

## XII. Cheerful Giving

March 3/4/5, 2015

2 Corinthians 9:1-15

**Aim:** To become cheerful, willing givers through the grace of God.

### A. Characteristics of Giving (2 Corinthians 9:1-7)

The chapter break here in the text is unfortunate, for these verses continue the thought expressed at the end of chapter 9. Verses 1-5 are actually closely linked in thought with the final verse of the previous chapter, for Paul is still thinking about the kind of impression the Corinthian church will make on the Macedonian visits when they arrive.

#### 1. Readiness (9:1-2)

<sup>1</sup>*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.*

Paul sometimes says he has no need to write to a church about a particular matter and yet he goes ahead and does exactly that (e.g., 1 Th. 4:9-10). A good teacher is not only to impart new truth or encourage new endeavor, but also to underline the importance of truths or actions already taught so as to establish firm habits of thought or life.

The term *diakonia* ('service'), which Paul uses here, he also employs for various spiritual activities within the church. We should never imagine that giving material aid is inferior to other activities we might consider more spiritual. If it is a product of the love of Christ, there could be nothing more spiritual.

In the opening verses of chapter 9 Paul acknowledges the Corinthians' readiness. It was, in fact, Paul's boasting about Achaia's readiness to give (i.e., the Corinthians' readiness to give—Corinth was the capital of Achaia)—a year prior that had stirred the impoverished Macedonians' amazing overflow of generosity. Indeed, it would be redundant and superfluous to write to the Corinthians about giving because they had already received Paul's directive (cp. 1 Cor. 16:1-3) with self-proclaimed readiness. In fact, it was the example of the Corinthians' original zeal that stirred up most of the Macedonians to contribute so sacrificially to the project.

Paul's concern is not that the Corinthians have reneged on their former pledge of help. He is still persuaded of its genuineness and of the generosity which prompted it, but he is afraid the gift has not yet been organized. They had evidently shown great enthusiasm when the matter of the collection had been first raised by Paul, and this had provided a real challenge to the Macedonians.

#### 2. Dependability (9:3-4)

<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.*

The rebellion against Paul incited by the false teachers had apparently halted their giving. He therefore sent the brethren (Titus and the two unnamed brothers) in order that his boasting about

## 2 Corinthians – Lesson 12

them ‘may not be made empty in this case;’ in other words, so that they would have the offering prepared. To forestall any embarrassment, the apostle called upon the Corinthians to finish what they had started. As their example had originally prompted the Macedonians to give, so the completion of their giving would also set an example. God desires giving that is not marginal, but exemplary.

However, it was not superfluous for Paul to ensure that their readiness materialized. Imagine the potential for humiliation. The poverty-stricken Macedonian church, upon hearing of the rich Corinthians’ readiness to give, had reached down in their affliction and poverty and overflowed in a wealth of generosity, giving beyond their means, begging Paul for the honor of relieving the saints (8:1-6). Picture a ragged party of Macedonians appearing in Corinth and finding the wealthy Corinthians unprepared. Infamous, unremitting humiliation!

Paul himself intends to visit them, and it may be there will be Macedonians with him. For fear of embarrassment then, let them have everything ready by the time he arrives on the scene. Paul mentions both his possible embarrassment and theirs, and so there is in his words a double inducement to them to be prepared.

But there was a far more ominous possibility that Paul carefully states—namely, that his boasting in the Corinthians might prove ‘vain.’ It is the same word used in 6:1 to describe receiving the grace of God ‘in vain.’ Thus, their claim to repentance and salvation would be shown to be false. This means that the authenticity of the Corinthians will soon be decided. The three envoys are actually agents of grace—insurance agents.

The initial ‘willingness’ or eagerness of the Corinthians to contribute was the factor that inspired the Macedonians to offer to share the collection. Now, however, Paul is evidently embarrassed. What the Corinthians were initially enthusiastic to do they have not yet completed, though their goodwill in the matter is undiminished. Lest Paul be ‘ashamed’ – to say nothing of the Corinthians – he exhorts that the arrival of the three representatives bearing this letter be the occasion for bringing the collection swiftly to its completion.

### 3. Willingness (9:5)

<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 not only sent the threesome to ensure the Corinthians’ readiness but also their willing generosity. We must understand that the word ‘gift’ used twice in this verse is literally ‘blessing’ (*eulogian*). Paul’s hope is that his envoys’ arrival well in advance of him would provide time for the Corinthians to spiritually rise to the level of the blessed, graced giving of the Macedonians—so their giving would not be grudging from stingy hearts, but a blessing from graced, willing, generous hearts.

While Paul is clearly laying some moral pressure on the Corinthians, under no circumstances does he want the collection to be ‘grudgingly given;’ as such it would not arise out of grace. It is to be a ‘generous gift.’

Again, Paul was concerned with their souls. His agents were sent to insure (so to speak) the Corinthians’ readiness and willingness to generously give. Mere giving itself is no sign of grace

## 2 Corinthians – Lesson 12

or redemption. It will save no one's soul. The giving of the redeemed is a response to the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ (cp. 8:9). Those who receive such grace give.

### 4. Generosity (9:6)

*<sup>6</sup>The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.*

By this farmers' proverb Paul introduces a thought-model that he will develop in verses 6-10. Implicit in the proverb is the bountiful generosity of God seen in sowing and harvesting. Generous giving brings its own reward. The verse matches Proverbs 11:24-25 (cp. Prov. 22:9; Lk. 6:38). The illustration Paul uses of harvest is striking. Thin sowing leads to thin reaping. Giving is as sensible an exercise as a farmer sowing for a harvest.

Every farmer recognizes that the size of the harvest is directly proportionate to the amount of seed sown. In the spiritual realm, the principle is that giving to God results in blessing from God; 'bountifully' translates *eulogia*, which literally means 'blessing.' Generous givers will reap generous blessings from God, while those who hold back selfishly fearing loss will forfeit gain.

Having described his careful orchestration of giving through his envoys, Paul now shows us what willing, generous giving is like with an easily understood proverb. The proverb employs the Greek word sometimes translated 'blessing' (also used in the previous verse). Thus, supplying the literal sense of 'blessing, the proverb literally reads, 'Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows blessings will also reap with blessings.' This goes back to the giver's heart and God's grace and the manner of giving. God gives back 'blessings' to those who give as a matter of 'blessing.' So it is not how much we give but rather that we give as generously as possible with an attitude of the joy of blessing. Here is the bottom line: we are to be a generous people. What we give, though material, glows with the golden light of eternity. Generosity unleashes that light. To be generous is divine.

God graciously promises a harvest in accord with what believers sow. The appeal is not, of course, to self-interest. The promise is not that God will reward generous givers so they can consume it on their own desires. The real purpose of God's gracious rewarding of believers will become evident as the passage unfolds.

### 5. Cheerfulness (9:7)

*<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.*

The logical conclusion of this proverb is Paul's advice that immediately follows. The force of the call to cheerful giving has its origin in Deuteronomy 15:10-11. That call to cheerful, ungrudging giving had special reference to the Sabbatical year of remission in which every seven years Israel was to forgive all debts (cp. Dt. 15:1-2). But now, under the new covenant, those in Christ are to make such cheerful generosity their *daily* practice.

It is not only what we give that matters but the reason for our giving. It may have seemed to his Corinthian readers that he had been seeking to put pressure on them to give. He implies here that this is untrue. He has not been attempting to override their wills, for voluntariness was of the essence of the matter.

## 2 Corinthians – Lesson 12

God loves the world in a general sense (John 3:16), but He has a deeper, more wonderful love for His own (Jn. 13:1; 1 Jn. 4:16), and a special love for each one of His who gives cheerfully. ‘Cheerful’ giving comes from inside, from the heart, rather than from external coercion. It begins by giving just as one ‘has purposed in his heart.’ Once again, Paul stressed the truth that Christian giving is strictly voluntary.

But though it is not forced, neither is it casual, careless, or a mere afterthought. *Proaireō*, (‘purposed’), used only here in the New Testament, has the idea of predetermination. Though there is spontaneous joy in giving, it is still to be planned and systematic (1 Cor. 16:2), not impulsive and sporadic. Nor is giving to be done ‘grudgingly. *Lupē* (‘grudgingly’) literally means ‘sorrow,’ ‘grief,’ or ‘pain.’ Giving is not to be done with an attitude of remorse, regret, or reluctance, of mourning over parting with what is given. And, it is not to be ‘under compulsion’ from any legalistic external pressure. The giving that God approves of comes from ‘a cheerful giver.’ ‘Cheerful’ translates *hilaros*, from which the English word ‘hilarious’ derives. Happy, joyous givers, who are joyous in view of the privilege of giving, are the special objects of God’s love.

This verse indicates too that the amount of a gift needs to be the result, not of impulse but of thoughtful decision. Giving should not be left to the whim of the moment. The words, ‘God loves a cheerful giver,’ seem to reflect Proverbs 22:8-9, where the same analogy of sowing and reaping occurs and where the Septuagint had a slightly longer text than the Hebrew, including words we may translate as ‘God praises (or blesses) a cheerful and generous giver.’ Both in Proverbs and here in 2 Corinthians we see the importance of motivation (cp. Rom. 12:8).

God’s grace towards us reproduces His graciousness within us. Since God’s grace towards us is infinite and not measured out, we who receive it are to show generosity without measurement or calculation. We are not under compulsion. Thus ours is to be a ready, not a reluctant response. ‘God loves a cheerful giver’ because He is Himself a cheerful giver (cp. v. 15).

Material prosperity does bring the responsibility, however, of using it wisely. Yet the way in which we disburse our gifts is a private and individual matter. We need to think about it seriously and make our own decisions. Both the purpose behind the gifts and the choice of recipients are our own. Our heavenly Father delights not only in what we give but even more in how we give.

### B. Benefits of Giving (2 Corinthians 9:8-15)

#### 1. Personal Benefits (9:8-10)

##### a) Sufficiency (9:8)

<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.*

The first personal benefit is *sufficiency*. The simple truth is, God will give us what we need to give to others—we will always be rich enough to be generous. Do we doubt this? Then we doubt His grace. We also forget that this mention of ‘grace’ refers to the grace given to the poor Macedonian churches (8:1-2). This mention of grace here in 9:8 is the seventh of the eight references to grace in chapters 8-9. God’s grace is sufficient for every good work He calls us to

## 2 Corinthians – Lesson 12

do. The challenge for us is not our wealth or lack of it, but belief and obedience. The generous, giving heart will live in this grace. There will always be enough to be generous.

To the Cynic and Stoic philosophers of Paul's day *autarkeia* ('sufficiency') meant independence from people and circumstances. They viewed such independence as essential to true happiness. But the believer's sufficiency does not come from independence from circumstances but rather from dependence on God.

His children will always have 'all sufficiency in everything.' In this context, that refers primarily to material resources, because the harvest must be of the same nature as the seed. Having sown material wealth by their giving, believers will reap an abundant harvest of material blessing in return. God graciously replenishes what they give so that they lack nothing; He will continuously provide the generous giver with the means of further expressing that generosity.

Not only does God love the cheerful giver, but He, the God of unparalleled generosity, has Himself made that person's generosity possible by His grace. In this verse, Paul underlines very strongly the total character of God's provision, for the Greek word *pas* ('all') in various forms occurs five times, if we include the word translated 'at all times,' which is a compound word including *pas*. Paul was clearly drawing the attention of his readers to the repetition.

Trying to convey the magnanimity of God's generosity, Paul resorted to hyperbole, using a form of the word *pas* ('all') five times in verse 8. God's gracious giving has no limits; it is off the scale. Since giving naturally seems to result in having less, not more, it takes faith to believe that giving will open up God's blessing. Christians must believe that what God has promised to do He is able to do. *Dunateō* ('is able') literally means 'has power.'

Like all authors, Paul had his favorite words. Here he twice uses one of these favorites, *perisseuein* ('abound'), so that the whole verse presents a picture of a God overflowing generosity who, by that generosity, reproduces something of the same character quality in His people.

In recent times there has arisen a 'theology of prosperity' that teaches that God will bless with health and riches those who give generously in support of Christian ministry. What Paul promises to the generous giver is not wealth-in-return but 'all you need' and also sufficient for 'every good work.'

The reason God gives back to those who give is not, as prosperity teachers falsely imply and exemplify, so people can consume it on their own desires with bigger cars, homes, and jewels. God supplies them so they will have 'an abundance for every good deed.' The Lord will fully supply cheerful givers with what they need to use for what is good work to the honor of the Lord. He constantly replenishes what they expend so the cycle of giving and ministering to others can continue. Generous givers are the people whose lives are most full of righteous deeds.

### *b) Righteousness (9:9-10)*

#### (1) Psalm 112:9 (9:9)

<sup>9</sup>*As it is written,*

*"He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor;  
his righteousness endures forever."*

## 2 Corinthians – Lesson 12

The other personal benefit to the generous heart is *righteousness*. Verse 9 quotes a poetic line from Psalm 112:9. The righteousness of the man in this Psalm is proved by his care for the poor. Since it is genuine, it endures forever.

Lest anyone think this was some radical new social welfare plan he had concocted, Paul cites Psalm 112:9 to show this has always been God's plan. God will replenish and reward him both in time and eternity. Deuteronomy 15:10-11 also illustrates this point.

Paul returns to the picture of sowing and harvesting. He quotes Psalm 112:9, which describes the happiness of the individual who fears God and gives generously. Generous giving and practical righteousness are indissolubly linked.

Such a person is the embodiment of the godly person portrayed in Psalm 112:9 who 'scatters abroad his gifts to the poor.' This person is blessed with numerous and upright descendants, with prosperity, with clear guidance in life and with courage. The apostle has the whole Psalm in mind, not merely the verse he quotes.

### (2) Isaiah 55:10 (9:10)

<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.*

Paul continues this idea of righteousness in verse 10 by citing Isaiah 55:10 almost word for word from the LXX. Then Paul alludes to Hosea 10:12, telling his readers that God who supplies seed to the grower will multiply their seed (i.e., material resources) and thus increase the harvest of their righteous deeds.

The words, 'seed to the sower and bread for food,' are in almost exact quotation from the Septuagint of Isaiah 55:10, a passage Paul may well have reflected on because it applies the principles of sowing and reaping to the declaration of the Word of God and its results. Here the analogy is reapplied, quite appropriately, to Christian giving. Those who give generously will be recompensed by God with resources of seed and to enable them to give.

Just as the God of harvest gives the sower enough harvest to supply seed next season, his daily bread, and some surplus beyond that, so God the fruitful provider will bless the generous giver with enough for his needs and will also 'enlarge the harvest of' his righteousness or 'multiply (his) resources' for good works. God provides the giver with enough for his needs and with more than enough to continue sharing with others.

Twin thoughts about harvest find expression here. First, God looks for a harvest of righteousness, because of His own good work in us. One of the fruits of His Spirit's activity in us is generosity. Essential to the harvest of righteousness from our lives is delight in giving. Second, as we love to give, God rewards it by His super-abounding grace. When we give, God may often graciously choose to supply and multiply our resources, to increase the harvest of our righteousness.

What spectacular benefits go to the generous giver! First, sufficiency for any generous deed to which God calls us. And second, a righteousness that endures forever, demonstrated by willing, generous giving that then is followed by a personal harvest of righteousness that extends to the church at large.

## 2 Corinthians – Lesson 12

### 2. Corporate Benefits (9:11-15)

#### a) Generosity (9:11a)

<sup>11</sup>*You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way...*

He makes us rich to make it possible for us to be always generous! This principle must not be misunderstood or wrongly applied. We must not, and do not, give to God and His work with this as our motivation. There must be no ‘penny in the slot’ mentality about our giving. The way God enriches us may not always be financial, since financial blessings are not the most important. Nevertheless, all who give generously and cheerfully know something of the ‘miracle’ and ‘surprise’ of God’s returning and recurring provision.

Paul had a firm grasp of the fact that God deals with us in grace, pouring out His blessings on us, so that we in turn may prove to be a blessing to others. The words ‘in every way’ and ‘on every occasion’ demonstrate how far-reaching Paul sees this principle to be. It also shows that he is not thinking simply of the collection he is making but is establishing an important general principle of the Christian life.

#### b) Thanksgiving (9:11b-12)

*...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.*

First, there is *thanksgiving to God*. The Corinthians’ enrichment through giving was not material prosperity. Their financial condition would wax and wane, like that of others, but they would be enriched by God Himself. The overarching benefit was that the wider church poured out thanksgiving to God.

Paul says, ‘through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.’ He is referring to the fact that the gifts of the Corinthians will be channeled through him and those who will travel with him to Jerusalem. The Jerusalem Christians will thank God for these gifts. Here then we see that the blessing of God moves in a circle. It begins in God’s heart, in His great love for His people. He then pours it out on them and they in turn become channels through whom others are blessed. These in turn complete the circle by returning thanks to God.

In verse 12 Paul described the Corinthians’ ministry of giving with the word *leitourgia* (‘service’), which refers to priestly service (cp. Lk. 1:23). The collection was not primarily a social program but a spiritual service to God. The word translated ‘fully supplying’ consists of the verb *plēroō* with two prepositions added to it for emphasis. The Corinthians’ generosity would meet needs, but more importantly, it would also result in ‘many thanksgivings to God’ when the poor believers in Jerusalem praised God for the Corinthians’ gift.

#### c) Glorification (9:13)

<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...*

The second and parallel benefit is *glory to God*. The Corinthians’ embrace of the gospel would be proved not only by their confession of belief but also by their submission to the grace of giving and their generous contribution to the poor church in Jerusalem. And there in the city of Jerusalem, the Jewish church would praise God for the demonstration of God’s righteousness among the Corinthians.

## 2 Corinthians – Lesson 12

Two qualities of the service of the Corinthians to the Jerusalem Christians were marks of the reality of their faith, in which they had proved themselves. The first was that it showed their obedience. The other mark of faith's genuineness was generosity. It is not only rectitude of conduct that should characterize the Christian believer but also love. Generosity, when properly motivated, is itself a manifestation of love.

Jewish believers in the early church were often suspicious of Gentile converts. It must have been especially difficult for them to believe that the Corinthians' faith was genuine. The city's reputation for immorality was widespread in the Roman world, and the chaotic condition of the Corinthian church would have done little to allay Jewish believers' suspicions. But the Corinthians' sacrificial giving tangibly demonstrated love for their fellow believers, that mark of genuineness. The Corinthians' obedience proved the genuineness of their 'confession of the gospel of Christ.' Their good works did not save them but gave evidence that they possessed a living faith, not a dead faith that is unable to save.

So, then their generosity would accomplish a three-fold result, for the recipients would benefit, they would themselves be blessed, and the God they loved and served would be glorified. Our chief end is to glorify God. Those who benefit from the timely and ample giving of God's people unfailingly give God praise. It is He who prompted the giving and enable the givers to give.

When we opt out of giving, we opt out of the privilege of meeting human needs and also deny ourselves the honor of promoting God's glory. Significantly Paul never deviates from the truth that God saves us by His free grace and not through good works such as giving. This giving is a 'proof' or an 'acknowledgement' of the gospel of Christ. Such goodness is the confirmation of our salvation, but not its basis.

### *d) Fellowship (9:14)*

<sup>14</sup> *...while they long for you and pray for you, because of the surpassing grace of God upon you.*

The third benefit, perhaps unanticipated, was *affection for the Corinthians themselves*. This is the eighth and final mention of grace in this exhortation that began in 8:1 with the first mention of grace, the grace of giving. As Paul anticipates that 'the surpassing grace of God' will produce a generous offering, he knows that the Jewish believers will long for the Gentiles and make them a focus of their prayer, enhancing the wider unity of the church.

The beautiful thought expressed in verse 14 probably meant a great deal to Paul. He had a deep sense of the oneness of the Christian church. The love for the Corinthian church that would be evoked in the hearts of the Jerusalem Christians was a matter of real importance. Not only so, but they would be encouraged to pray for the Corinthians. No Christian church or organization should be concerned in its prayer meetings only with its own work, but should remember God's work in other parts of the world.

Some may think that poor believers have nothing to offer rich ones, but that is not the case. The prayers of the poor are the reward of the rich, and the believers in Jerusalem would repay the Corinthians' generosity by offering prayer on their behalf. Real unity in the church is founded on sound doctrine and mutual prayer. Not only would their fellow believers pray for the Corinthians, they would also yearn for a deeper, more intimate fellowship with them.

Such practical kindness will establish a bond of affection and prayer between giver and receiver. Though separated by distance and culture, they now enjoy a fellowship whose visible expression

## 2 Corinthians – Lesson 12

is the money given and received. The receivers perceive that in the graciousness of the giver may be discerned the outworking of the grace of God in them. Both giver and receiver will know that God's grace, embodied in Christ, has started a chain reaction of generosity, thanksgiving, and fellowship.

The church-wide benefits of ready, willing, generous giving, then and now, are remarkable: thanksgiving to God, glory to God, and a bond of affection within the church.

*e) Praise (9:15)*

<sup>15</sup>*Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!*

As Paul caps his exhortation to give, he can scarcely contain himself. He was giving thanks, of course, for the gift of Christ (cp. 8:9). This is the first time the Greek word translated 'inexpressible' appears anywhere in the Greek language. Paul could find no word to express the ineffable character of God's gift, so he made one up—a word that says, in effect, that the gift can't be described.

In verse 15, Paul, having written much about thanksgiving, now lifts up his own heart to God in gratitude. A word like 'surpassing,' in verse 14, suggests the straining of language to its limits. Paul often has to resort to comparatives and superlatives to express his thought about the wonder and richness of the gospel. The Epistle to the Ephesians is particularly full of them. The word 'indescribable,' however, indicates that, even at the outer linguistic limits, words can never be adequate to describe whatever is in view. This is certainly true of God's gift in Christ. We can describe this great gift but never adequately; we may preach Christ, but never do Him justice. This is surely one of the reasons why heaven will be such a delight for Christians, for there our praise will be far more adequate.

This simple concluding benediction is one of the richest statements in Scripture. God's 'indescribable gift,' is of course, His Son—the most magnanimous, glorious, wonderful gift ever given, the gift that inspires all other gifts. God's gift of the Lord Jesus Christ is the basis for Christian giving.

What we must understand from this is that Paul's call to ready, willing, generous giving is not a call to reach down deep within our beings and rise to the best that is within us. Rather, it is a call to authentically come to Christ in true belief and repentance. It is a call to contemplate Christ's giving as the example for our giving—His embrace of poverty that we might become rich. It is not a call to legalistic observance but to grace, as Paul's repeated mentions of grace emphasizes. It is a call to rise to *His* best within is. It is not a call to save ourselves but to demonstrate by our giving that our faith is not in vain. Christians give. Generous giving is the province of a regenerate heart.

In all our giving, from beginning to end, our eyes must be on our Savior and God's indescribable kindness in giving Him to us. Christian giving, properly understood, is our response to that gift. When our eyes are on the Savior, giving is never a problem!

For next time: Read 2 Corinthians 10:1-18.