

August 29, 2021

THE GLORIOUS GRACE OF CHEERFUL GIVING

2 Corinthians 9:6-15

(19 of 22 in a series through 2 Corinthians)

I've shared before that early in my ministry, giving was not a topic I wanted to preach about. The decade in which I grew up—the 1980's—was filled with financial scandals by two well-known evangelists, Jimmy Swaggart and Jim Bakker (and, of course, his wife Tammy Faye). And it just seemed to me that the clearest way to distance myself as far as possible from such charlatans was to avoid the topic of money as much as possible. It seemed like a fool-proof plan. But it's not quite that simple and easy, especially if you're going to preach the Bible.

The Bible actually talks a lot about giving. I mentioned when we started chapter 8 that many have noted that Jesus talks about money about as much as anything. He actually points to money as *the* indicator to identify where our hearts are, saying in Matthew 6:21, "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." Consequently, if you're a pastor, concerned with wanting to give a faithful account to the Lord of the people you oversee but are unwilling to talk about giving—well, you can see it's a bad approach. And therefore some years back I repented of my hesitation to talk about giving.

But I think my hesitancy to talk about giving highlighted that I was missing another important point. When the Bible talks about giving, it almost always frames the discussion in terms of blessing. For example, when Jesus says that where your treasure is, there is also where your heart is, he says that in the context of inviting us to store up treasure in heaven where moths can't destroy it and thieves can't steal it. Similarly, when Jesus mentions our giving in Luke 6:38, after saying "Give," he adds, "and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you." You see, so not talking about giving not only ignores the need to remind us of how we identify where our hearts are, it also misses an opportunity to talk about how to pursue blessing, reward, joy, and the glory of God. And that's what we see in 2 Corinthians 9:6-15.

I've noted in each of the previous two sermons that have focused on these two chapters that there was financial need with the saints in Jerusalem that led Paul to take up this collection among the Gentile churches—including the one here in Corinth. But have you noticed that Paul almost never speaks to the Corinthians about the need to which they're giving?¹ Rather, he's spoken of the Macedonians' joy, the fact that giving benefits the Corinthians, and the Lord's provision. And in our text he's going to hold up more glorious realities that serve to invite us into the blessings that come with giving. So we're not going to see in this text all the reasons the

¹Jamie Dunlop makes this observation in his little book, *Why Should I Give to My Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 10.

believers back in Jerusalem really need the money. Nor will we hear about how God could really do something if only he had their money. The Lord does not need our money, as he makes clear, saying in Psalm 50:12, “If I were hungry, I would not tell you, for the world and its fullness are mine.” He already owns everything. Nor will we hear some guilt-laden tirade from Paul that attempts to force the Corinthians into giving. Rather, he tells us three truths about giving that—when understood—invite us to get in on the blessing that comes with giving and that should move our hearts to be generous, cheerful givers. Let me start with a point about the nature of our giving, and then we’ll look at two blessings. So, first, giving is to be done out of a joyful and generous heart.

Giving is to be done out of a joyful and generous heart

Paul begins by talking about the blessing that is in giving. He writes, “The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully” (v. 6). The image is of a man sowing seed, and the illustration makes sense. If you’re out tossing seed, and you put down only a bit (sowing sparingly), then you’ll not see much when you go to reap what you’ve sown. But if you sow bountifully (or generously), then you’ll likely also see a bountiful harvest when you go to reap. And Paul applies that to giving.

My guess is that immediately this raises questions about *how* God blesses the sower. In other words, if sowing seed is compared to our giving, then what is reaping a bountiful harvest compared to? How do we reap? What is the Scripture telling us here? Well, I want to dive into that in the next point, but for now I want us to see what Paul follows this statement with in verse 7 because I think it is here that he identifies for us what bountiful, generous sowing looks like. He says, “Each one much give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”

Now, there is clearly an expectation in the New Testament that believers give and specifically to their churches. When Paul writes to this very church in 1 Corinthians 9:14, he says, “The Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel.” In Galatians 6:6 he adds, “Let the one who is taught the word share all good things with the one who teaches.” And in 1 Timothy 5:17-18 he instructs the congregation to pay those who labor over them in preaching and teaching—all texts that should lead believers to give to their local churches (not to mention that we like lights and air conditioning and other blessings that cost money). And yet Paul is clearly here aiming for something beyond adherence to a law, isn’t he?

He doesn’t want the Corinthians giving reluctantly or under compulsion. He wants their giving not to stem from some outside force they’re feeling pressing on them. He wants them to give from their hearts with joy. And he adds, “God loves a cheerful giver” (v. 7). This is why the God who tells us he owns everything and needs nothing from us talks to us about giving. It’s because he wants us to be the kind of people whose hearts have been so transformed that we enjoy giving and enjoy giving generously. This is what bountiful sowing looks like. We give, not from a place of reluctance or under compulsion, but from a joyful heart that longs to be generous.

And yet it's at this very point that some might be tempted to shrink back. We might say, "Well, this is an easy thing to talk about if you have a good amount of financial resources, but I'm quite limited, so I really can't give myself to this act of giving joyfully and generously." But if that is your response, then I want you to stay with us because Paul addresses this very point by reminding us of some blessings that are ours when we give. One is that giving enables us to keep giving and increases our righteousness.

Giving enables us to keep giving and increases our righteousness

Now, clearly this needs elaboration because it doesn't make sense if you think about it apart from the teaching of Scripture. In our minds giving doesn't *enable* giving; giving *limits* our ability to give. Let me give you an example. Let's say you have three apples, and you decide to give one of them away. Well, you've given away thirty-three percent of the apples you have. Now, you have two apples, and if you want to give one of them away, it requires you to give away fifty percent of the apples you have. In other words, giving one apple has made it harder to give an apple in the future, right? It seems with each gift it's getting harder. So why am I saying that giving *enables* us to keep giving? It seems it would make it harder, limiting our giving. Well, the answer is in verses 8-11.

Paul writes, "And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work. As it is written, 'He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever'" (vv. 8-9). Now, if you pulled these verses completely out of their surrounding context, you could think this has nothing to do with financial provision from God. Maybe you could think he's talking about simply God giving you the righteous desire to obey—kind of like how the prophets promised that God would cause his new covenant people to walk in his ways. After all, the grace that comes to us enabling us to do every good work could indeed be a willing heart that produces righteousness. And the man in Psalm 112 (from which Paul quotes) clearly shows himself to be one living in righteousness that will be seen even on the day of judgment. And no doubt that's true. But there's more here. And I want you to see it because some of us may be saying, "The will is there. I'm just worried about my financial resources." So I want you to see that God is actually saying to us that he'll enable us to have what we need to give as we give. Look at verses 10-11.

Paul writes, "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. You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God." Here it's hard to miss that God is saying that he'll provide for us to have material blessings to give. In this entire context, the seed is the material blessings we give. It's why he encourages us to sow bountifully in verse 6 and then follows that up in verse 7 by saying that each one much give as he's decided in his heart, for God loves a cheerful giver. And in verses 10-11, Paul tells us that God will supply and multiply your seed for sowing. He'll enrich us in every way to be generous. In other words, as we give, God will enable us always to have more to give. Or, to use the illustration, if we cast the seed on the ground, God will supply us with seed and even multiply our seed so that we can keep sowing.

But this might make us uncomfortable because of the prosperity gospel, right? There is an unbiblical teaching that says that we give so that we can get rich. And because of that view we might want to try to find a way not to see material blessings here in this text. But you can't remove financial blessing from this text. However, we should note what makes these verses very different from the prosperity gospel. Paul isn't saying, "Give and you'll get rich. Imagine the house you'll own and the nice cars you can buy." He's saying, "Give, and God will enable you to have the financial blessings *to be able to keep giving.*" Give, and God will enable you to keep giving. God's aim is not necessarily that you and I get rich; it's that we can keep laboring in the good work of giving. That's why I said that in God's economy giving enables us to keep giving. And this has some enormous implications.

Let me try to trace out one. Some of us may be tempted to say that we can't give because finances are tight. And I think we can all understand that sentiment. But let's say we were all sitting around, hearing you say you want to give but just don't think you can afford to, and we have this text in front of us, brainstorming about what in the world you could do. Wouldn't eventually one of us say, "Wait a second. You need to go ahead and give. Because as you give, God will supply you more to give and even multiply what you have to give"? In other words, if you and I want to see our capacity to give increased, then the answer isn't to store up and not give until we feel like we have much and feel good about giving. If we want to expand our capacity to give *the answer is to start giving* and trust the promises of God—especially the ones we see here.

But there's more. He adds in verse 10 not only that God will supply and multiply our seed for sowing but that he will increase the harvest of our righteousness. In other words, your righteous works will be increased. Your righteous character will increase. God is both providing you material blessings to enable you to keep giving and spiritual blessings to increase your righteous character and works. Therefore, just as we can say that meditating on the Scripture, praying, gathering with the saints, and the like *are* righteous works and works that *increase* our righteousness, so we can say the same thing about giving. It is a righteous work that increases righteousness.

I remember this lesson taking root in my heart as a kid. My grandfather had some land that my dad owned for a bit after my grandfather had died. But my dad was unable to farm it, so he made a deal with the guy that owned and farmed the land next to it. That guy (whose name was Clyde) would be able to farm all the land, and when he sold the harvest, he'd give dad a portion of what was made off of his land. Well, the day came when dad was going to meet him for payment, and I tagged along. And I still remember the conversation to this day. Clyde told my dad that he was stupefied by something. He said, "Dan, my land and your land are no different. We just draw an imaginary line between the two pieces of property. I do the same thing for every bit of the land. Yet, when it comes to harvesting, I'm getting ten percent more off of your land than I am my land. Why in the world do you think that is?" And of course, as a kid, I was genuinely interested myself. But instead of dad answering, he just asked Clyde a question. He said, "Clyde, do you give?" And then I remember looking back at Clyde, who put his head down

and said, “No, I don’t.” And even as a boy I remember thinking that my dad was making the point that God had done this, and that giving was something I wanted to characterize my own life. He gave, God provided for more giving, and it led to my growth in holiness in that moment. And in my own life I can multiply such stories, which I’m sure you can too. Giving enables us to keep giving and increases our righteousness. But the blessed nature of giving doesn’t stop there. Paul also shows us that giving results in thanksgiving and glory to God.

Giving results in thanksgiving and glory to God

Paul had already mentioned this at the end of verse 11. After saying, “You’ll be enriched in every way to be generous in every way,” he adds, “which through us will produce thanksgiving to God.” That is, as Paul sees their giving and how God is enabling them to keep giving, Paul himself will begin to thank God. And so Paul concludes in verse 12, “For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God.” When we give, the Lord uses that to meet needs, but he also uses it to lead people to give thanks to him.

And it does more. Paul adds, “By their approval of this service, they will glorify God because of your submission that comes from your confession of the gospel of Christ, and the generosity of your contribution for them and for all others, while they long for you and pray for you, because of the surpassing grace of God upon you” (vv. 13-14).

As this gift from the Corinthians comes to the church at Jerusalem to meet their needs, they’ll begin thanking God, as we’ve noted. But they’ll also glorify God, Paul says, because of what the Corinthians had done. This, of course, is because of the truth we noted last week in looking at 8:16-9:5. Just as Paul saw all good things as coming from God and so concludes that God put into Titus’s heart that earnest care, so the saints in Jerusalem will rightly recognize the Corinthians’ gift as the provision of God for them. Consequently, they will glorify God. But it will also raise their affections for the Corinthians, and so Paul says they’ll long for you and pray for you.

Note then all that giving does. It supplies needs, produces thanksgiving to God, abounds in glory to God, and raises our affection for one another. No doubt you’ve experienced this. I remember a few years ago while Christopher Ortiz was wanting to go out as a church planter, what held him back was \$13,000 of school debt he had. Then, one day someone walked into the office and handed us a \$13,000 check so the Ortizes could go. And I asked him, “Do you want us to tell Chris who gave it?” And he answered, “No, but you can tell him that this is half of my yearly pay this year.” Now, you can imagine that when he walked out the door, we thanked God, glorified God, loved our brother more, and were spurred on to increase our own righteousness. Imagine then how Chris and Sarah felt when we gave them the check!

But I also hesitate to tell that story because there can be a real thrill in giving like that, when the reality is that giving doesn’t always look like that. When you drop a check in the offering box on Sunday morning, there isn’t any instant rejoicing and jumping up and down. So let me see if I

can show you how glorious this is. The mission that Christ has given our church is to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them, and teaching them to obey all that Christ commands. And that is glorious. We've seen an act of that this morning in the baptism of a new believer—Timothy Bowen. And each Sunday we gather together, read the Word, sing, and hear the proclamation of the Word, teaching one another to obey all that Christ commands (i.e. what the Great Commission commands us to do). We continue that with small group meetings throughout the week, intern training meetings, counseling meetings, and the like. We're able to send out people and support them so that we can be part of obeying the Great Commission not just right here but in places like Utah, New York, Peru, and on and on. And you're playing a part in that as you drop a gift in the offering box in the most ordinary of ways—with no confetti falling from the sky, no loud celebrations, and no tears of happiness streaming all around. But don't be deceived, as the Lord continues to supply for this work of enabling us to keep laboring to obey the Great Commission, we are continuing to supply needs, thanking God every step, giving him glory, and growing in our affection for one another. At my small group meeting Wednesday night we were doing just that—thanking God for what he's done for each of us by being part of this congregation. And so I join with Paul as I consider your giving and say, "Thanks be to be for his inexpressible gift!" (v. 15). Thank God that he lets us play a role in his glorious work as we give what he's already given to us.

We said at the start of chapter 8 that giving for the believer is simply the overflow of grace that has been given to us. And what grace have we been given! We all sit here (if our faith is in Christ) as forgiven children of God because Jesus lived a perfect life, died for our sins, and was raised from the dead for us. We've been given so much. And on top of that, he has given us something so that we can give of it and continue to be a part of his work of making more disciples. And on top of that he promises to keep giving us seed so that we can keep sowing in our giving. And on top of that he tells us that it'll abound in thanksgiving, glory to God, and raised affections for one another. This is why I said that our text isn't a picture of Paul launching into a guilt-laden tirade about giving. It's an invitation to get in on the joy of cheerful, generous giving that should indeed characterize one whose heart has been transformed by Christ. And now let's come to the table, not losing sight of the gift we've been given in Christ. Amen.