

The Economics of Christian Service

II Corinthians 12: 14-15

We have read a portion of the second letter that Paul had written to the church at Corinth. These were a people that were dear to the heart of Paul, but there were many problems developing in Corinth. This second letter was written to deal with the problems that were yet unresolved.

Corinth would not have been an easy place to pastor or serve the Lord. It was a port city and wealthy commercial center, situated between the Aegean and Adriatic Seas. Corinth boasted an outdoor theater that accommodated 20,000 people, athletic games that were second only to the Olympics, Greek, Roman, and Oriental residents, and the temple of Aphrodite with its 1,000 temple prostitutes. Corinth was a culturally diverse city that offered all manner of indulgence to its residents and visitors. The Greek term *Korinthiazomai* (to act like a Corinthian) came to mean “to practice fornication.” Clearly, Paul had his work cut out for him in Corinth.

Often we find ourselves in situations that are not what we desire. We are living in an age that seems to have no desire for the things of God. It is easy to get discouraged and want to quit when it appears that our efforts seem so small amidst so much sin and wickedness. It would have been easy for Paul to have forsaken the church at Corinth, but he continued for the glory of God and the good of the people.

As I read these verses, Paul’s statement in [v.15](#) gripped my heart. [I will very gladly spend and be spent for you.](#) We must keep in mind that God is no respecter of persons. He loved the Corinthians in Paul’s day and He loves those whom we live among today. We can’t see all that God is doing. We have no idea what can be accomplished when we allow God to use our lives for His purpose. I want to look at the simple [truths](#) in these verses and consider: [The Economics of Christian Service](#). It may not appear to add up to us or the world, but God’s economics are not the same as ours. There are two aspects that we need to consider.

I. An Unhindered Service (14)

A. Involves Commitment (14a) – [Behold, the third time I am ready to come to you;](#) Paul was prepared to visit Corinth for the 3rd time. He had spent 18 months with them when the church was established. After writing the 1st letter to them, he made a hurried visit to Corinth since the problems he addressed had yet to be resolved. After writing this 2nd letter he is prepared to go again. It would’ve been easy for Paul to have washed his hands of Corinth and abandoned them to their sinful lusts, but Paul would not be deterred. He was committed to the church and wanted to do all he could to help them.

- We too face problems, but we must press on. We have not been called to abandon the work, but to be diligent in labor for the Lord, whatever the cost.

B. Involves Constraint (14b) – Behold, the third time I am ready to come to you; and I will not be burdensome to you: Paul had no desire to be burdensome. Clearly Paul is making a financial application, but I believe it goes much deeper than finances. Paul didn't want to hinder the church in any way. He was not a man who feared conflict. He had no problem confronting sin or revealing truth, but Paul wanted to help them rather than hurt them. He had no desire to come in anger, but in love, seeking to resolve their problems. Some had accused him of being a "money grubber" but he refused to allow that to consume his focus.

- At times ministry involves constraint. There are issues that we would like to address. There are times when we would like to tell folks just how it is. We must be careful as we minister for the Lord. There are times when we must deal with particular issues, but we must not fail to see the bigger picture. (Paul wasn't concerned with what a few people thought or said; he was concerned with the good of the church. He wasn't going to let an accusation hinder the church.) In God's economics we must learn to practice constraint. How will our actions affect the big picture?

C. Involves Clarity (14c) – for I seek not yours, but you: for the children ought not to lay up for the parents, but the parents for the children. Paul is simply saying, "I'm not after your money or your possessions. I am after you." He wasn't consumed with what the church could do for him, but what he could do for the church. He wasn't focused on a salary; he was focused on souls. He wanted that to be clear.

- What message are we sending to our community? How is our desire perceived? Why are we here? Are we concerned with the number of baptisms that we can report, numbers on the board for Sunday school, dollars in the plate, or are we concerned about souls? God help us to sense the need and to be clear about our objectives. We are not here for personal recognition or gain. We are here to share the Gospel and reach souls for Christ. If we can reach them, the Lord will take care of the rest!
- Churches in our day have become so focused on the mechanics and money that they have forgotten about the ministry. It is no wonder that the world is skeptical of the church. Many feel that we are more concerned with our needs than we are theirs. We are here to reach people. I am not so much concerned with what they have to offer, but what they need. I want Fellowship to have a clear purpose and for that purpose to be conveyed!

D. Involves Confidence (14d) – for I seek not yours, but you: for the children ought not to lay up for the parents, but the parents for the children. Paul knew that he was obligated to the church. He had been there as many of them were born into the family of God. He could not walk away and leave them to perish. This was not a lost cause, hope remained. He knew that Christ had saved some of them and that their faith would endure!

- We live in troubled times, but ours is not a lost cause, hope remains today. We need to regain our confidence and press on for the Lord. We are serving the same Lord that brought us out of sin and saved us. He has the same power today. There is no reason to abandon our efforts. Press on children!
- It is up to us to meet the needs of the younger generation. I fear that far too many are setting back and letting the youth take the lead. Many churches are experiencing a move of God, but it is through the youth.
- I praise God that He is working in their lives, but I fear that my generation is failing. We need to be taking the lead. We need to provide that spiritual example. We don't expect our children to meet our physical needs and it is unacceptable for us to expect and allow them to stand accountable for the spiritual needs of the church. It is a shame and disgrace for us to ride the "coat tails" of our children in spiritual matters!
- They need to sense and believe in our confidence in Christ. Would anyone desire what you have? Are we passing anything of value on to the next generation? If we aren't confident, don't expect them to be!

I. An Unhindered Service (14)

II. An Unlimited Sacrifice (15) – [And I will very gladly spend and be spent for you; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved.](#) Here we get to the heart of the economics of God. This deals with our personal sacrifice. As we look at this, I want us to consider all that God gave for us. There is no way that we could ever repay all that we have received. Notice:

A. The Attitude of the Dealings – Paul says that he would [very gladly spend and be spent for the church](#). He is talking about making a profound personal sacrifice and yet he is very glad to be able to give of himself.

- For many today, gladness hinges upon personal achievement and acquisition. If we can achieve our goals and acquire all that we desire, then there is gladness. Very few are glad to give of themselves any more. We live in a society that is consumed with "self." We live in an "all about me" age. If there is something that will benefit us or our agenda, then we are all for it. If it involves giving of ourselves with nothing in return, then we are not interested.
- This was not an easy place for Paul to minister. He had been accused of taking more from them than he gave. The church was situated in an environment given to the lusts of the flesh. His authority as an apostle was being questioned. He faced intense persecution while he was in Corinth.

- Most Baptist would have given up a long time ago. Most would've had the attitude that if this is all there is, I'm moving on. I have given and given and yet they don't appreciate it. But, not only was Paul willing to give more; he was willing to give more gladly.
- Let me say that our Christian service doesn't hinge upon our happiness. God has not called us to seek out those tasks that are pleasant. He has called us to labor in the harvest with joy in our hearts. Do you think Christ enjoyed the cross? No, but He gladly went for you and me!

B. The Abundance of the Distribution – Paul says that he will [very gladly spend and be spent for the church](#). This is something that we need to get a hold of and practice in our day. It is a two-fold application.

- [First Paul was willing to spend](#). It simply has the idea of "*spending money freely*." Paul had no reservations about spending what he had for the good of the church. He was willing to give of himself for them. He wasn't talking about giving for his benefit, but for the good of the church.
- Many are willing to spend, but most want it to be for their benefit. God wants us to give freely. [2 Cor.9:7 - Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver](#). Are we willing to freely give unto the Lord? I'm not just talking about our money, but our all? Many times giving is the easy part.
- Not only was Paul willing to spend; [he was also willing to be spent](#). This has a different application all together. It involves much more than just freely giving. It has the idea of "*spending until there is nothing else to spend*." It is completely exhausting the resource. Paul was willing to give everything that he had monetarily to the church. I have no doubt that he was willing to give all he had physically and spiritually to them also.
- You might say that you are willing to give, but you can't give it all. I know that we have got to live and survive, but few are willing to be spent for the Lord. Few in our day are willing to surrender all to Christ. We will give of ourselves as long as it is comfortable, but that is where we draw the line. God deserves our best and He desires our all.
- I'm not telling you to sell all you have and give it to the church. I am saying that we need to be willing to be spent for the Lord. We need to have a desire to serve Him that exceeds any personal desire we may have. God sees the heart rather than the gift. (Do you remember when Jesus watched in the Temple as people gave their offerings? The widow gave more than all, even though it was just a mite. She gave all her living. She was willing to be spent for God.)
- Are you willing to say, "Lord, here is my life, spend it as it pleases you."

C. The Assessment of the Dividends (15b) – *though the more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved.* Paul reveals that the more he loves, the less he is loved. The more that he gives, the less he receives.

- Looking at this from a financial perspective, the dividends are not adding up. There was not a good return on his investment. He had freely given, even his all, and yet it is not returned unto him.
- Our lives are much the same way at times. You may feel as if you have given your all and yet there has been no return on your investment. We must keep the faith and continue the work. I am not looking for a return down here. Jesus warned of those who worked for the praise and glory of men. *He revealed their praise would be their reward. But He also promised those who served the Lord in secret would be rewarded openly.*
- You may not receive much of a return in this life, but God will not be indebted to you. Payday may not be Friday, but it will come!

How is it with you today? Are you willing to serve the Lord according to His economics? His way is always best. We must trust Him and press on.