

## **THE JOY OF GENEROSITY**

### **(3) GENEROUS GIVING**

2 Corinthians 9:1-15

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(With material from Robert Heerspink, used by permission)

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#### **PROLOGUE**

Paul Harvey, who passed away earlier this year (Feb 28), was a popular radio broadcaster known for dramatic pauses, quirky intonations and his folksiness. One of my favorite stories for this time of year comes from one of his broadcasts (11/22/95):

The Butter Ball Turkey Company set up a hot line to answer consumer questions about preparing holiday turkeys. One woman called to inquire about cooking a turkey that had been in her freezer for twenty-three years! The operator told her it might be safe if the freezer had been kept below 0 degrees the entire time. But the operator warned the woman that, even if it were safe, the flavor had probably deteriorated, and she wouldn't recommend eating it. The caller replied, "That's what we thought. We'll just give it to the church."

If the Lord is our King, surely he deserves better!

#### **SCRIPTURE**

Now it is not necessary for me to write you about the ministry to the saints, {2} for I know your eagerness, which is the subject of my boasting about you to the people of Macedonia, saying that Achaia has been ready since last year; and your zeal has stirred up most of them. {3} But I am sending the brothers in order that our boasting about you may not prove to have been empty in this case, so that you may be ready, as I said you would be; {4} otherwise, if some Macedonians come with me and find that you are not ready, we would be humiliated--to say nothing of you--in this undertaking. {5} So I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to go on ahead to you, and arrange in advance for this bountiful gift that you have promised, so that it may be ready as a voluntary gift and not as an extortion. {6} The point is this: the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. {7} Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. {8} And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work. {9} As it is written, "He scatters abroad, he gives to the poor; his righteousness endures forever." {10} He

who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. {11} You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity, which will produce thanksgiving to God through us; {12} for the rendering of this ministry not only supplies the needs of the saints but also overflows with many thanksgivings to God. {13} Through the testing of this ministry you glorify God by your obedience to the confession of the gospel of Christ and by the generosity of your sharing with them and with all others, {14} while they long for you and pray for you because of the surpassing grace of God that he has given you. {15} Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift! (2 Corinthians 9 NRSV).

## **INTRODUCTION**

The ninth chapter of Second Corinthians is a remarkable passage. It is a rich treasury of material on biblical giving. Paul's instructions about giving are set against the backdrop of the "great collection," Paul's gathering of resources from various congregations in order to help the church in Jerusalem. In the previous chapter, Paul introduced the church in Macedonia as a model of healthy, gracious giving. Paul detects an eagerness to give among the Corinthians, but good intentions do not always translate into action. The Macedonians have given generously; now it is time for the Corinthians to do likewise.

As Paul invites the Corinthians to give, he highlights some important truths:

### **1. THE ATTITUDE OF GENEROUS GIVING**

First, Paul is concerned about their attitude toward giving. To Paul, grudging generosity is a contradiction (2 Cor. 9:5). Indeed, Paul wants his churches to give cheerfully. In place of the compulsive, guilt-ridden giving that takes place in many churches, Paul directs us to give as Christ:

"Who for the joy set before him endured the cross" (Heb. 12:2).

### **2. THE EFFECT OF GENEROUS GIVING**

Second, Paul wants the church to understand the effect their giving creates. The Greek expression for "bountiful gift" (eulogia) commonly refers to an act of blessing (v. 5). Paul picks up this theme at the end of the chapter. Not only does giving have practical effects; it also results in praise and thanksgiving to God and builds up the unity of the church. Corinthian giving, says Paul, will testify to the largely Jewish believers of Jerusalem that the faith of the mostly Gentile Corinthians is real (v. 13). And the hearts of the Jewish believers "will go out to" the Corinthians (v. 14), demonstrating the unity in diversity that marks the church of Jesus Christ.

### **3. THE WORKS OF GENEROUS GIVING**

Third, Paul wants the church to understand the divine action that works through their giving (vv. 6-11). The sowing and reaping metaphor is used throughout Scripture (see Prov. 11:24-25, 19:17; Luke 6:38; Gal. 6:7). It is tempting to twist this metaphor into a simplistic health-and-wealth gospel, where financial giving to some kingdom cause assures our own material success. The abuse of this principle by some, however, should not blind us to the reality Paul is teaching here:

“And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work” (v. 8).

Paul makes no distinction between spiritual and material blessings. He expects that, in a holistic sense, believers will be blessed by God the Giver, even as they bless others through their generous gifts (eulogia). It is not difficult, of course, to find Christians in every congregation today who have experienced precisely this dynamic in their own lives. Many are here in this fellowship. May the rest of us aspire to be like them.

### **CONCLUSION**

Generous giving suits us because this is the way God made us.

Alexander the Great conquered much of what his contemporaries considered to be the known world. The story is told of Alexander traveling down a road and happening upon a beggar. The beggar had no right to call out to the emperor but cry out he did and he asked for some money. Alexander stopped and gave the beggar several gold coins. His advisors immediately chastised him, “My Lord, surely a few copper coins would have suited the beggar.” Alexander replied, “Yes, it would have suited the beggar’s need but not Alexander’s giving!”

May your giving suit the way God has made you.