

GOD LOVES A CHEERFUL GIVER

2 Corinthians 9:1-15

Key Verse 9:7

“Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”

Last week we heard Dr. Augustine Sohn’s message from 2 Corinthians 8. Especially we thought about Jesus, who though he was rich, became poor for our sakes, so that we, through his poverty might become rich. Jesus is the King of heaven. But he came down from heaven to earth, renouncing his glory and majesty as King. We would expect Jesus, the King of heaven, the One and Only eternally Begotten Son of God, to be treated like royalty, born into a palace and served with only the best that earth has to offer. But Jesus was born into a poor Jewish family and placed in a manger at birth. Furthermore, when Jesus ministered on earth, he had no home to call his own, and no bed to lay down in each night. He depended on people’s generosity and support for food and a place to stay. Finally, Jesus chose the most brutal, painful and humiliating form of death, death on a Roman cross. Though he was rich, he became poor for our sakes. He chose the way of discomfort, sacrifice and suffering. It was so that we, through his poverty, might become rich. So that we, through his suffering and sacrifice, might be saved and brought into his eternal kingdom as children of God and heirs of Christ! Eternal thanks and praise be to Jesus Christ our Savior and King!

Today’s passage continues chapter 8. It is about the collection that the Corinthian believers had pledged to give to the poor and suffering believers in Jerusalem. This collection from the churches or families of believers in Galatia, Macedonia and Achaia to give to the church in Jerusalem was so important that Paul mentions it in three other letters (Ro 15:25-27; 1Co 16:1-4; Gal 2:10; see also Ac 11:29). We will think about why this offering was so important. We will also think about what our proper attitude in giving as Christians should be. I expect that we will be surprised, challenged and even frightened to consider the spirit of giving that depicts a growing Christian life and community.

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First, speak well of others behind their backs. Look at verses 1-2. “There is no need for me to write to you about this service to the Lord’s people. For I know your eagerness to help, and I have been boasting about it to the Macedonians, telling them that since last year you in Achaia were ready to give; and your enthusiasm has stirred most of them to action.” In 8:1-5 Paul told the Corinthians about the overflowing joy and rich generosity of the Macedonian believers who gave a gift to the Lord’s people in spite of their own extreme poverty. The Macedonians were the Christians in Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea. Paul said that the Macedonians gave even beyond their ability for the offering to the Jerusalem believers. In other words Paul spoke with praise about the Macedonians to the Corinthians, praising them for their joyful and sacrificial offering. And here Paul says that he has been boasting to the Macedonians about the Corinthians’ eagerness to help out in this offering. William Barclay gave an insightful comment regarding this: “...the whole point is that [Paul] never criticized one church to another; he praised one to another. [A good] standard by which to test people is whether they delight in speaking the best or the worst of others.”¹

In other words, if you don’t have something good to say about someone, it’s probably best not to say anything. Actually, if we think about it, we can usually find something good to say about someone. I confess that I find it much easier to criticize others, whether churches or fellow Christians behind their backs. I repent and must stop doing this. I pray to grow in and practice the grace of Jesus which is to speak well about others to others. In doing so, I can encourage others to pursue godliness and Christ-like behavior, both by practicing it myself and by urging imitation of the Christ-likeness of others.

Second, if you make a generous promise, keep it. Sometimes on Christian radio we hear fundraising pledge drives to support the radio station. Sometimes people make generous pledges. And sometimes, a few months later, we hear the radio announcer encouraging people to send in the gift that

¹ William Barclay, The New Daily Study Bible: The Letters to the Corinthians, (Westminster John Know Press, 2002, 1st publ. 1954), 275.

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they pledged. This is similar to what the Corinthian church did. Look at verse 5. **“So I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to visit you in advance and finish the arrangements for the generous gift you had promised. Then it will be ready as a generous gift, not as one grudgingly given.”**

Sometimes, in an inspiring moment, we make a promise to God. Maybe it's during a time of prayer or testimony writing. A few months ago I was reading one of my seminary books. My daughter Hannah suddenly asked me about orphanages, saying she wanted to visit one. The page I was reading was talking about orphanages, though she did not know it. I took that as a mysterious sign that I should visit an orphanage with her to make an orphan friend. So I told her I would visit an orphanage with her. But I have not done it yet. The Bible says we should not swear or make promises that we cannot absolutely keep. Have you made any promises to God that you have not kept? Let this be a reminder and an encouragement to follow through with your pledge or promise.

Third, sow generously. Look at verse 6. **“Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously.”** Paul shares an obvious farming and gardening fact: if you plant many seeds, you can expect a greater harvest. The key is: you have to plant many seeds. To plant many seeds requires first of all many seeds and next much time and effort planting. If you plant only a few seeds, you can expect only a small harvest. It's a simple truth that you reap what you sow. For those hoping to have a Bible student or to bring someone to church: if you don't ask anyone, no one will come. If you invite one person, you shouldn't expect many to come. But who knows: if you invite one person, one person might come and bring many others, if God abundantly blesses the prayer and invitation. In UBF terminology we can say: no fishing, no sheep, which means: without inviting someone, no one will come to Bible study.

Paul applies this truth to giving. He says that the one who gives generously will reap generously. What does this mean? Does it mean that if we put \$10 in the offering plate at church, we will soon receive \$100 from somewhere? That is certainly possible. But Paul is talking about spiritual blessings, similar to Jesus' words in Mark 10:29-30, **“Truly I tell you,” Jesus replied, “no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or**

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mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age: homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields—along with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life.”

The one who sows generously will reap generously by God’s blessing. Paul says in verse 8: **“And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.”** This verse has many superlatives: “all things,” “all times,” “all that you need,” “every good work,” “abundantly,” “abound.” God is able to bless us abundantly. This does not mean, as some might hope, that God gives us a blank check to have or ask anything that we want. He provides according, not to our want, but according to our need. Our Heavenly Father knows what we need even before we ask Him. Yet he wants us to ask. He wants us to depend and rely on Him, not on ourselves, or our own hard work or bank accounts.

Fourth, give with the right attitude: cheerfully. Verse 7 is a well-known Bible verse: **“Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”** Here Paul emphasizes the right attitude of giving and the wrong attitude of giving. A wrong attitude is to give reluctantly or under compulsion. This attitude calculates and complains: “Why do I have to give? What if I don’t want to give? Can’t I keep what I have for myself? Can’t I have a savings account? Can’t I own anything?” Since there are laws in the Bible against stealing, yes, we can own things. Generally Americans are generous, and American Christians are more generous. But we are also among the wealthiest humans on earth.

I want to share with you some challenging, uncomfortable thoughts from John Wesley (1703-1791), who founded the evangelical movement known as Methodism. One of Wesley’s frequent sermons was on Matthew 6:19-23 titled, **“Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth...”** He said that Christians should give away all but “the plain necessities of life”—that is, plain, wholesome food, clean clothes and enough to carry on one’s business. All income should be given to the poor after one satisfies bare necessities. Wesley discovered, in his opinion, there is not one person in 500

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in any “Christian city” who obeys Jesus’ command. To him, this demonstrated that most professed believers are “living men but dead Christians.” Any Christian who takes for himself anything more than the “plain necessities of life,” Wesley insisted, “lives in an open, habitual denial of the Lord.” He has “gained riches and hell-fire!”²

This exhortation to be generous to the needy among God’s people stems from Deuteronomy 15:10, which I quote here in its context at length: **“If anyone is poor among your fellow Israelites in any of the towns of the land the LORD your God is giving you, do not be hardhearted or tightfisted toward them. Rather, be openhanded and freely lend them whatever they need. Be careful not to harbor this wicked thought: ‘The seventh year, the year for canceling debts, is near,’ so that you do not show ill will toward the needy among your fellow Israelites and give them nothing. They may then appeal to the LORD against you, and you will be found guilty of sin. Give generously to them and do so without a grudging heart; then because of this the LORD your God will bless you in all your work and in everything you put your hand to. There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore I command you to be openhanded toward your fellow Israelites who are poor and needy in your land.”** (Deut 15:7-11) Although this passage applies to lending money to a poor and needy person among God’s people, the concern for the poor among God’s people is clear.

Sometimes we think that we earned and deserve whatever we have. But Deuteronomy 8:18 is a solemn reminder for us: **“But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth...”** We must not forget that all we have and are comes from God. Martin Luther said, “I have had many things in my hands that I lost; the things that I placed in the hands of God I still possess.”³ Paul says that **“God loves a cheerful giver.”** Of course, God loves all people, but he particularly delights in us when we give joyfully and generously. I delight in my children when they do something good or kind or thoughtful or beautiful to others. God delights and approves of joyful, generous giving. Verse 9 is a quote from Psalm 112:9

² Quoted in Ronald Sider, *Rich Christians In An Age of Hunger*, (Hodder & Stoughton, 1977), 150.

³ From New American Commentary on 2Cor 9:10, Logos Bible Software.

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about the blessedness of a righteous person. The 1984 NIV is closer to the original Greek: **“He has freely scattered his gifts to the poor; his righteousness endures forever.”** The righteous person is generous and righteous. His character reflects the righteousness of God (see Ps 111:3).

Fifth, willing generosity brings thanks and praise to God. God is the Supplier and Provider. Look at verses 10-11. **“Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.”**

God blesses us, not so we can buy better things for ourselves. God blesses us to be generous to those in need. When we are generous, the result is thanksgiving to God. Look at verses 12-14: **“This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of the Lord’s people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, others will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else. And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you.”** When people act in line with their profession of faith in Christ, others are encouraged and God is praised. On the other hand, when Christians are selfish or stingy, people are discouraged and God is not honored. Paul concludes in verse 15: **“Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!”** What is this indescribable gift? It is eternal life. It is Jesus Christ. It is God’s amazing grace and love for us revealed in Jesus Christ.

I want to end this message with a story that is going to sound unreasonable to most everyone who hears it. It is a true story from the book, “Rich Christians In Age of Hunger” by Ronald Sider.⁴ Walt and Ginny were successful professionals. Ginny was associate editor of a Christian magazine. Walt was a biochemistry professor at Iowa State University. Their professional lives left little time to think, write or spend time with their two children. They decided to adopt a much simpler lifestyle. They cut their spending in half and put half their income in savings. After two years, they

⁴ Sider, pp.154-5.

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quit their jobs, bought an old house and learned to live on a fraction of their former income, devoting their time to Christian ministry.

When I heard that story I thought: “Could our family do that?” Then I remembered missionaries Joseph and Esther Chung in Uganda. At the age of retirement, they went as missionaries to Uganda. But I like my comfortable, affluent lifestyle in the USA. Of course, I give generously to our church and to other charities. I give my time to minister to others in Jesus’ name. But I also waste too much time and money on petty pursuits of happiness or rest or comfort or other forms of self-indulgence. Sometimes I think about the needy or less fortunate, in my neighborhood or around the world. The needs are so great. It’s easy to justify myself that I cannot solve the problems of hunger or disease or unemployment for all these people. But I can help one or two in Jesus’ name. I can support five needy children around the world in the name of my five children. I could put aside the money that I was going to spend on an unnecessary luxury or pleasure and donate it to a needy person or Christian organization.

Are you doing anything to help even one needy person? What are you giving to build up the family of believers? How are you investing your life and resources in the eternal kingdom of God, the only inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade? Whoever sows generously will also reap generously. God loves a cheerful giver.