

THE BALANCE OF SEED AND BREAD

By John Gagliardi



Whenever we talk about “Biblical economics” – how God wants us to handle our finances and other resources – it is important to keep central a sense of balance. It is all too easy to go off in one or another direction at a hundred miles an hour, and before we know it, we are way out in one extreme or another.

I have often talked of the balance between prosperity and integrity – that the same God Who wants us to be successful and wealthy, also wants us to carry out all our activities in righteousness, honesty and holiness. The same God Who teaches us to profit (Isaiah 48: 17) and gives us the power to generate wealth (Deuteronomy 8: 18), also tells us to be holy, for He, our Lord, is holy (Leviticus 19: 1; 20: 7, 26; 1 Peter 1: 16).

One of the most important chapters in the whole Bible for marketplace ministers, I believe, is 1 Corinthians 9 – it tells us a whole lot about how we should handle money and wealth, what it means to be truly wealthy in a Godly way, how important the basic principles such as sowing and reaping are, and the eternal significance of giving.

In Verse 9 of that chapter is hidden a little gem that contains a very important truth – a few words that it are all too easy to skim over, and miss the deeper import. And these words are: “...Seed to the sower and bread for food...”

The whole verse, which contains a wealth of good teaching if you look into it deeply, reads: “Now may He who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food, supply and multiply the seed you have sown, and increase the fruits of your righteousness, while you are enriched in everything for all liberality, which causes thanksgiving through us to God.”

But let’s concentrate for the moment just on those eight words I referred to above – “seed to the sower and bread for food”. That is where I see a key “balance” – a balance marketplace ministers need to understand when they apply the laws of “sowing and reaping” and multiplication.

As we sow, so shall we reap – in other words, *whatever* we sow, we will reap (Galatians 6: 7). If we sow friendship, we will reap friendship; if we sow love, we will reap love; if we sow suspicion and

meanness, we will reap suspicion and meanness; and if we sow money, we will reap money. The key word is *"whatever"*.

I heard a preacher in the US recently railing against anyone who "gave to get" – but that is where he left it. And he was right to that extent – if our attitude in giving is just to "get" for our own selfish desires, then we are right out of kilter with God's way of giving.

But as Christians, there is one more step: we give – to get – to GIVE! Our proof text here is the promise God made to us as heirs to the Abrahamic covenant in Genesis 12: 2 – "I will bless you ... and you will **BE** a blessing." It is the same promise God gives to Judah and Israel (and prophetically to us) in Zechariah 8: 13 – "...So I will save you, and you will **BE** a blessing ..."

So when Paul tells the Corinthians that God will supply and multiply their "seed" so they will have "all liberality" and "an abundance for every good work" (V 9), He is clearly encouraging them to trigger the multiplication principle of Biblical economics by giving (sowing their seed) – but, and it is a big "but" – he is also reminding them that God also supplies "bread for food".

And this is where the balance comes in! While we are to give to "every good work", God does not want us to be a bad witness to the people around us by giving everything away and being unable to pay our bills and feed our family.

Sadly, there are too many examples around of good-hearted but misguided people who make huge promises "in faith" to building funds and missions, only to find they can't fulfill their commitments. They then either go into a guilt spiral, and condemnation, or give away what they can't afford.

God wants us to give out of what we have, not what we do not have. There is a big difference between faith and presumption.

He wants us to have seed to sow – and He will give us that seed. But He also wants us to have "bread for food" – in other words, to have enough to pay for our daily needs and commitments.

I once knew a well-meaning (but misguided) person who felt God had told him not to pay his credit card bills, so he could give to God. Ultimately, he just avoided prosecution, had to pay his bills anyway, and in the process brought ridicule and reproach on himself and the church.

We are "in" the world but not "of" it – true. But sometimes we major on the "not of" at the expense of the "in". Every day, 24/7, we are "in" the world, and those around us watch us closely to see how we operate, whether we walk the talk. And if we talk about righteousness and then defraud our creditors, we do more harm than good.

God tells us that if we ignore the needs of our own family, we are worse than unbelievers (1 Timothy 5: 8). So this is a serious injunction. God wants us to have a good witness to those around us, to look after our families, pay our bills, pay our taxes, and generally be good neighbours and good citizens (Matthew 22: 21; Romans 13: 7; Titus 3: 1; Hebrews 13: 17).

So yes, we should be abundant and generous and cheerful givers, but also, we should be good providers for our families and good citizens and neighbours, and – like Jesus – "fulfill all righteousness" (Matthew 3: 5). At the end of the day, our main task is to become more and more like Jesus, to become more "Christlike".

Jesus paid His taxes and carried out his responsibilities as a good citizen and a good neighbour – he avoided bringing reproach on His Father’s Kingdom, without compromising His fundamental integrity. When He had to, he opposed unrighteousness and hypocrisy, but He always stayed true to His character and His call. His central and guiding truth was love – everything He did was done out of love.

And so must we. If we give, we give out of love – love for God, and love for our fellow man. And that implies that as we give, we do so within the guidelines of love set by Jesus and the Word – not giving to impress others, at the expense of those closest to us and for whom we are accountable to God.

“God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work. As it is written:

He has dispersed abroad

He has given to the poor

His righteousness endures forever.” (2 Corinthians 9: 8 and 9)