

I. The Prophecy and Response

- A. Agabus brings a Word - Around the year AD 40/41 a number of believers with a strong prophetic gift came down to the city of Antioch from Jerusalem to deliver to the believers there a word from the Lord. One of them, Agabus, prophesied that there would be a severe famine coming across the entire Roman-controlled world. (Acts. 11:27)
1. This prophetic word was weighed and tested by the church and the Spirit confirmed its validity. It seems that the Spirit not only confirmed Agabus's prophecy but gave them more clarity, specifically as to the severity of the famine in the region of Judea and the city of Jerusalem. (Acts 11:28)
 2. The famine came around three years later, during the reign of Claudius and was extremely severe, specifically in Judea and Jerusalem.
- B. The Application and Ask - All of the disciples in Antioch agreed that the Lord had given them this word so that they would start raising relief money for the believers in Judea. They took up a "free will" offering and then laid hands on Paul and Barnabus to bring it to Jerusalem. Once Paul and Barnabus came back from Jerusalem, they were then sent out to all the churches in Asia Minor and encouraged all the churches to give generously in response to the prophetic word concerning a coming famine.
- C. The Exemplary Generosity of the Church in Macedonia - Though it is not specifically mentioned in the book of Acts, Paul's letters make it clear that he made it part of his mission to continue to raise money for the coming famine as he went on his missionary journeys. Of all the churches that responded, no groups responded more generously than those of the region of Macedonia. (2 Cor. 8:1-5)

II. The Surveying the Church in Corinth for Generosity

- A. The church in Corinth also participated in the universal offering for the coming famine and Paul appeals to them to finish what they started. He makes it clear that the church of Corinth was the first to give, but now a year later, he exhorts them to not lose their zeal to be generous.

1. He strongly encourages them to continue pursuing a desire to be generous and in its context actually frames freewill generosity as the pinnacle example of spiritual warfare. (2 Cor. 10:1-6)
2. Paul also presents the idea that he is looking to see how much of the love of Christ has been formed in them through their generosity. Not in a pass/fail kind of way, but rather a measurement of understanding and exposure to the heart of God. We actually find this theme quite often in the scripture, that generosity accompanies the life of a lover of God.

III. The Exhortation to Practice Generosity

- A. Practice or Spiritual Discipline - Generosity is presented as an intentional positioning of the heart and will that is inspired by the Spirit's desire to form God's character in us. In other words, we seek to be generous but true generosity is the fruit of a transformed life inspired and empowered by God through one's intentionality to cultivate it. (He is Generous)

Stats - The average American adult thinks about money at least six times per day, and 77% of Americans report feeling anxiety and stress to the point of losing sleep in light of financial worry.

- B. Motivation - The right and pure motivation to seek the generosity of God is rooted in the desire for intimacy and to walk the fullness of life that God wants us to live in. He has life and life abundant for us and greatly desires us to be free from the weight. However, I find that two wrong motivations generally exist when it comes to the reality of seeking to be a generous giver.
1. Religious Merit - Far too many people give financially out of a religious spirit motivated by a desire to be more righteous in God's eyes. They believe that God will like them more, or they will be nearer to God if they give more. This wrong mindset actually results in more slavery to works and distances our hearts from God.
 - a. Tithe - The word "tithe" literally means "tenth". Under the old covenant, God's people were commanded to give a tenth of their increase back to the temple. This was to sustain the tribe of Levi who depended upon it in order to live since they were commanded not to work.

- b. In light of the new covenant, I believe it is unbiblical to insist upon tithing. To boil down giving to the religious practice of methodically giving 10% of our increase is not what God desires.
 2. Selfish Gain - There are many false teachings today that attempt to inspire generous giving as a way of leveraging financial gain. In other words, the motivation is you give so you can receive, or you bless so that you can be blessed. This mindset is actually rooted in the love of money, not the love of Christ.
- C. Strongholds - Jesus tells us that one of the most powerful strongholds and bondages that we all face in this fallen world is the “love of money”. Thankfully, with the same fervor that He warns us about it, He gives us the keys to deliverance from its grip.
 1. Contentment - Every time Jesus brings up the stronghold of the lust for money, He exhorts us to cultivate a spirit of contentment to combat it. Paul tells us that he had to learn to do this over time and through circumstances. (Phil. 4:10-20; 1 Tim. 6:6-10; Heb. 13:5-6)
 2. Resting in God's care - Scripture tells us that we oftentimes allow the love of money to grip our lives because we lack revelation of the care that God has for us. We fall into the lie that we are more concerned with our well being than God is and so we put the burden on ourselves to make sure we never lack. (Mat. 6:22-34; Lk 12:18-34)
 3. Eternal Perspective - The assurance of life abundant forever looses the cords of seeking pleasures and experiences in this age that we feel will only be achieved by financial gain. (Heb. 10:34-39; 11:24-26)

D. The Exhortation

- A. The exhortation of scripture for the lover of God is to give generously with a free heart, not expecting anything in return. This is the heart and will of God for us. When it comes to giving, the question of our lives should be, “Am I generous like God is generous?”