving extended beyond the local congregation. Acts 11 describes events which took place in Antioch, including the prophecy of a "great dearth throughout all the world" (verses 27-28) (a "dearth" is a "shortage" or "lack"). Listen as the Bible describes the response of the Antioch church of Christ.

Acts 11:29-30

*"Then the disciples, every man according to his*

*ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judea: which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul."*

Here we learn several interesting facts which are characteristic of all Christian free-will offerings in the Bible, and indeed even today among those who hold true to the word of God.

- ▶ "The disciples . . . determined." It truly was a free-will offering. They were not coerced but were driven by love for their brethren.
- ▶ Their giving was "every man according to his ability." Those who had more, gave more simply because of ability. The poor gave what they could and no less honor was bestowed upon them than upon the rich. (This illustrates that which was mentioned above—about the church working as a collective body instead of individually. The emphasis here is on what the whole church at Antioch did, not upon any individual.)
- ▶ Their giving was in response to a specific need, "to send relief unto the brethren . . . in Judea."
- ▶ Their offering was sent to elders of another congregation for distribution as needed.
- ▶ Their offering was not sent to some charitable organization but to "brethren." No Biblical example can be given of a church of Christ as the church joining with non-believers to accomplish her work. (This is not to exclude the possibility of individual Christians joining with non-religious efforts in the community, national or international efforts to do good works [cf. Galatians 6:10]).

Truly we can see the love, the compassion, the generosity of the early Christians as they made sacrifices to help other brethren whom they had never met. This sacrificial compassion is generated even today where people understand the fellowship of the one body in Christ. For the Christian, who has received so much from God, it is difficult to ignore the pain of others, and especially those who are also a part of Christ's body.

#### When and How Often Should Christians Give?

The New Testament church has been instructed to "upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store" (1 Corinthians 16:2). The church at Corinth was involved in the relief fund for the Saints of Judea. Much information is given in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 which reinforces the principles considered above from Acts 2-6 and

Acts 11. The instruction given to the church at Corinth was not limited to the local group. Paul said, "...as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye" (1 Corinthians 16:1). The instruction to gather on the first day of the week is both authoritative as a "command" or "order" (therefore not optional) and universal as Paul indicated. The free-will offerings of the church of Christ, then and now, are upon each and every Lord's day or Sunday and at no other time. Notice also, that the day of the offering is what was "ordered" here and not the giving itself as it was already being practiced.

#### **How Much Should Christians Give?**

Tithing is practiced among many denominational groups and was the system of regulated giving in the Old Testament. In the New Testament, there is no such doctrine as tithing (giving ten percent). Under Christ's system, the amount is determined according to the following principles:

- "As God hath prospered him" (1 Corinthians 16:2);
- From a "willing mind" (2 Corinthians 8:12);
- With "zeal" (2 Corinthians 9:2);
- "Every man as he purposeth in his heart . . . not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver" (2 Corinthians 9:7);
- "According to that a man hath . . . not that other men be eased, and ye burdened, but by an equality" (2 Corinthians 8:12-15).

The Christian should also always remember that "he which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully" (2 Corinthians 9:6).

#### **Common Non-Biblical Practices Among Denominations**

In spite of the clear doctrine of Christ, it is not uncommon today for denominational churches to practice their own plan for funding their works. Many groups have changed the Lord's day free-will offering to include any meeting on any day of the week as suits their wishes. Some have made it more like paying a bill where the church tries to regulate the amount given and scrutinizes its members' giving practices. Still others have either added to the free-will offerings or replaced it with sales, auctions and soliciting the public to raise funds.

One thing that has led to this behavior is that many churches have attempted to modify the scope of the work of the church as portrayed in the scripture. So many times, the churches are raising

funds for various forms of entertainment and social activities or facilities to accommodate such activities. It seems that many consider youth group social activities or sightseeing trips as the work of the church—things which God never intended for the church to fund. When a church reaches beyond the purpose for which she was intended by God, then God's system of funding cannot suffice. Every church whose work is governed by the New Testament can fully fund her efforts by free-will offerings of understanding and sacrificial Christians collected upon the Lord's day.

#### **Concluding Remarks**

The free-will offerings of Christians was the only manner in which the Lord's church funded her works in the Bible. Those who follow the New Testament today, will not support church car washes, bake sales, yard/garage sales or auctions, walk-a-thons, etc. Nor will they solicit funds for the church from the general public as some religious organizations do. These things are not authorized in the Bible as methods of funding the church. On the other hand, as was practiced in Acts 4-5, Christians should feel free to, as individuals, conduct such fund-raisers for personal use, and if they then desire, to contribute a part or all of these funds to the church. In this case, promoting such as a manner of raising funds for some church-related activity might best be avoided.

The Lord has spoken. We can find "book, chapter and verse" authority for:

- Free-will offerings.
- On the Lord's day.
- For the purpose of doing the Lord's work.

Let us determine to follow God's revealed plan in our free-will offerings as in every other aspect of Christian worship and living. ◻

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International Bible Studies  
Tract Series