

**THE GENEROSITY OF GIVING  
(3) PROMOTING GENEROSITY**

2 Corinthians 9:1-15

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(With material inspired by *The Grace of Giving* by John Stott)

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**INTRODUCTION**

Today marks the conclusion of a three-part series exploring Paul's teaching on Christian giving as found in 2 Corinthians 8 & 9. In these chapters Paul is explaining arrangements for an offering from the Greek churches in Macedonia and Achaia to help the struggling churches in Judea.

For Paul, Christian giving is not an end in itself. Not only must it go for a worthwhile purpose, but it must also promote further generosity.

**SCRIPTURE**

Now it is not necessary for me to write you about the ministry to the saints,<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> 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;<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>5</sup> 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.

<sup>6</sup>The point is this: the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.<sup>7</sup> Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.<sup>8</sup> 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.<sup>9</sup> As it is written, “He scatters abroad, he gives to the poor; his righteousness endures forever.”<sup>10</sup> 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.<sup>11</sup> You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity (2 Corinthians 9:1-11a NRSV).

## **1. PROMOTE PRINCIPLE**

Throughout chapters 8 & 9, Paul uses a little friendly competition to stir up generosity. He does not single out individuals, as that would be inappropriate and harmful. Instead, he pits groups of north and south Christians against each other to see who will be the most generous, thereby increasing the offering to the Judean Christians who were in desperate need of help.

Paul also uses the imagery of the harvest to teach an important principle: We reap what we sow. This idea is found throughout Scripture (see Prov. 11:24-25, 19:17; Luke 6:38; Gal. 6:7). But we mustn't twist this metaphor into saying something it does not, namely, that the more we give the more money we will receive. This is not a health-and-wealth gospel, where financial giving to some kingdom cause assures our own material success.

Sowing refers to giving and how we give is almost more important than what we give. Paul says:

Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver (2 Cor 9:7).

The Greek word that is translated as "cheerful" is *hilaron* and it is where we get our word "hilarious." Christian giving must be hilarious giving. Is your giving hilarious? Of course, some people's giving is so paltry that to boast about it would be ridiculous, even hilarious, but that is not what is being said here.

To Paul, grudging generosity is a contradiction (2 Cor 9:5). A generous heart is a willing heart. This is not a tax. There is no celestial version of the IRS to compel people to part with their money.

A wife came to the living room one day after having answered the front door. "There's a man at the door who wants to see you about a bill you owe," she told her husband. "What does he look like?" the husband inquired. "He looks like you'd better pay him," she said.

Fortunately for us, this is not the way God works. Each worshiper must decide what to offer. But it must be done willingly and not reluctantly. If we give reluctantly we dishonor God and treat the church as though it were just one of the many secular organizations that solicit our funds.

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).

If we sow with joyful generosity, what will we reap? The answer is two-fold: 1) We will reap an abundance of blessings, not necessarily material blessings, but real blessings nonetheless, and 2) We will reap an abundance of opportunities for further service. As the psalmist says, the consequence of giving to the poor is to have a righteousness which endures forever (2 Cor 9:9; see Psalms 112:9).

Joyful givers often have a story to tell of how God changed their lives. They may tell you of a time when they were living for themselves and not for God. A time when they were in their own little "prison" of selfishness. But Jesus set them free. Their joy, then, is the natural response to what God has done for them. They are grateful for God's grace and forgiveness and want to show in a tangible way how thankful they are for God's presence in their lives.

Joy is the fruit of a transformed life. The transformed life is the giving life. Giving is actually a double miracle of transformation. It reflects the miracle of Christ within us. It also reflects that providence of God around us by which our time, talent, and treasure are turned into that which we place in the offering plate. Our life transforms into money. That money transforms into ministry. That ministry transforms again into life. The point is simple: Share your treasure out of gratitude to God and lives will be transformed!

Christian giving needs to promote the principle that we reap what we sow.

### **SCRIPTURE**

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, while they long for you and pray for you because of the surpassing grace of God that he has given you (2 Corinthians 9:13-14 NRSV).

### **2. PROMOTE SIGNIFICANCE**

Christian giving has symbolic significance. It represents our confidence in the Gospel or Good News of Jesus Christ. What is the Gospel of Jesus Christ?

Volumes of books have been written in the attempt to answer that question. But Paul's use of it here is quite simple. Anyone can find redemption and eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ. Anyone. Jew or Greek. Man or woman. Slave or free. Anyone. Or as John puts it:

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life (Jn 3:16 NIV).

This is the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

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 (9:5). Paul picks up this theme at the end of the chapter. Not only does giving have practical benefits; 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 (9:13). And the hearts of the Jewish believers “will go out to” the Corinthians (9:14), demonstrating the unity in diversity that marks the church of Jesus Christ.

Christian giving needs to promote the significance of the Gospel.

### **SCRIPTURE**

You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity, which will produce thanksgiving to God through us; <sup>12</sup>for the rendering of this ministry not only supplies the needs of the saints but also overflows with many thanksgivings to God. <sup>13</sup>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, <sup>14</sup>while they long for you and pray for you because of the surpassing grace of God that he has given you. <sup>15</sup>Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift! (2 Corinthians 9:11-15 NRSV).

### **3. PROMOTE THANKSGIVING**

Psychiatrists tell us that our attitudes may hurt us or help us. Unresolved anger, bitterness, and resentment actually cause us physical harm. On the other hand, feelings of love, joy, forgiveness, and concern heal us. The attitude of revenge can be the most harmful. Gratitude can be the most helpful. God gives us a fundamental lesson for living. He asks that we remain thankful. He understands that gratitude and continued thanksgiving can contribute to our well being, and even the well being of those around us.

Four times in the concluding paragraph of these two chapters Paul expresses his confidence that the result of the offering will be to increase thanksgiving and praise to God. This is at the heart of all Christian giving. Authentic giving leads people not only to thank us, the givers, but to thank God, and to see our gift to them in light of the indescribable grace of God, shown supremely in the gift of his Son.

Christian giving needs to promote thanksgiving.

## **CONCLUSION**

Christian giving not only must go for a worthwhile purpose, it must also promote further generosity. Our giving can do this if we embrace the principle that we reap what we sow. It can do this if we recognize that it represents the Gospel of Jesus Christ who invites all people to come to him. It can do this if we foster an attitude of gratitude – thankful for all that God has done, is doing, and will do for us.

Later in the service you will have the opportunity to express your commitment to support the life, ministry and mission of the church for the coming year. A number of you have already responded and that is great. Many of you are prepared today to make a pledge and that is wonderful. Some of you “accidentally” left the information on your kitchen table and now you are deeply distressed. But I say, “fear not.” We have provided extra cards in the pew racks. And during these next few minutes leading up to the offering, we hope you will prayerfully consider how you can participate in the generosity of giving.