

Love Compels Us

“For Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died” (2 Corinthians 5:14).

God seeks a relationship with us that is rooted in love. *“For God so loved the world that he gave . . .”* (John 3:16). God has never stopped pouring out his love for us. It is with the love that he gives to us that he wants us to return to him. His love for us compels us to give, serve, and honor him.

God is pleased when we serve him as faithful stewards out of love rather than out of obligation. To illustrate this, say I give my wife a dozen red roses on Valentine’s Day. Upon greeting her I simply tell her “Happy Valentine’s Day.” She says, “They are beautiful, but you shouldn’t have spent so much money.” I respond by saying, “Don’t mention it. Today is Valentine’s Day, and as your husband it is my duty to get a gift for you.” Of course, my wife wouldn’t be pleased. If I had responded differently by saying, “Honey, there is nothing I’d rather do with my money than use it for you because I love you so much,” her response would be quite different. It is the same money and the same gift. However, one gift is motivated out of duty and obligation and one is motivated out of love. God is pleased when we give to him cheerfully and willingly because we love him.

Abraham, King David, Zacchaeus, and Barnabas are just a few of the many people in Scripture who gave out of love for the Lord. The widow in Luke chapter 21, who gave her last coins, provides a wonderful example of how love compels us to give so sacrificially. *“I tell you the truth, [Jesus] said, ‘this poor widow has put in more than all the others. All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on’ ”* (Luke 21:3-4). Her love for Jesus was so great that she gave everything she had. Through faith, we understand God’s love and that love will compel us to give freely.

Read 2 Corinthians 8 and 9. Why did the Macedonians give freely?

Prayer: Lord, we thank you for your love that is given to us, not because we merit it, but because you are a God of love. **Amen.**



Giving God our Best

“Bring the best of the firstfruits of your soil to the house of the Lord your God” (Exodus 23:19).



Giving is part of life. We probably give many people birthday, anniversary, Valentine’s Day, and Christmas gifts. As Christians, we also give to God who first gave to us. In contrast to our giving to other people, our gifts to God should represent our first and best because he is our creator and redeemer. Our giving to God reminds us of his sovereignty and expresses our gratitude to him for what Jesus did on the cross for us. *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life”* (John 3:16). Through giving, we express our love. We give to others because we love them. Our attitude towards or love for that person will determine what and how much we give. When we know the love and mercy of God, we become giving people who want to give to him by sharing with others. It has been aptly said that the mind grows by what it takes in, whereas the heart grows by what it gives out.

The account of the brothers Cain and Abel (Genesis 4:3-5) exemplifies how giving or lack thereof reveals what is in the heart. Abel raised animals while Cain worked the soil and harvested grain. Abel loved the Lord and gave him the firstfruits of his flock. However, Cain merely gave some of the harvest. The Lord honored Abel’s offering because of his loving and obedient heart, but he was not pleased with Cain’s offering.

As we examine our giving, we should ask ourselves whether God is getting our best or just our leftovers? Is our giving a proper response to God’s love for us? As we read and meditate on his word and participate in the Sacraments, God changes our hearts so that we are willing to give him our best.

Read 2 Chronicles 31:5. What was the attitude of these givers?

Prayer: Lord, we thank you for your tremendous love for us which enables us to give you our best. We thank you for your promise that you will never leave us nor forsake us. In your name we pray. **Amen.**

Live for Today

“Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms” (1 Peter 4:10).



This is a verse every Christian steward has probably memorized. It seems to cover every aspect of stewardship. “Each one:” every Christian; “whatever gift he has received”: everyone has at least one gift and that’s just what it is – a gift; “to serve others”: the reason we have these gifts is to help others, not ourselves; “faithfully”: consistently, without fail; “administering God’s grace”: without God’s grace working within us, we would not be able to use the gifts he has given us; “in its various forms”: God is a God of diversity who gives different kinds of gifts to different people. This is pretty basic stewardship, but we should examine the verses surrounding this one (verses 7-9,11) as well.

Peter tells us the end is near. Some scoff and say that that warning has been repeated for thousands of years and we’re still here. While that is true, it doesn’t guarantee that Christ won’t come today and, when he comes for you, the end will not only be near, it will be here! In light of our mortality, how should we practice stewardship of our lives? “*Be clear minded and self-controlled,*” Peter says, “*so that you can pray*” (1 Peter 4:7). Thanking God, asking his forgiveness, and expressing your deepest thoughts to your Father in Heaven are necessary acts for the faithful Christian steward. Our strength to obey his command to love as we’ve been loved and to use our gifts to the greatest potential comes from communion with God as he speaks to us through his word and Sacrament and we speak to him in prayer. Christ in us enables us to **give it all we’ve got!**

Compare Peter’s exhortations with Paul’s as found in Romans 12:6-13. Note similarities and additions.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, giver of every good and perfect gift, help me to treasure your gifts to me and to use them diligently and joyfully in your service. Help me to live each day as if it were my last, that you might find me faithful when you come for me. Through Jesus. **Amen.**