

# Cheerful Giving

## 2 Corinthians 8-9

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### Introduction

Two weeks ago we looked at what stewardship looks like as an over-arching biblical lifestyle and calling. We are expected to be stewards of the gospel in all areas of our life. One of the areas of stewardship that directly impacts the church and the expansion of the kingdom is the ministry of giving.

In Paul's first letter to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 16:1-4), he explained a directive that he had given all of the churches of Galatia, that "On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come." Paul desired that the Gentile churches give regularly for the needs of the church. Systematic, regular giving would be used to help the churches suffering financial hardship and persecution, as well as unifying Jewish and Gentile believers. Jewish believers had been hit hard by outbreaks of famine in the region around AD 41-54, and Paul instructed that the Gentile churches set aside money weekly so that the money could be used to relieve believers in other parts of the region who were suffering great financial and economic ruin.

### Giving Out of Poverty (2 Corinthians 8:1-5)

*We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, <sup>2</sup>for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. <sup>3</sup>For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, <sup>4</sup>begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints— <sup>5</sup>and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us.*

The Macedonian Church was in severe poverty and affliction, and yet begged Paul for the opportunity to give to the Jerusalem Church. So giving is not just for the wealthy, and not just for those who are comfortable and doing well. Look at Paul's description of the heart of the Macedonian Church regarding the collection for the Church at Jerusalem. First of all, their giving is described as grace-based. And even in their own severe test of affliction, they were overflowing with joy and generosity and earnestly begged Paul to allow them to take part in this ministry of giving. Paul also describes their sacrificial giving as giving themselves first to the Lord. It was as if the Macedonians were truly offering themselves first as a self-sacrifice to the Lord, accompanied by glad generous hearts, which compelled them to give beyond their means.

### Giving Reveals Fruit (2 Corinthians 8: 6-8)

*<sup>6</sup>Accordingly, we urged Titus that as he had started, so he should complete among you this act of grace. <sup>7</sup>But as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you—see that you excel in this act of grace also. <sup>8</sup>I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine.*

It was Titus who started the collection for the Jerusalem saints among the Corinthians, and Paul urged Titus openly to complete the act of giving that they had begun. Paul calls this act of collecting and giving an act of grace, but it appears that the collection that the Corinthians initiated had stalled in its completion. Paul desired that the Corinthians excel in the grace of giving as much as the other gifts they had excelled in; faith, speech, knowledge, eagerness and love. The grace of giving was to be pursued within the church as much as these other God-given gifts that the Corinthians prized within their community.

Paul is not commanding the Corinthians to complete their commitment to give, but to excel in giving. Generous giving will prove the sincerity and genuineness of love within the church.

## Giving Out of Richness (2 Corinthians 8:9)

Paul switches illustrations in verse 9, and encourages giving from a different perspective, that of giving from a position of wealth. After encouraging the Corinthians to excel in giving as much as they desired to excel in the other gifts, Paul reminds them that Jesus was the ultimate giver of vast wealth. Jesus didn't give out of his poverty (like the Macedonian Church did), but instead, gave out of his wealth (to the point of his own destruction). The Son of God became poor by becoming a man, and emptied himself of life so that we as sinners might receive the richness of new life and reconciliation with God through eternity. And in fact, Paul expects the reader to understand that Jesus' death provided believers the very grace to give in such a sacrificial way.

<sup>9</sup> *For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.*

So for Paul, Christ is the very center and cause of our ability to give. Without Christ's becoming poor we would never be rich, but Christ turned our poverty into vast richness. This richness of grace is the very cause of our joy and generosity. This example also helps us understand that when we are blessed and given grace for our generosity, our rewards may not be material, but spiritual.

## Commitment with Eagerness (2 Corinthians 8:10-15)

<sup>10</sup> *And in this matter I give my judgment: this benefits you, who a year ago started not only to do this work but also to desire to do it.* <sup>11</sup> *So now finish doing it as well, so that your readiness in desiring it may be matched by your completing it out of what you have.* <sup>12</sup> *For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have.* <sup>13</sup> *For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened, but that as a matter of fairness* <sup>14</sup> *your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need, that there may be fairness.* <sup>15</sup> *As it is written, "Whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack."*

The Corinthians apparently followed Paul's instructions in his first letter to set aside a collection for the saints in Jerusalem and then began to get "cold feet" and not complete their earlier commitment to give. Paul reminds them that eagerness should be matched to the abundance that the Lord has provided. Paul expected not only a basic readiness and desire to give but an eagerness to give as well. Paul is not asking the church to give more than they can, but each person is to give to the point of fairness. Paul does not dictate what that guideline should be, other than the attitude behind it as informed by Old Testament scripture. Paul refers to

Exodus 16:18 to illustrate his thinking on giving, and expects the listener to connect his instructions back to the story of the children of Israel in the wilderness. <sup>15</sup> *As it is written, "Whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack."*

## Generosity in the Wilderness (Exodus 16)

God miraculously provided food for the Israelites daily in the form of manna in the morning and quail in the evening. They were commanded to gather only what they ate daily or share with those who could not gather for themselves. No food was left over and no one was in lack. The idea that those who have more should be giving their excess to those who had less was an expected principle of life in the wilderness community, while on the other hand, hoarders were punished as it revealed the hard rebellious heart of those who sought self-dependency rather than the daily dependency on God. Paul's use of the Exodus passage shows us that it is a matter of fairness that those who have an abundance should give willingly to those who are in need, but out of a generous, loving heart, not coercion.

## Honor and Accountability (2 Corinthians 8:16-24)

<sup>16</sup> *But thanks be to God, who put into the heart of Titus the same earnest care I have for you.*  
<sup>17</sup> *For he not only accepted our appeal, but being himself very earnest he is going to you of his own accord.*

Titus accepted the challenge by Paul to complete the collection in Corinth and in fact Titus was going to Corinth of his own desire and earnest care for the church. Paul also reassured the Corinthians that their offering would be taken care of by honorable and godly men; men gifted and tested in the sight of God and those within the church.

<sup>18</sup> *With him (Titus) we are sending the brother who is famous among all the churches for his preaching of the gospel.* <sup>19</sup> *And not only that, but he has been appointed by the churches to travel with us as we carry out this act of grace that is being ministered by us, for the glory of the Lord himself and to show our good will.* <sup>20</sup> *We take this course so that no one should blame us about this generous gift that is being administered by us,* <sup>21</sup> *for we aim at what is honorable not only in the Lord's sight but also in the sight of man.* <sup>22</sup> *And with them we are sending our brother whom we have often tested and found earnest in many matters, but who is now more earnest than ever because of his great confidence in you.* <sup>23</sup> *As for Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker for your benefit. And as for our brothers, they are messengers of the churches, the glory of Christ.* <sup>24</sup> *So give proof before the churches of your love and of our boasting about you to these men.*

Paul is diligent to make careful plans to do what is right before God and men, and he encourages the Corinthians to prove their love by coming through with what had already been boasted about by many within the church, including Paul and other leaders.

The elders and finance team here at the Chapel strive to treat the money we have been entrusted to manage with similar intent as Paul did for that collection for saints. We have written procedures and accountable steps, and have godly people implement those steps every time we handle and consider money within the church. We use recognizable accounting practices, and multiple layers of accountability and oversight so that we too can stand before the Lord and men in honor regarding our monetary policies and practices.

## The Promised Collection (2 Corinthians 9:1-5)

*Now it is superfluous for me to write to you about the ministry for the saints, <sup>2</sup> for I know your readiness, of which I boast 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 so that our boasting about you may not prove empty in this matter, 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—for being so confident. <sup>5</sup> So I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to go on ahead to you and arrange in advance for the gift you have promised, so that it may be ready as a willing gift, not as an exaction.*

Paul recognized the practicality of encouraging the Corinthians to have a regular, systematic plan for accumulating their offering so when it came time to collect the offering they would not feel as if the collection was an extraction. Paul wanted the gift to be given willingly not grudgingly. But, even while bragging to other churches about their readiness to give, he also took practical steps of accountability with the Corinthians, making sure they had the collection ready ahead of time, and by reminding them that he told other churches about their enthusiasm to give generously.

## Sowing and Reaping (2 Corinthians 9:6-8)

All that we have comes from the Lord, whether a lot or a little. But the Lord desires that we be good and wise stewards of what we have been given as well as generous, proportional givers.

*<sup>6</sup> The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. <sup>7</sup> Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. <sup>8</sup> 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.*

In the New Living Translation verses 6-8 say, *<sup>6</sup> Remember this—a farmer who plants only a few seeds will get a small crop. But the one who plants generously will get a generous crop. <sup>7</sup> You must each decide in your heart how much to give. And don't give reluctantly or in response to pressure. "For God loves a person who gives cheerfully." <sup>8</sup> And God will generously provide all you need. Then you will always have everything you need and plenty left over to share with others. <sup>9</sup> As the Scriptures say (Psalm 112:9), "They share freely and give generously to the poor. Their good deeds will be remembered forever."*

The main point of this passage is that no matter how much you decide to give or are able to give, God loves a cheerful giver. Each person needs to decide in his heart how much they can give, but not reluctantly or under pressure. If we give cheerfully and generously God will graciously provide everything we need and still have enough left over for us to share with others. Our attitude towards giving is at least as important as the amount we decide to give. Each of us is dependent on God's grace in the area of giving. It is God's grace that enables us to give far beyond what we will believe we can, and even excel in the grace of giving.

Paul encouraged the Corinthians not to hesitate setting aside a proportional sum of money for the church because God would provide all of their needs as well as provide extra to share with others.

God's ability to provide all things for our sufficiency and for every good work, is illustrated in Paul's reference to Psalm 112 in 2 Corinthians 9, <sup>9</sup>As it is written, "He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever." Let's look at Psalm 112 in its entirety,

*<sup>1</sup> Praise the Lord! How joyful are those who fear the Lord and delight in obeying his commands.<sup>2</sup> Their children will be successful everywhere; an entire generation of godly people will be blessed. <sup>3</sup> They themselves will be wealthy, and their good deeds will last forever. <sup>4</sup> Light shines in the darkness for the godly. They are generous, compassionate, and righteous. <sup>5</sup> Good comes to those who lend money generously and conduct their business fairly. <sup>6</sup> Such people will not be overcome by evil. Those who are righteous will be long remembered. <sup>7</sup> They do not fear bad news; they confidently trust the Lord to care for them. <sup>8</sup> They are confident and fearless and can face their foes triumphantly. <sup>9</sup> They share freely and give generously to those in need. Their good deeds will be remembered forever. They will have influence and honor. <sup>10</sup> The wicked will see this and be infuriated. They will grind their teeth in anger; they will slink away, their hopes thwarted.*

Psalm 112 reflects the character and attributes of a righteous man living life in the midst of both good and evil and yet never wavering in his righteous conduct or character. Such a righteous man is blessed in the context of a full life and in his destiny. A righteous man trusts the Lord to care for him in good days and bad and deals generously with others and is able to lend his resources fairly to those who are in need. He conducts his financial and business affairs justly and is blessed for doing so. He is not afraid of bad news, implying that he has planned well, has set aside money and trusts the Lord to provide for him and his family through wise and prudent planning. The righteous man gives generously to the poor and those in need, especially (implied) those of the household of the Lord.

## God Supplies and Multiplies (2 Corinthians 9:10-15)

And how can we not be cheerful givers since God has supplied everything we need and much more. Just like God provided for the children of Israel in the wilderness and God blesses the righteous man, God is sovereign and caring in what he provides for us to live and give.

*<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 to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. <sup>12</sup> For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God. <sup>13</sup> 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, <sup>14</sup> while they long for you and pray for you, because of the surpassing grace of God upon you. <sup>15</sup> Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!*

God is the supplier and multiplier of all that we have. God provides us with the seed for the sower (the very beginning of the food supply), and is fully responsible for supplying bread (the finished product of our food supply) in the end. From beginning to end God supplies all we need and is able to multiply what he gives us so that we can be generous givers.

God will use our cheerful generous giving to increase the harvest of our righteousness, and we will be enriched and empowered to be generous in every way which will produce thanksgiving to God by all. The ministry of cheerful giving is not *just* to meet needs, but to produce thanksgiving and praise and glory to God!

It's important to note that this is not a prosperity gospel teaching. We are not to give to get, and God does not necessarily grow our worldly wealth based upon our giving. And the context of this blessing is the Corinthian church giving generously to the Jerusalem church who had a great financial need. It would not have been appropriate to say these same things to the poverty stricken Judean church. But the Macedonian church was praised for their example of giving under severe poverty, and the Corinthian church was expected to give out of their wealth. God in his sovereignty allowed three churches in different circumstances to be unified in Christ through the ministry of giving. And while everyone (and every church) is called to be generous to the body of Christ, just because God may allow one church to be prosperous and able to excel in giving, does not guarantee that at another point in time that same church may lose its financial prosperity, and roles of giving would reverse. The once financially blessed and prosperous church could one day be the church with financial needs and could be dependent on the gifts of others for a season. It is in this unity and fairness that God provides for his church and we all grow in grace and benefit from this gracious ministry of one another. We should also always be thankful to God for the generous resources he supplies each and every one of us, and this should motivate us to look for opportunities to be cheerful givers in the name of Christ and the church, always being good and wise stewards of all that we have been given.

1. We are called to give to the local church on a planned, regular and proportional basis
2. Each person should decide in his/her heart how much to give based upon what the Lord has provided, but what we do with our money does expose our hearts and where our treasure is
3. God will meet all of our needs and is able to give all of us more than we need so that we can give generously and cheerfully to the needs of others in the church
4. By God's grace we are called to pursue and excel in the grace of giving so that in all things God is glorified and we can increase our harvest of righteousness

## Conclusion

*"I do not believe one can settle how much we ought to give. I am afraid the only safe rule is to give more than we can spare. In other words, if our expenditure on comforts, luxuries, amusement, etc., is up to the standard common among those with the same income as our own, we are probably giving away too little. If our giving does not at all pinch or hamper us, I should say it is too small. There ought to be things we should like to do and cannot because our commitment to giving excludes them."*

C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity

Generous and cheerful giving is a vital part of expanding God's kingdom and expanding a great harvest of righteousness. Be eager to give, and give in proportion to what you have. If you are eager to give, whatever you give is acceptable in God's eyes and will bring glory to Him.



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