

The Joy of Giving

Special Focus Session

May 26, 2024

### **The Joy of Giving**

**The Point:** Give generously and trust God with the outcome.

**Session Question:** Why is generous giving important in a Christian's life?

**Session Passage:** 2 Corinthians 9:6-15

### **God gives freely and loves a cheerful giver - 2 Corinthians 9:6-9**

**The Author.** Paul (also known as Saul) was a circumcised Jew from the tribe of Benjamin. Although born in Tarsus, he was a Hebrew with impeccable credentials, blameless according to the law, and a well-educated Pharisee (Phil. 3:5-6). He also had been a fierce persecutor of the church (Acts 7:58; 8:1; 9:1-2). On the road to Damascus to imprison followers of "the Way," his conversion experience dramatically changed his life. From that point, Paul became as zealous in taking the gospel to the Gentiles as he had been in persecuting believers. Second Corinthians is one of three known letters Paul wrote to the church at Corinth. Two of those letters are in the biblical canon. One letter is lost (1 Cor. 5:9-13).

**The Letter.** Paul wrote 2 Corinthians from Macedonia, or possibly Ephesus, to the church at Corinth between AD 55-57. The letter addressed problems in the congregation and informed the church that Paul was planning a return visit. He urged them to complete a collection for the impoverished church in Jerusalem, whose leaders had asked him to remember the poor there (Gal. 2:10). Paul avowed to do his part. As soon as he left on his second missionary journey, he began his relief campaign for those who were destitute.

**Need for the Offering.** Scholars suggest several reasons for why the Jerusalem church was struggling financially: 1) An increase in the number of widows needing care (Acts 6:1). 2) The increase of converts moving to Jerusalem (2:5). 3) Issues with the Jerusalem church's communal lifestyle (4:32). 4) The financial drain due to famine (11:27-29). 5) The wealthy elite's oppression of the poor (Jas. 2:6-7; 5:4).

Paul desired that the collection for the poor would unify the church. He wanted to show the Jews that believing Gentiles united with them in faith (Eph. 4:4-6). They were cheerfully willing to help financially in gratitude for the privilege of sharing in God's covenant (Rom. 15:25-27). In addition, Paul hoped the Gentiles' generosity would provoke more Jews to place faith in Jesus Christ. His prayer was that they would see the Gentiles' gifts as a fulfillment of prophecy (Isa. 2:2-4; 60:6-7,11)

**Sows sparingly . . . reap sparingly, . . . sows generously . . . reap generously** (v. 6). Most people had some knowledge of agriculture. The typical outcome of sowing seed was the more a person sowed, the better the harvest. No farmer was concerned about conserving seed during planting season. He knew that if he was conservative in sowing, he was defrauding himself. Paul applied this illustration to meeting the needs of the poor. Those open-handed with their gifts would receive blessings in return. The more generously one gave, the more generously one would receive.

Some have twisted this verse in order to line their own pockets. Paul's request for financial help was never for himself but for the Jerusalem church. The motive was never to increase one's personal wealth. Blessings come in many different forms, both material and spiritual. If God blesses financially, it is so more can be given to those in need.

**Decided** (v. 7). The Greek verb means "to prefer" or "choose for one's self" and appears in the New Testament only here. Paul wanted the Corinthians to give, not out of duty, but as a result of thankfulness to the Lord for His willingness to give Himself for them.

**Heart** (v. 7). People often mistakenly believe that once one has determined a dictionary definition of a biblical term, that definition holds throughout Scripture. However, the context in which a word is used is critical. Just as some English words have multiple meanings, so some ancient Hebrew and Greek words often encompass a much broader understanding. The Greek word for *heart* most often refers to more than the organ inside the body. In this instance, it indicates a person's basis for making a choice. One who has made a firm decision cannot be easily swayed in judgment or intention.

**Compulsion** (v. 7). This word refers to forcefully guiding someone in a particular direction. Although it can be used in a positive sense (Matt. 14:22; 1 Cor. 9:16), most New Testament usages have a negative overtone. Paul did not want the Corinthians to give halfheartedly or out of obligation. One's attitude in giving is important. The amount is inconsequential. Those who give grudgingly forfeit any blessing they would have received if they had given cheerfully.

**Since God loves a cheerful giver** (v. 7). Paul quoted from Proverbs 22:8 as it appears in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, our Old Testament). The Hebrew text in Proverbs 22:9 connects the blessing a generous person receives with willingness to give to the poor. The Hebrew word for *generous person* literally means "a pleasant or good eye" as opposed to "an evil eye" of a tight-fisted person (Prov. 23:6; 28:22). God is pleased with the one who gives cheerfully (Deut. 15:10).

**Every** (v. 8). The Greek word for "all" or "every" is repeated five times in this verse—"every grace," "every way," "always," "everything you need," and "every good work." God abundantly meets every need. Often, the more one gives, the more one receives from God to use as charity for others.

**Grace** (v. 8). The Greek word can take on different inferences depending on the context. It can refer to joy, pleasure, or charm. It may speak of kindness, favor, or blessing. Often it addresses the benefit of something given. On rare occasions, the word can translate as “thanks.” In this instance, it carries a broad connotation, referring to material blessings and the divine persuasion to give those blessings away.

**Everything you need** (v. 8). A literal interpretation of this Greek phrase is “all-sufficiency.” First-century philosophers used this term to describe a person free from everything and anyone. They did not need to engage with others. Their wealth allowed them to be independent of society. Paul suggested that having enough doesn’t mean people should isolate themselves from the world. Rather, it meant the opposite. They should curtail their material desires so they may develop relationships by sharing with others.

**Righteousness** (v. 9). The Greek term appears ninety-two times in the New Testament. It refers to what is right, just, or fair according to God’s divine attributes and supreme authority. God is entirely righteous. Humanity is desperately sinful. But humanity can receive righteousness by placing faith in the work of Jesus Christ’s sacrificial death on the cross (Rom. 3:22; 4:5; 2 Cor. 5:21).

**He distributed freely; he gave to the poor; his righteousness endures forever** (v. 9). Paul quoted Psalm 112:9. In the psalm, “righteousness” is ascribed to God’s holy character. However, this psalm connects the rightness of the heart with giving to the poor. Every person is needy whether or not that one recognizes the fact. One only has what God has given. God supplies some with more than they need so they may aid those who are less fortunate. The charity of a Christian becomes part of the bigger picture of God’s goodness, and each act of giving *endures forever*. Therefore, one evidence of a right relationship with God is caring for those in need (Dan. 4:27).

#### **God multiplies our gifts - 2 Corinthians 9:10-11.**

**Provides seed** (v. 10). Paul returned to his farming analogy (v. 6). God’s righteousness is compared to seed. God gives it, God sows it, and God produces the harvest. In the parable of the rich fool, the ground produced a good crop (Luke 12:16). Jesus’s audience understood that God caused the ground to produce, not the rich man. In Mark 4:26-29, the farmer does not know how the seed “sprouts and grows.” “The soil produces a crop by itself.” Paul used a similar analogy in 1 Corinthians 3:6 when he said, “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth.” A generous person believes God will supply all of his immediate and future needs.

**The harvest of your righteousness** (v. 10). This phrase speaks of righteousness applied to people. One’s righteousness does not come from one’s self. No amount of good deeds a person performs can earn a right standing with God. Righteousness comes from Christ extending His righteousness to sinners through His atoning death on the cross. As a result, one should sacrificially work out the righteousness that has been worked in by Christ. Evidence of having

right standing with God shows when people freely give time, abilities, or money to help others, but God gives the results.

**Enriched** (v. 11). In the New Testament, wealth often carries negative connotations (Matt. 19:24; Luke 6:24). However, the meaning here is one of blessing. God gives abundance to those who are generous. One does not receive riches so one can “eat, drink, and be merry” (Luke 12:19, KJV). The key to resolving whether wealth is evil or good hinges on how people use what God has given (Rev. 3:17-18).

**Thanksgiving** (v. 11). Old Testament worship centered around thanksgiving in response to God’s acts in the past. As the people of Israel traveled from their villages to the Jerusalem temple three times a year, thankfulness characterized their worship (Pss. 42:4; 95:2; 100:4; 122:4). Festivals that celebrated national deliverance, God’s covenant, and forgiveness were characterized by praise and thanksgiving to God (30:4-5; 44:7-8; 100:5). Giving thanks was even more important than offering sacrifices (69:30-31).

Giving thanks should be the natural response of a Christian and a key element in one’s worship. Those who receive abundance from God will give thanks. Others will offer thanksgiving for the gifts bestowed to them from another. A lack of thankfulness reveals a worthless mind and a darkened heart (Rom. 1:21).

**Produces . . . through us** (v. 11). The wording of this phrase reminds the reader that Paul offered this instruction on cheerful giving for a specific cause. The opportunity given to the Corinthians was not only an occasion to be generous, it was also a chance to affect the church across the Roman empire. Earlier in the letter (2 Cor. 8:5), Paul shared with the Corinthians how this collection was already affecting the church. The Macedonians had begged for the privilege to participate in the offering. Not only did they gladly give of their finances, but they also gave “themselves first to the Lord and then to us by God’s will.” The “us” in this verse may refer to Paul and Timothy (1:1), or the pronoun may assume the apostle and the Jerusalem leadership that requested the aid. Building unity between the Jews and Gentiles in the church was one of Paul’s chief goals.

### **God is glorified when you are generous - 2 Corinthians 9:12-15.**

**Ministry** (v. 12). The Greek word refers to working for the benefit of the gospel. This is one’s act of carrying out some deed toward building the body of Christ in unity, faith, knowledge, and maturity (Eph. 4:12). In 1 Corinthians 12:5 Paul stated, “There are different ministries, but the same Lord.”

**Service** (v. 12). This Greek word is used in a couple of ways. First it speaks of public service or giving money to a particular cause. It was the lot of the wealthy to devote funds for the good of a city or community. In return, they were honored with inscriptions and memorials for what they had done. An inscription with the name “Erastus” (possibly the one mentioned in Rom.

16:23) was found at Corinth stating that he was responsible for paving the theater plaza. Luke 7:5 mentions a Roman centurion who built a synagogue for the people of Capernaum. The citizens of the town felt that this act of generosity made the soldier worthy of the Lord's aid. However, the service that Paul spoke of is not just for the rich. The poor can also give.

The word for *service* can also refer to the duty of a priest. An example is in Philippians 2:17. Paul blended the two meanings to say that his ministry to the Philippians was a "drink offering" to God that brought thanksgiving to many for His bountiful blessings.

**Proof provided by this ministry** (v. 13). An assessment of the legitimacy of one's faith is giving to those in need. The collection for the Jerusalem church was critical because it demonstrated that the church had such confidence in God to supply all their needs, they freely and cheerfully gave what they had.

**Obedient confession** (v. 13). *Confession* refers to more than just a person's words. People's proclamations of faith will be viewed as hypocritical if their actions don't support their words. Paul praised the Corinthians for not only *confessing* Christ with their mouths but *confessing* Him with their actions—specifically the financial support of their Jewish partners in the gospel. Their presentation of love was a sign that God's grace was for everyone. The gospel made those who once were enemies, now friends and co-heirs with Christ.

**Pray on your behalf** (v. 14). Paul believed that the contributions to the Jerusalem church would bring unity through prayer. In Romans 15:31, Paul requested that the Romans pray their gift would be received the same way it was given. He hoped that when the Jerusalem church received the financial gift, they would reciprocate by praying for the Gentile believers. As a result, their intercession for the Gentile believers would create a deep affection for those brothers and sisters in Christ. The barriers of race and heritage would no longer separate them from fellowship. Oswald Chambers once said a common adage is that "prayer changes things," but a more accurate statement may be that "prayer changes me, and then I change things." When a person is redeemed by God, He transforms the way that person views life. Prayer is not just about changing an external situation but working wonders in one's own frame of mind.

**Grace** (v. 14). It may seem odd to think of one's finances as something undeserved. A person normally considers money as something one works hard to receive. However, when Paul spoke of money, he used the word *grace* or *gift*. Whereas mercy is not receiving the punishment we deserve, grace is receiving spiritual blessings we don't deserve. Both terms (*grace* and *gift*) come from the same Greek root. Everything a person has is a gift (*charisma*) of God's grace (*charis*). God blesses people with what they have so that they might extend God's grace to someone else. When people hoard what God has given, it is no longer grace for anyone.

**Thanks** (v. 15). *Charis* is the word used here also. Earlier in verse 8, different translations for this Greek word were discussed. Thanks (or grace) is not given to the Corinthians for their generous contributions. It is offered to God for His “indefinable gift.” This gift encompasses God’s salvation, His Son, and His grace wrapped together as one provision of His goodness to those who place faith in Jesus Christ (8:9).

**Gift** (v. 15). This translates a different Greek word (*dorea*). Whereas *charis* speaks of spiritual gifts, *dorea* refers to the physical offering of something to another free of charge or worthiness. All New Testament references to this word pertain to a gift from God to a person.

**Conclusion.** A Christian’s giving is to model the sacrificial gift Christ gave for the church. Christ gave all He had. Giving should come joyfully from the overflow of one’s heart and in proportion to what God has given that person (Mark 12:41-44). It supports the needs of others and the unity of the church at large. As a result of the love shown among believers, lost people are drawn to saving faith in Jesus Christ (John 13:34-35).

Romans 15:25-27 suggests Paul’s collection was a success. On his way to Jerusalem, he wrote that Macedonia and Achaia (of which the city of Corinth was a part) were pleased to contribute to the poor in Jerusalem. Not only did they want to help the Jerusalem saints, but they also recognized the debt they as Gentiles owed the Jews for the spiritual benefits received through them.