

CHRISTIAN GIVING

By H. C. Mullen.

Article 2.

Next to people's natural selfishness, the chief reason for the financial straits of the church is lack of system. If there is never any better method on the part of the individual than to give spasmodically or when he feels like it, or when there is no personal need or desire pressing for his money, then there will always be the same shortage and uncertainty in the church. When every church member takes seriously what the Bible says about giving and settles it in his mind to lay aside first of all a portion for the Lord's cause, there would soon be no further difficulties in the church and this so called "begging" which so many profess to hate would be a thing of the past.

It is inconceivable to think that in every other important thing of our lives, God has given us some rule to go by, but left the question of our giving to chance or the freak or fancy of fickle human nature. Very many people that are methodical about their work, and believe in system in almost everything, fail terribly when it comes to the matter of setting aside something for the work of God's Kingdom. Folks that have no system of giving will sometimes do some strange things. They may get moved upon by some touching tale of some need across the continent somewhere, and while under the influence of this emotion may send money away to some work or institution which they know nothing about, and may be a fake anyway, while they would see their own church and pastor suffering actual need without ever an emotion. I have seen folks get under the spell of some eloquent evangelist because he was new to them, and during special meeting times would pour out their money lavishly, perhaps making special gifts to the evangelist and singer, and that would be the end of it, till another, meeting or evangelist or singer excited their fancy. Their own pastor could wear threadbare clothes, go into the forest and cut his own firewood, and do other manual labor, the pastor's wife could work her fingers off tearing up old garments to make clothes for the children, and getting gray trying to run the home on less than ten dollars a week, but small things like these would never move the heart strings nor the purse strings of some of these spasmodic givers.

Scriptural giving takes faith and is one of the acid tests of faith. It takes faith in God to first take out the Lord's money and set that sacredly aside, when perhaps there are a dozen needs right at hand for more than the full amount without taking any out.

Here is where the blessedness of systematic giving comes in. God has promised to honor them that honor Him and He is well pleased with the faith that will put Him to the test and will honor Him right in the face of pressing need. This kind of giving becomes a great and strong bond whereby we recognize God's claim upon us and is a recognition of our dependence upon Him. No person would be able to muster much faith to pray to God for help in time of need if he had not played fair with God in times of prosperity, or if he failed God because he thought he was too poor to give. The poor have more reason to be punctual and faithful in this regard, if possible, than the rich. And usually this is the case, for many people who once could be systematic and give a proportion when they were getting a small amount have failed when their income increased. It is very much easier

to take out one dollar out of ten than ten dollars out of one hundred.

In connection with this same subject Dr. Churchill of Buffalo, N. Y., says, "There are two subjects any preacher can talk about and be unpopular; one is money, and the other is work. And yet, Jesus Christ devoted about sixty per cent of His teaching to the subject of money and its equivalent, and about twenty per cent to work—in the neighborhood of eighty per cent, of His teaching to money and work." Dr. Churchill says further, "I do not believe that this great neglect of duty is because of a lack of funds. I am also charitable enough to believe it is not because of lack of willingness. No, this great neglect is not because of unwillingness nor lack of funds; it is because of the lack of knowledge and system."

This lack of system has been the occasion of about all the inconvenience and suffering and dissatisfaction in our churches.

It may have been excusable in the early days of the movement for the church to offer no better than to give the pastor what collections happened to be taken up, but this is a poor makeshift for a church that is supposedly organized and is supposed to run on some business principles. To better illustrate what I mean I will quote some actual happenings. A certain pastor goes to a new field and to a church well able to support him. He is told he will receive the offerings.

As it proves out, these offerings at regular services, on fine Sundays, amount to about ten dollars. It is war times with prices high and with strictest economy the pastor is able to pay some rent for parsonage and to barely live and make ends meet at all, when this amount comes every week regularly. But it happens right in the middle of the winter that on account of exceptionally bad weather there is no Sunday service for three successive Sundays. Now what happens. One would suppose that the people would consider that the pastor would have to have food and to pay his debts just as well during stormy weather as fine, and that the grocer would not accept as an excuse for not paying for what was bought, that it was bad weather. And one would suppose that when the fourth Sunday came that for that offering there would be all the back Sundays' offerings. But no, it is just the same thing, just what happened to be thrown in the box, as on the other Sundays, some five cent pieces, because there was no smaller silver pieces, some cents because unfortunately there were no half cents, and perhaps a few dimes and quarters, making up out of a church full of people the amount of ten dollars when the tenth of what some one individual had made for that last four weeks would have amounted to that much. This is exactly how the matter of "Giving the preacher the collections" works out unless there are some systematic givers in the congregation. Now the three Sundays that it stormed the preacher got nothing, then he wonders how working men at other professions would act if they worked on and did their duty but did not receive their pay, and some excuse was made because it was stormy or their employer said he felt kind of poor or had not made much that week so thought he would not pay them for that week or month. What would likely happen? Working men would strike or resort to law, but the preacher has got to keep his mouth shut or he will be accused of being unthankful or of having a complaining spirit, or of being after money. This very article that I am writing will bring down upon the head of the author these very charges. But the writer feels

that it is time someone spoke on this matter so he might as well come in for the criticism.

I can give another case in point and it happened quite recently. A good self-sacrificing brother capable of taking his place with any working man in almost any profession and of making as much money as the best of them, is called upon to be absent from his own church, for five weeks and the whole time in service for the denomination, but for the whole five weeks he receives not one red cent from any church just because he was receiving the offerings and of course if not present there was none for him. What did the people do with their money? Well, in a good many cases they just kept that in their pockets and considered it so much gain for themselves. Man of the pew, how would you act if you did not get your pay when your living was in it, and when the only reason would be because of the thoughtlessness and lack of system of those to whom you looked for your living? I know how still you would keep about it!

When folks are taken into the church they hear the covenant read and take a solemn pledge to give to the support of a faithful ministry among them, and that is about the last some ever think of it. If they happen to be at church, why of course they might be ashamed to have the plate passed by them and not even shake their hand over it, so they will drop something in, something that they won't miss, it may be a dime or even a quarter, but if it rains the next Sunday and they are not to church the offering for that day will be just that much less and if they are away two Sundays in succession the same thing happens. If on the third Sunday they are at church instead of a regular proportion of what they had received through the weeks gone by, given as to the Lord, as an act of obligation to God and to the church, again they will drop in whatever small piece happens to be first in their pocket, and their responsibility for the support of the church is over again till they happen to go to church again. Others that have taken a solemn pledge to stand by the church and to help in its support, go away from the home church to work elsewhere and that is the last the church ever hears of them so far as money is concerned. Now if in these two cases some responsibility in the matter of supporting the church had been taken upon the individual, and if they had taken the Bible seriously in the matter of giving, a certain proportion of their income would have been sacredly set aside first of all as soon as any amount came in, and the church would get that, whether it rained or whether it snowed, or whether the sun shone bright. If they were five hundred miles away the mails would carry their offering safely to the treasurer of the church every week. The person would be blest and have an abiding interest in the home work that would be wholesome spiritually, and they would add to the efficiency and usefulness of the church and help to lift its burdens and make the matter of keeping a settled pastor on the field an easy and satisfactory accomplishment. (To be Continued.)

Faith may languish; creeds may be changed; churches may be dissolved; society may be shattered. But one cannot imagine the time when Jesus will not be the fair image of perfection, or the circumstances in which He will not be loved. He can never be superseded; He can never be exceeded. Religion may come and go, the passing shapes of an eternal instinct, but Jesus will remain the standard of the conscience, and the satisfaction of the heart, whom all men seek, in whom all men will yet meet.—I. McLar-er.