

Giving Beyond Ability.

God does not condone living beyond my means, but he does encourage giving beyond my ability.

Let's talk about the first part of that statement: God does not condone living beyond my means.

In Romans 13:8, Apostle Paul writes, "*Let no debt remain outstanding...*"

A budget is both a road map and an itinerary. If we don't know where we're going financially, we may soon find ourselves sinking in a swamp of debt.

To be a good steward, I need a good budget with built-in practical controls. A road map is useless if it isn't followed. The human heart is self-deceptive and needs to face the reality of "in come" and "out go."

Affordable debt is that which I am able to pay at agreed upon intervals from my existing income. Affordable debt or expense is normal inventory or cargo.

Unaffordable debt is costly overstocking or dangerous overload; in troubled seas (unexpected financial reverses), it can capsize or sink my ship. It's better to go with less but keep sailing.

The second part of the statement says: God does encourage giving beyond my ability.

Jesus observed that all the donors at the temple "... *put in a contribution out of their surplus, but the poor widow gave out of her neediness all that she possessed - her whole living.*" Mark 12:42-44 Moffatt).

One of the most beautiful biblical examples of the grace of giving is related in 2 Corinthians, chapter 8. The Macedonian churches "...*gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability.*" This is the kind of giving God loves, the kind of giving he blesses.

Normal *ability giving* is careful and calculated. It would probably not be much more than the obligatory tithe (tenth), which people in those days gave to their heathen gods (if they were not Christians) or to the Lord (if they were Christians).

But what is *beyond ability giving*? It can mean only one thing: self-denying, sacrificial giving. Denying oneself something. Giving up something. Cutting back. Living on less. Daring to work with God. Daring to believe him, to trust him. God himself is behind that kind of thinking, that kind of giving.

Scripture says sharing is a privilege. The Macedonian Christians gave, because of the grace God gave them. It had to be the grace of God because "*Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints.*"

Sadly, nowadays, you don't often see this kind of disposition and demonstration. We

must come to the point in our stewardship for God where we are completely convinced that sharing is a privilege.

Why did God pour out His "grace" on these impoverished Christians, which resulted in their giving so sacrificially, yet so joyfully and insistently? I think it was because, as Apostle Paul states, "*...they first gave themselves to the Lord...in keeping with God's will.*" That must be the explanation for what happened. That is what could, should happen to each one of us.

The first step of giving is giving *myself* entirely and unconditionally to the Lord, because that is God's will. And when God has all of me, there will be no dispute over money: what is Caesar's, what is God's, what is mine. The Holy Spirit will direct me. With his guidance, I will give what is right, what is pleasing to the Lord. If we are extreme in our giving, may it be in the direction of more than enough, rather than not enough. Giving too much doesn't happen very often but, when it does, it's a happy problem. Wouldn't it be wonderful if, in church and in outreach, it would happen more often? ◇◇◇