

The Blessedness of Giving

2 Corinthians 9:6–11

© Mike Riccardi

Introduction

Well it was a pleasure to gather together on Friday night for our GraceLife Christmas banquet. It was a wonderful night of fun, food, and fellowship, as well as an encouraging time around God's Word, as, at this time of year, we focus our attention in a special way upon the incarnation of God the Son—the eternal Word become flesh and dwelling among us—the redemptive ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ, whereby we are saved. The incarnation is the genesis of the so-called “Christmas spirit.” Christmas is the season of giving because it is in the incarnation of Christ that God has given to sinful mankind the greatest gift ever given: the perfectly suitable Savior from our sin and God's judgment. Being fully man, Christ is able to stand in man's place—to bear our punishment and to accomplish our righteousness. And being fully God, Christ is able to bear the wrath of His Father, and able to bestow His infinite merit upon the innumerable sinners who come to Him in repentance and faith.

We celebrate Christmas by giving gifts to one another because, most foundationally, Christmas *is* God giving man history's greatest gift. And as Christians, we give gifts to others in order to magnify the beauty and the sufficiency of that greatest gift. Because our hearts are satisfied and made glad by the bountiful grace of God, we desire to imitate that grace in generous giving.

And as I mentioned last time, we find the Apostle Paul taken up with this same theme in our study of 2 Corinthians 8 and 9. As we've made our way through these two chapters on Christian giving, we've found that all of Paul's practical instruction concerning Christian stewardship and generosity is fundamentally shaped by the gift of God in the incarnation—shaped by two (what I called) Christmas texts. Chapter 8 verse 9: “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 through His poverty might become rich.” And then, the final verse of this section, chapter 9 verse 15: “Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!” The incarnation of the Son of God—whereby He who was rich for our sakes became poor—is God's indescribable gift to us. And that Gospel grace is to fundamentally drive and shape the way we think about and practice our own giving. So it's fitting that the Lord has us studying this portion of His Word as we enter the Christmas season, because we only have greater occasion to be reminded of the generosity of God to us in Christ, which grace then shapes and drives our generosity to others.

Now, I remind you once again of the historical setting for this instruction on giving. The Apostle Paul is overseeing the collection of a financial offering for the believers who belong to the

church in Jerusalem. Because of persecution and other providentially-ordered circumstances, these saints in Jerusalem are unable to provide themselves with the basic necessities of life. And so Paul has arranged to take up an offering from the various Gentile churches to offer them relief. And he writes these two chapters to stir up the Corinthians to bring to completion the offering that they had begun in the last year, so that when Paul comes again to Corinth he can receive their offering and transport it to Jerusalem.

And we've mentioned a number of times that the directives Paul issues in these two chapters concerning this 2,000 year-old offering become to us, and to Christians of all ages, the closest thing to a systematic theology of Christian giving that is found anywhere in Scripture. And as these chapters are rooted in and shaped by the two "Christmas texts" of chapter 8 verse 9 and chapter 9 verse 15, we find that this portion of Scripture outlines timeless principles for giving that is produced by grace, that is shaped by the Gospel, and that is glorifying to God. And in our series of expositions so far, we have gleaned several such principles. We've seen that giving has its source and motivation in the grace of God. We've seen that generosity has primarily to do not with the amount given but with the disposition of the heart, and therefore genuine generosity is not hindered by difficult circumstances. We've seen that Christian giving is to be proportional to what one has, that it is to be a voluntary, willing gift given from the whole heart. We've seen the principle of sacrifice, the principle of equality, and others.

And then, as we turned to chapter 8 verse 16 all the way to chapter 9 verse 5, we found Paul's letter of commendation for Titus and two unnamed brethren—a three-man delegation whom Paul sends to Corinth ahead of him, to help the Corinthians properly prepare their contribution to the offering. And in chapter 9 verse 5, he ends that section by explaining that such preparation is important "so that [their offering] would be ready as a bountiful gift and not affected by covetousness." Paul says, "I don't want to get to Corinth and have you surprised by my presence, and, because you want to save face with me there, have the collection be a matter of my wringing your gifts out of tight-fisted, narrow-hearted hands! I want you prepared! I want you reading over this letter, assimilating its directives and applying its principles, praying that the Lord would accomplish this grace-produced, Gospel-shaped, genuine generosity in your hearts!"

Well, at that point, this mention of generous giving as opposed to covetousness, gives Paul occasion to speak of the ramifications of giving bountifully as opposed to giving sparingly. And so in the rest of the chapter, verses 6 to 15, Paul discusses the results, or ramifications, or consequences of generous giving, as a final effort to motivate the Corinthians to generosity. In verses 11b to 15, Paul reflects on how generous Christian giving redounds to the glory of God. And that will be the subject of our sermon next week. But in verses 6 to 11a—our text for this morning—Paul reflects on how generous Christian giving brings manifold blessings to *those who give*. Let's read our passage together. 2 Corinthians 9, verses 6 to 11: Now this I say, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.

⁷Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. ⁸And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed; ⁹as it is written, ‘He scattered abroad, he gave to the poor, his righteousness endures forever.’ ¹⁰Now 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; ¹¹you will be enriched in everything for all liberality, which through us is producing thanksgiving to God.

And once again, we find Paul’s instruction concerning a 2,000 year-old offering to be rich with significance for our own understanding of giving and generosity today. Jesus said, recorded in Acts 20:35, that it is more *blessed* to give than to receive. Well, as Paul discourses on the manifold blessings that fall on those who are genuinely generous, he presents to us **four motives** for joyful generosity—at least **four enticements** or **incentives** to give generously, freely, joyfully, and from the heart. And they are: the proportion of God, the pleasure of God, the power of God, and the promise of God. How can we hope to engage in grace-produced, Gospel-shaped, God-glorifying giving? We need to understand these multi-faceted blessings that result in the lives of the generous, and receive them as **motives** for joyful generosity.

I. The Proportion of God (v. 6)

And that **first motive** for joyful generosity comes from a consideration of what I’m calling **the proportion of God**. And we find this **proportion of God** in an axiomatic principle that Paul borrows from the realm of agriculture. We see it in verse 6. “Now this I say, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.” And this little extended agricultural metaphor vividly illustrates one of the most important principles of Christian giving. Paul likens the act of giving to a farmer sowing seed in a field. And he contrasts two kinds of farmers—we’ll name them Farmer James and Farmer John. One sows his seed sparingly, and the other sows his seed bountifully.

Now, what does it mean to sow sparingly? It means to give in a hesitating, restrained way—a stingy, miserly, tightfisted, parsimonious way. A farmer who sows his seed sparingly sows his seed as if he wants to have seed left over to spare. So picture it. It’s springtime. Farmer James has a large field, a field whose soil he’s plowed and tilled in preparation for planting season. He’s neatly organized furrows of soil that are ready to receive the seed for his crops. And so he grabs his seed bag, filled to the brim with seed, hoists it up onto his shoulder, and heads out into his field to sow. And he gets out there, and he finds the row he wants to start in, and he reaches into his seed bag. And between his thumb and his index finger, he pinches out three or four seeds, and he carefully and gently places them into the furrow like he’s trying not to crack an eggshell! And then he walks a few steps, reaches into his seed bag, pinches out another couple of seeds, and lays them down. Farmer James is sowing sparingly—stingily, tightfistedly. And come

harvest time, what's Farmer James's crop going to look like? Well, it's not going to look like much at all! He's not going to have any trouble gathering his entire crop all by himself. Why? Because he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly.

But then there's Farmer John. And Farmer John has a field not too far from Farmer James, and, it being springtime, he's ready to go out to sow in his field. Well, he grabs his seed bag—just as full as his neighbor's bag—and hoists it up onto his shoulder, and heads out into the field. And as he comes to where he wants to sow first, he reaches into his seed bag, and pulls out a *fistful* of seed, and scatters it generously to his left and to his right! And he takes a few more steps and grabs another fistful, and casts it again to his right and to his left. He's scattering so much seed that he's got to go and get another bag, and then another, and then another. And by the time the day is over all Farmer John has is a bunch of empty seed bags. Now, come harvest time, what's Farmer John's field going to look like? It's going to be overrun with crops—with wheat and corn and cabbage and lettuce. He's going to have so much yield from the land that he's going to have to hire help to gather it all. Why? Because he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.

This agricultural principle of **proportionate** returns beautifully illustrates the truth about Christian generosity and giving. Paul is teaching us that when we give to the work of the Lord and His Gospel, we are not merely *giving away money*, as if we piled up all our 20- and 50- and 100-dollar bills and set them on fire! No, when we give financial gifts to meet the genuine, legitimate needs of our brothers and sisters in Christ, we are *sowing seed*! And even though we cast it from us, that seed is not lost forever; it's going to yield a crop!

You see, the problem with Farmer James is that he thinks that by casting his seed into the ground he's parting with it forever. He's worked *hard* to get that seed! That seed came from the fruit of the previous year's harvest, when he labored by the sweat of his brow to collect it, and to gather it into seed bags, and to store it in his barns for the next year. That seed represents his entire livelihood, and so he's grown attached to it. When he thinks about just throwing his seed away into the ground never to see it again, he can't bear it! But Farmer John recognizes that in scattering his seed generously and liberally throughout his field, he's not parting with his seed forever. He's not giving his seed away, never to see it again. No, he's *sowing* it! He may have to part with it for a time, but because he does he's going to get it back thirty-, sixty-, and even a hundredfold.

And so Paul declares, when you sow your seed bountifully into the field of Gospel ministry and brotherly generosity, you're not throwing that seed away. God is able to make that seed yield a bountiful harvest of blessing for you to reap. You're going to see that money again! Perhaps not in the same exact form, but you're going to see the fruit of that investment into the purposes of God, because He's going to bring forth blessing from it. And Paul is saying: Don't rob

yourselves of the blessings of a plentiful harvest by sowing sparingly! Sow bountifully, and enjoy the harvest that is to come!

And this principle is taught throughout the Scriptures. In Proverbs 3, verses 9 and 10, Solomon says, “Honor Yahweh from your wealth And from the first of all your produce; So your barns will be filled with plenty And your vats will overflow with new wine.” In Proverbs 11:24–25, we have this very same principle laid out for us. It says, “There is one who scatters, and yet increases all the more, And there is one who withholds what is justly due, and yet it results only in want. The generous man will be prosperous, And he who waters will himself be watered.” Proverbs 19:17 says, “One who is gracious to a poor man lends to the Lord, And He will repay him for his good deed.” And in Luke 6:38, Jesus repeats this principle. He says, “Give, and it will be given to you. They will pour into your lap a good measure—pressed down, shaken together, and running over. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return.”

John Calvin put it this way as he commented on this passage. He said, “In sowing, the seed is cast forth by the hand, is scattered upon the ground on this side and on that, is harrowed, and at length rots; and thus it seems as good as lost. The case is similar as to alms-giving. What goes from you to some other quarter seems as if it were a diminishing of what you have, but the season of the harvest will come, when the fruit will be gathered. . . . Let this doctrine be deeply rooted in our minds, that, whenever carnal reason keeps us back from doing good through fear of loss, we may immediately defend ourselves with this shield—‘But the Lord declares that we are *sowing*’” (308–09). You say, “I can’t give to meet that need! I wouldn’t be able to afford to such a loss!” But the Lord declares that you are *sowing*! It’s not a loss! It’s the sowing of seed! And it’ll produce a harvest.

When you’re confronted with an opportunity to meet the need of a brother or sister, or when an opportunity to invest in Gospel ministry is put before you, and you’re considering how much you should give, you need to ask yourself: “What kind of harvest do I want to reap?” Do I want a sparing harvest? A scant harvest? A meager harvest? Or do I want a bountiful harvest? A plentiful harvest? An abundant harvest?

You say, “Now, wait a minute. That’s fleshly self-interest! You can’t be motivated to give by the blessing you’ll receive back! Sure, it’s nice that God is kind enough to give us a reward, but that reward shouldn’t be the *basis* of your generosity! That’s just selfish!” My friend, that kind of thinking has absolutely no basis in the Word of God. In Kantian philosophy, maybe; but not in the Scriptures! Not in Luke 6:35, where Jesus says, “Love your enemies, and do good, and *lend*, expecting nothing in return; *and your reward will be great.*” Not in Luke 6:38, which we read before, where just a few verses later Jesus says, “Give, *and it will be given to you.*” Not in Matthew 6:4, where Jesus says, “But when you give to the poor, do not let your left hand know

what your right hand is doing, so that your giving will be in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret *will reward you.*”

You say, “Those texts don’t say, ‘Seek the reward’! They just say that a reward will be the result!” No! It would make absolutely no sense for Jesus to say, “Love your enemies and your reward will be great,” if He thought that desiring a great reward would ruin the morality of loving your enemies! If desiring a reward from the Father spoiled the virtue of giving in secret, Jesus would have been a really bad teacher for saying “Give in secret and your Father will reward you”! Besides, elsewhere Jesus explicitly commands us to make the reward of God’s blessings a motive for our obedience! Luke 12:33 says, “Sell your possessions and give [alms]; *make yourselves money belts* which do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near nor moth destroys.” This is a command! “*Make yourselves money belts that are capable of storing an unfailing treasure! Pursue eternal treasure by giving to the needy in this age!*”

You see, dear people, it is Kantian moralism—not the ethics of Jesus—that teaches us that obedience is genuine only if it is disinterested. Scripture teaches us to be motivated to obedience by pursuing the rewards of blessing that God promises for obedience. It would make absolutely no sense for Paul to remind the Corinthians that bountiful sowing yields a bountiful harvest if he didn’t intend the prospect of a bountiful harvest to motivate bountiful sowing. You say, “Oh, Mike, that’s just that John Piper Christian Hedonism stuff!” Really? Listen to Charles Hodge, that 19th-century Princetonian who defended orthodoxy from the attacks of theological liberalism on every side. Hodge writes, “The wisdom of God, while teaching the entire abnegation of self, and requiring a man even to hate his own life when in conflict with the glory of God, tells all who thus deny themselves that they thereby most effectually promote their own interests. He that loses his life shall save it. He that does not seek his own, shall best secure his own. He that humbleth himself shall be exalted. . . . We may therefore learn that it is right to present to men the divinely ordained consequences of their actions as motives to control their conduct. It is right to tell men that obedience to God, devotion to his glory and the good of others, will effectually promote their own welfare” (595).

Do you want a bountiful harvest? Then dear people: sow bountifully! Set your heart on the blessing of God! And then order your hands in obedience so that you might thereby secure that blessing for yourselves. Don’t throw away your harvest because you like collecting seed! Seed is for *sowing*! Be **motivated** to joyful, generous giving by considering **the proportion of God**.

II. The Pleasure of God (v. 7)

A **second motive** for joyful generosity comes in verse 7. Not only ought we to be enticed by the proportion of God. We ought to be motivated to generosity by considering **the pleasure of God**.

Verse 7: “Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”

And almost as if he anticipates someone getting the wrong idea by his motivating them to bountiful giving by God’s promise of a bountiful harvest, Paul quickly reiterates that each believer who gives to the work of the Lord must not do so because they’re being manipulated or coerced in some way. Those who give must give joyfully and freely. And we glean several principles for giving from this verse. Paul says, “*Each one* must do just as he has purposed in his heart.” So here we learn that genuine, grace-produced giving is an individual stewardship before God. It’s true that the gift the Corinthians contribute will be a corporate offering from their church as a whole, and even further, a single part of the entire offering from all the Gentile churches. But when it comes to what a believer is deciding to contribute to that whole, it is an individual responsibility. “Each one,” Paul says.

Secondly, note the voluntariness of genuine generosity. “Each one must do *just as he has purposed in his heart*.” This is not something that has been foisted upon you. This is not something that you have to be manipulated into doing. You give what you yourself, as an individual steward before God, have decided to give. And there’s a beautiful illustration of this principle in Exodus chapter 35. Turn there with me. Exodus 35 chronicles the construction of the Tabernacle. And because the Tabernacle was the dwelling place of Holy God in the midst of His people, it was going to take some resources to finance its construction. Verses 10 to 19 speak of all the things that had to be made: the tent, the ark, the mercy seat, the holy utensils, the stand for the bread of the Presence, the lampstand, the altar, and so on. And so the command comes from Moses to take an offering from the people. Exodus 35:5: “Take from among you a contribution to Yahweh; *whoever is of a willing heart*, let him bring it as Yahweh’s contribution: gold, silver, and bronze, and blue, purple and scarlet, fine linen,” and so on. You see, these were to be *voluntary* offerings. “Whoever was of a *willing heart*” was to give.

Well, how’d that work out? Look at verse 21: “Everyone whose heart stirred him and everyone whose spirit moved him came and brought Yahweh’s contribution for the work of the tent of meeting.” Verse 22: “Then all whose hearts moved then, both men and women, came and brought broaches and earrings and signet rings and bracelets, all articles of gold; so did every man who presented an offering to Yahweh.” Verse 26: “All the women whose heart stirred with a skill spun the goats’ hair.” Verse 29: “The Israelites, all the men and women, whose heart moved them to bring material for all the work, which Yahweh had commanded through Moses to be done, brought a freewill offering to Yahweh.” And then chapter 36 verse 3 says they kept bringing these freewill offerings every single morning, so much so that Moses has to issue a command, in verses 6 and 7, to say, “Stop bringing your offerings! We have more than enough!” *That* is the picture of free, willing, voluntary generosity that Paul is prescribing in 2 Corinthians

9:7. Each of these Israelites were doing just as they had purposed in their hearts. And so it is to be with us. What you give is entirely up to you. Christian giving is entirely voluntary.

But note, just because giving is to be voluntary and free doesn't mean that it can be careless or flippant. Quite the opposite. "Each one must do just as he has *purposed* in his heart." Giving is to be purposeful. It is to be the fruit of thoughtful deliberation—of prayerful consideration. Giving is not to be impulsive or casual. We spoke about this last time, when we were reminded that Paul speaks of the Philippians' gift to him in the language of Old Testament sacrifice: "a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God" (Phil 4:18). And so we learned that our giving is part of our ministry as priests of the New Covenant, and that, analogous to the priestly ministry of the Old Covenant, in which the priests made elaborate preparations as they prepared the sacrificial offerings, we also must take care to prepare ourselves, as well as our offerings, in this ministry of giving. When a need is before us, we need to prayerfully reflect upon the grace that has been shown to us in the Gospel. We need to ask that our giving be received as an act of worship to God that meets the needs of His people. We need to seek His face for guidance as to how much we ought to give. We need to petition Him to provide for all of our needs, even as we give our resources to provide for others' needs. There must be a deliberate, considerate purposefulness with which we engage in this ministry of generosity.

And note further, such giving as God produces and with which God is pleased is never done "grudgingly or under compulsion," but rather cheerfully. The word *grudgingly* translates the Greek phrase, "not out of sorrow" or "not out of grief." Giving is not to be a grievous experience. The kind of generosity that is genuinely produced by God's grace in the heart of the believer is not such that you mourn over what you're losing—or what you're missing out on by giving this money to your brothers and sisters in Christ rather than spending it on yourself. To give grudgingly is to *give*, but to not *like* giving. It's burdensome to you. It's depressing. It's grievous. God says that's not the kind of giving He receives or blesses. Neither is such giving done under compulsion—that is to say, as a result of external coercion. You're not to give out of internal sorrow or external pressure. Not because a pastor or a leader is leaning on your emotions and guilting you into giving; not because you see other people giving and you don't want people to think poorly of you so you give in order to save face with others. Giving is to be done neither grudgingly nor guiltily.

Well, how is it to be done then, if not grudgingly or guiltily? Answer: Gladly. Paul says, "God loves a *cheerful* giver." We are to give cheerfully. Joyfully. The Greek term is *hilaros*, from which we get our English word *hilarious*. Now, this doesn't mean that we're to be laughing hysterically as the offering plate passes by. But it does mean that we ought to be driven to meet the needs of our brothers and sisters in Christ by an indomitable, grace-produced joy in Jesus, that severs our hearts' attachment to money and the things money can buy, and therefore frees us to be sacrificially generous.

Remember what Paul says in chapter 8 verse 2, that it was the Macedonians' *abundance of joy* that overflowed into a wealth of liberality—even while they were in the midst of great affliction and deep poverty! Remember, in chapter 8 verse 4, that they *begged* Paul with much urging to be granted the *favor* of participating in this ministry to the saints! They were *cheerful* givers! Not grudging givers, or guilty givers, but glad givers, because they had realized that there was more of the glory of Jesus to enjoy on the path of generous, sacrificial giving. And their joy in Him severed the root of their joy in money or in things or in pleasant circumstances, and made them cheerful givers. And they recognized that in giving generously, they could magnify the generous grace that they had been shown by God in Christ. The same ought to be true of us, friends. We ought to recognize giving for the privilege that it is—the opportunity to behold the glory of Christ in greater ways as we seek to serve the brethren the way He has served us, and, as chapter 9 verse 12 says, to not only supply the needs of the saints, but also to live in a way that will bring glory and honor to God.

And then, after all that, Paul finally gives the **motive** for giving in this way. “Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, *for God loves a cheerful giver.*” We give cheerfully because we are motivated by **the pleasure of God**, because God loves cheerful givers. And as those who love God because He first loved us—because we have been redeemed and forgiven and justified and adopted and sanctified by Him—therefore we always have as our ambition to be pleasing to Him, 2 Corinthians 5:9. We are always preoccupied with blessing the heart of the One who has so blessed us—with bringing a smile to the face of our great God and Savior.

Now you say, “What sense does it make to say God loves a cheerful giver? God loves everybody indiscriminately, doesn't He?” Well, no, not in the same sense. There *is* a universal love that God has toward all His creatures; we call it His love of benevolence or beneficence. It's the kind of love that sincerely desires the well-being of His creatures and that moves Him to make the sun shine and the rain fall even on His enemies. But there is also a special love that God has uniquely for His elect—those whom He's chosen out of the world to reconcile to Himself through Christ. It's that great love with which He loved us, Ephesians 2:4 and 5, whereby He made us alive together with Christ even when we were dead in our transgressions. It's the love of John 13:1, where it says that Jesus “having loved His own who were in the world”—which is to say, distinct from the world—“He loved them to the end.”

But then, later in that same chapter, in John 13:23 the Apostle John refers to himself as the disciple “whom Jesus loved,” which of course doesn't mean that He didn't love the rest of the disciples; John just said He did. But John means to communicate something of the uniqueness of the love that he shared with the Lord Jesus. And then in the next chapter, John 14:21, Jesus says that the one who keeps His commandments is the one who loves Him, and who will be loved by

His Father. And, He says, “I will love that person and will disclose Myself to him.” And so here we learn of still another unique, peculiar love that the Lord has for those who walk in obedience to Him. And that’s the kind of love that Paul is speaking about in our passage: that God has a peculiar delight in—a special affection for—those of His people who, in obedience to His Word, are cheerful givers.

And why is that? Why does God love a cheerful giver? Because in such people He beholds the beauty of His own grace reflected back to Him! God loves a cheerful giver because *He Himself* is a cheerful giver! and He delights to see the image of His own grace and goodness reflected back to Him in the obedience of His people—obedience which He Himself has granted to them and has worked in them. And I don’t know about you, but with all my heart I want to know that peculiar delight and affection of my God! I want to be so conformed into the image of the Lord Jesus Christ, that when the Father looks at me He sees the fingerprints of His own grace in my life. And because He sees so much of Himself, He might look upon me with a special love and **pleasure**. Could there be any greater privilege than being the special object of the love and **pleasure of the God** of the universe?

III. The Power of God (vv. 8–9)

And so we are to be **motivated** to joyful generosity by considering the proportion of God, and also by coveting the pleasure of God. There’s a **third motive** for joyful generosity in this passage, and that, is **number three**, the **power of God**. And we see this in verses 8 and 9. Paul writes, “And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed; as it is written, ‘He scattered abroad, he gave to the poor, his righteousness endures forever.’”

And here again, it’s as if Paul anticipates the questions and objections. “Paul, I’ve heard you outline the standard of grace-produced, Gospel-shaped, God-glorifying giving. I’ve understood that it is to come from an open-hearted, bountiful, free and voluntary, cheerful disposition of sacrificial generosity. I recognize that if God is going to accept my giving that it cannot be done grudgingly or under compulsion—that I cannot mock God or fool Him into accepting the offerings of my hands unless He first has the offering of my heart. And with everything in my inner man, I want to become that kind of bountiful, generous giver that you call us to be. But I see a different principle at work in my remaining sin, waging war against those desires. I look into my heart and I recognize the impulses of the self-centered, self-indulgent, self-interest of a sinful man. I recognize the indifference to the needs of my brothers and sisters, and my preference for my own comfort, ease, and security at their expense.

“Paul, there’s a part of me that longs to be generous in the way you describe, but my heart just seems so preoccupied with questions of what might happen if I give so generously and freely.

Will I have enough money to provide for my own needs and the needs of my family? If I don't have a sizeable nest-egg that I can fall back on in the case of emergency, I wonder if I'm being imprudent. If I give as much as I think I ought to give now, what guarantees do I have that I won't find myself in the poor house soon down the road?"

And Paul's response to those questions and objections is: "O, my dear friends: God is able!" God is able! He grounds everything that he's called us to in **the power of God** to provide, by grace, that which He requires of us! You say, "But my heart is so narrow and stingy and tightfisted!" God is able by the power of divine grace to open your heart and cause it to flower with an abundance of generosity! You say, "But I worry about the circumstances that I might find myself in as a result!" God is able to provide all the sustenance you need in order to continue to be radically generous!

"Really? He's able to change my heart? He's able to order my circumstances?" Yes, my friend, He is able. Just as He was able to call the world into existence by the breath of His own mouth (Ps 33:6)! Just as He was able to bring an heir from the loins of a 99 year-old man whose body, Scripture says, was as good as dead, and from a 90 year-old barren woman whose womb is described as dead (Rom 4:19)! Just as He was able to take a man who was so despised that his own brothers sold him into slavery, and place that man second in command over the world's greatest superpower (Gen 37–50)! Just as He was able to take an 80 year-old stuttering murderer and convince the ruler of the known world to let his own slaves go free (Exod 1–12)! Just as He was able to *deliver* that nation of slaves from the world's greatest army, by parting the waters of the sea so that His people could walk to freedom on dry land—and then calling those waters to come crashing down to drown their enemies (Exod 13–14)! Just as He was able to make a virgin bear a child! Just as He was able to take two things of an infinite distance from one another—divinity and humanity—and unite them in a single person without mixing or confusing them! Just as He was able to crush the power of sin by assuming all the weakness and frailty of humanity! able to conquer every enemy by becoming the slave of all! able to triumph over death by succumbing to death! and then raising Christ from the dead!

Dear people, God is able! He is "able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to **the power** that works within us" (Eph 3:20)! He is "able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy" (Jude 24)! He is able to raise up children of Abraham from stones (Matt 3:9)! And so He is able to take wicked, stony hearts, recreate them, and turn haters of God into worshipers of God. He is able to take tightfisted, selfish, narrow-hearted misers and make them into lavish, generous givers. And He is able to so govern the affairs of men by His providence that His people who trust and obey Him will never lack what is necessary to go on being generous. And if there was any doubt about the **power** of God's grace, Paul has dispelled that at the outset of these chapters: "Now, brethren, we wish to make known to you the *grace of God* which has been given in the

churches of Macedonia!” Though they had nothing! Though they were in a severe test of affliction! Though they were mired in deep poverty! God was able to triumph over and *through* their inability, and make His **power** perfect in their weakness! Dear friends, God is able!

You say, “How able?” Look at verse 8: “And God is able to make *all* grace *abound* to you, so that *always* having *all* sufficiency in *everything*, you may have an abundance for *every* good deed!” Paul is just straining to adequately capture the limitlessness of God’s **power**! And all he can do is keep repeating the word *all*! Five times in this one verse! So that it’s literally: “God is able to make *all* grace abound to you, so that *in all things* (circumstances), *always* (at all times), you will have *all* sufficiency, for *all* good works!” What’s missing there? What dimension of reality remains uncovered by the immeasurable **power of God**?

You say, “Has He ever done it before?” What, you mean aside from the Macedonians? But yes, He has done it before. He’s done it so much before that those for whom He’s done it have been memorialized in song. And so Paul quotes one of those inspired songs—Psalm 112—in verse 9: “As it is written, ‘He scattered abroad, he gave to the poor, his righteousness endures forever.’” The man to whom God has made all grace abound, who always has all sufficiency in everything, has an abundance for every good deed, so that his righteousness—the practical, lived-out obedience that manifests itself in generous giving—that man’s righteous acts of charity endure forever. Both in this present life and in the life to come, your generosity will be “regarded as righteousness that will never fade or lose its value in the sight of God” (Storms, 79). Your gifts will remain forever in the substance of your eternal reward—those money belts which do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near nor moth destroys. Your checkbooks and your dollar bills and your house and your car will all rust and rot. But every investment you make in the kingdom of God—every righteous deed of generous giving—will endure forever, and will yield so abundant of a return in heaven that there aren’t words to describe it.

{Refer to audio for comments on the nature of our harvest. God doesn’t bless us so we can hoard. He blesses us so we can continue to give.}

Oh people, do you need **motivation** for joyful, generous giving? Trust in the **power of God**, for He is able to make all grace abound to you!

IV. The Promise of God (vv. 10–11a)

And do you know what? He’s not only *able* to make all grace abound to you; He is *willing* to do it. And He’s not only willing to do it; He **promises** to do it! And that’s our **fourth motive** for joyful generosity: the proportion of God, the pleasure of God, the power of God, and now: the **promise of God**. Verses 10 and 11: “Now 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 everything for all liberality.”

Now, we’ll only be able to treat this briefly because our time is near gone. But that’s OK, because we’ll have some time to go over it again next week, *and* because verses 10 and 11 are basically a restatement of verses 8 and 9. The difference is, verses 8 and 9 speak of God’s power to provide for the needs of the generous, and verses 10 and 11 speak of His **promise** to do so! God’s measureless ability to give grace wouldn’t mean anything unless He was willing to exert that ability to bless His people. Well here we are assured that He is both able and willing!

And Paul returns to the word picture that he started with in verse 6, and he reminds us that even in the physical realm, God is the one who provides the harvest and produce of the land! Psalm 104:14: God “causes the grass to grow...and vegetation for the labor of man so that he may bring food from the earth!” And so He is the one who supplies seed to the sower, because *He* is the one who gave the increase of the crops whose seeds the sower gathers and stores in his seed bags for the following year. God makes that happen even in the physical realm.

And here he promises to make it happen in the spiritual realm. “He *will* supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness.” It falls to us simply to believe His **promise**. And we have good reason to believe His **promise**, because He is *able* to perform what He promises. In fact, that’s how Scripture defines the faith of Abraham, by which God reckoned him to be righteous. Romans 4:19–21 says, “Without becoming weak in faith he contemplated his own body, now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah’s womb; yet, with respect to **the promise of God**, he did not waver in unbelief but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully assured that what God had **promised**, He was able also to perform.” And if we are going to be generous—if we are going to become experimentally acquainted with the grace of God that works generosity into the hearts of sinners—we must have the faith of Abraham. We must trust—we must be fully assured—that what God has **promised**, He is **able** also to perform.

Human wisdom teaches us that prosperity comes from hoarding money, not giving generously. You know what else human wisdom teaches? That 100 year-old men and 90 year-old barren women don’t have children. But by faith in God’s promise—by trusting that He is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think—the wisdom of the world is made foolish in the light of the wisdom of God.

I’ll close with a final quote from Charles Hodge. He said, “Giving is, to the natural eye, the way to lessen our store, not to increase it. The Bible says it is the way to increase it. To believe this it is only necessary to believe in the **power, providence, and promise** of God” (596). We say we believe His power and His promise to forgive us our sins and to deliver us from death and

judgment into the blessings of heaven. Do we believe in His power and promise to *sanctify* us and conform us into His own image, to make us into cheerful givers like He is? Trust Him, dear people! Prove Him! Step out in faith unto joyful generosity, motivated by His proportion, His pleasure, His power, and His promise.