



# Cooperative Program

# Bible Study Series

## *Cooperating to Make a Difference*

### *- Biblical Background -*

**ACTS 4:32-35; 1 TIMOTHY 6:17-19**

***Storing up for themselves a good foundation for the age to come, so that they may take hold of life that is real. 1 Timothy 6:19 HCSB***

#### **Introduction**

Life teaches us that foundational principles or accomplishments are crucial to later life successes. Note the following, for example:

- physical development: mastering certain basic motor skills must come before running the race;
- the educational process: reading and knowledge of basic grammatical skills are necessary before writing the English book;
- building a house: the foundation or footings provides the support base for the roof to keep the rain out; or
- spiritual growth: the understanding of certain biblical truths is necessary if one is to grow in Christlikeness. Achievement or progress in any area of development provides an initial gain, but also lays a foundation for other more advanced dividends.

Giving money to the church to support the work of God's kingdom is one way to build a proper spiritual foundation.

Christians need to be taught and reminded that giving their money makes a difference, not only in the lives of others, but in their own as well. Today's lesson reveals what happens when giving takes root in one's life. Its effects have significance for both time and eternity.

#### **Exposition**

#### **1. Unity curbs selfishness, enlarges giving and expands grace. (Acts 4:32-33)**

Whether we want to admit it or not, all of us are basically selfish. We want what we want, and we want it when we want it. And we are not happy campers when things do not turn out the way we'd like. But left unchecked, selfishness will slant our attitude about life in a negative direction. Many people are negative because they are unhappy with themselves; they have never learned what it means to get beyond themselves. When we take a "life is

all-about-me” attitude, failing to consider the needs of others, we block out some of God’s most special blessings.

Luke, the writer of the Book of Acts, speaks about the believers in chapter four as being “*of one heart and soul*” (Acts 4:32). This means they were in agreement with one another, especially regarding their possessions. The test of their giving was that they did not claim what they owned exclusively (or selfishly) for themselves. The believers “*held everything in common,*” having a willingness to share with each other. While the passage does not seem to promote common ownership, if one believer owned something another believer legitimately needed, he voluntarily gave up rights to it for the sake of helping the one who needed it.

From such an attitude, two things resulted as noted in Acts 4:33: first, a testimony of “great power”— this increased the effectiveness of their witness of Jesus; and, second, the benefit of “great grace”—God blessed them with His favor. Our gifts through the Cooperative Program (CP), likewise, affect our witness and our blessings. When we choose to “keep” our money rather than give it, we hinder our witness for Christ, and we shut ourselves off from distinct ways in which God would bless us.

## **2. Giving helps meet needs. (Acts 4:34-35)**

Can you imagine a place where no one’s needs would go unmet? It’s hard to believe that America, with all her wealth, has people who are homeless, hungry, and poverty

stricken. What would happen if every person who had, gave something to one other person in need? The believers in this passage so cared for each other that “*there was not a needy person among them*” (v. 34). They were willing to sacrifice, voluntarily give up what they had, even to the point of selling their houses and lands, to provide for each other. This showed a genuine love and concern among them. In a fuller sense, the believers recognized these were God’s blessings to be shared with each other.

It is interesting to note that while everyone gave, it was the apostles who oversaw or administered the distribution of funds. There was wisdom in this because, first, it provided a central means for collection and distribution and, second, it provided for accountability. Funds were likely brought to a particular area (known to all) and an authorized group of folks (not just one individual) offered accountability to the believers as well as among themselves. Bringing the proceeds to the apostles was a way of acknowledging them as Christ’s representatives

The CP allows Southern Baptists a central means by which our monies, given voluntarily, may be distributed to expand the gospel and help those in need. Additionally, those who administer and are responsible for overseeing CP monies show themselves accountable by providing public reports of how funds are used. What’s more, whether we give or oversee what is given, each of us is responsible under God.

### 3. People should be instructed to give. (1 Timothy 6:17-18)

Earlier in this chapter, Paul speaks to those who do not have material wealth. In 1 Timothy 6:6 he states, “...*godliness with contentment is a great gain.*” Now here, beginning in 1 Timothy 6:17, he directs his attention to those who have material wealth. Paul does not condemn wealth, but he is careful to speak a word of caution regarding one of the greatest temptations the wealthy have, loving their money! When one worships his money, his attitude and use of wealth are improper. In light of this, Paul first of all warns, “*instruct those who are rich...not to be arrogant*” (1 Timothy 6:17). It is easy to become prideful in wealth, thinking that we are better than others. Second, he warns the rich not “*to set their hope on the uncertainty of wealth.*” Not only is there the tendency toward pride, but there is also the tendency of false hope. Wealth is uncertain, and placing our hope in money only sets us up for disappointment when it is gone. Only God, not our money, is the adequate source for our needs. He is the *One “who richly provides us with all things to enjoy.”*

After giving instructions on what not to do, Paul now turns to what should be done. There are four things the wealthy should be instructed to do according to 1 Timothy 6:18:

- “*do good,*” we should use wealth wisely;
- “*be rich in good works,*” true riches come when we do for others;
- “*be generous,*” we should give liberally; and
- “*be willing to share,*” our liberality in giving should result from a

sincere desire to give.

True riches do not equal a large bank account; rather, genuine wealth comes from what we choose to do with the money we have.

Compared to earlier generations and other cultures, Americans are among the wealthiest people who have ever lived. While we may not think of ourselves as particularly wealthy, we are in comparison with the rest of the world. And because we have been given such a blessing, God will hold us accountable for how we use it. The CP affords us the opportunity to put into practice these four things Paul suggests here.

### 4. Giving lays a foundation for eternity. (1 Timothy 6:19)

Something of great magnitude results when genuine giving takes place. And it really has little to do with the amount of money one gives. We build a foundation for our heavenly treasure. We carry into “the age to come” (eternity) what we have done here on earth. Ironically, by giving away our money to help others, we store up true wealth for ourselves in heaven. And in turn, we lay claim to or “*take hold of life that is real.*” Real life is eternal life. Our giving shows evidence of our salvation. Although the full extent of eternal life comes in heaven, we benefit in numerous ways in this life. When we give we choose to act unselfishly, thereby testifying to what is of real value—only those things which are taken into eternity. By giving to the CP we not only reap benefits in the here and now, but we lay up treasures that await us in eternity.