

To the Lord First

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2 Corinthians 8:5 And *this they did*, not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God. (KJV)

2 Corinthians 8:5 and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us. (ESV)

In chapter 8 of Second Corinthians, Paul brags on the Macedonian church. He outlines how they were so eager to sacrificially give to the needy saints in Jerusalem. He uses the Macedonians as an example as he leads up to imploring the Corinthians to come through with their previous pledges. In the middle of this recitation, a very important principle is dropped in. The apostle said that the Macedonians gave not only their money, but gave their own selves to the Lord first and then to the ministry. Paul's wording reveals a philosophy that every pastor should have. Paul put the Macedonian's surrender to God before their surrender to him as their leader.

I fear that some have created a culture in which the people's first concern is pleasing the pastor. Their ultimate goal should be to please God, but they have somehow become more man-conscious than God-conscious. When this happens, joy will leave the church, and intrigues will abound in the congregation. In these churches, getting into the pastor's good graces becomes the ultimate goal, and people lose sight of their relationship with God. Often in these cases, hierarchies are established in the congregation, and emulations begin to proliferate. A large treatise with vivid examples could be written on this subject. Instead of enumerating more of the negative, let us turn to the answer. It lies in the simple phrases the Holy Ghost left to us in Vs. 8, "...but first gave of their own selves to the Lord, and unto us..."

May we ever make it a priority to build up first the people's relationship with the Lord. The old term, 'preacher religion,' rings out here. How shallow a profession this is! For a saint who is facing temptation to first think of how their pastor will respond to their sin is a grave error. For them to first consider the loss of a position instead of considering God's disposition is folly. A relationship that has burgeoned with love for a savior will keep anyone through the hour trial!

Shepherds, let us implore our flocks to see us behind God. He is the focus of our holy endeavors. He is the object of our ultimate affection. For the cult of personality is fated to fail.

J. Trevino