

GOD LOVES A CHEERFUL GIVER

This morning I want to bring a lesson that I believe you are going to love, even though it is probably not one most of you would choose to listen to if given a choice. I want us to spend some time looking at God's word about something said in our reading early in the week, as we continue working our way through the New Testament Studies. I am referring to something said in **2 Corinthians 9:7**. Paul writes, "*God loves a cheerful giver.*"

You might be thinking, "Oh no! Not another lesson on giving!" Well, I can assure you won't think that by the time I get through this morning, and hopefully you realize that I don't really preach that much on this subject. For the most part, you are a congregation who give graciously and generously, and that has not been one of our problems. But before I get into that specific idea—that God loves a cheerful giver—let's first get the context.

Paul was writing about a collection that he was taking up among the Gentile churches. You will remember that Paul was called by the Lord to become a special ambassador to the Gentiles. While Peter and the rest of the twelve preached the gospel, especially among the Jews, Paul was commissioned to make the name of Christ known among the nations. You may recall that following Paul's first mission journey, a controversy developed because some of the Jewish Christians had begun teaching and insisting that Gentiles had to be circumcised first. Essentially, their idea was that Gentiles needed to become Jews and then they could be saved. Well, it was decided that this was something that needed to be discussed and so a council of a number of Christians was convened in Jerusalem. The apostles were there as well as the elders in Jerusalem, along with Paul and Barnabus. At this conference, Paul shared what had been happening among the Gentiles. It was decided that Gentiles did not have to be circumcised, and a letter to that effect was written which Paul and others were to take to the Gentile churches. Paul was to continue taking the gospel to the Gentiles, and Galatians 2:10 tells us something that we don't get from the Acts 15 story. In Galatians, Paul tells us that the brethren—meaning the ones in Jerusalem—asked Paul to remember the poor as he went among the Gentile churches. That is, he was to try to let Christians in the rest of the world know about the plight of Christians in Judea. A famine had hit Judea and Galilee hard and a number of the Christians in those places were having a very difficult time. Paul tells us that he gladly took that on as a kind of personal commitment to help the Christians in Judea.

This is first mentioned there in Galatians 2:10, and again in **1 Corinthians 16:1,2**, where he writes, "*Now concerning the collection for the saints: as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do. 2) On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come.*"

Several months after writing that first letter to the Corinthians, Paul writes a second letter, and again in chapters 8 and 9 he speaks to them about that collection. In chapter 8 and verse 6, he refers to it as an act of grace and then in verse 7, encourages them to excel in that grace. And then in verse 8, he says something we all need to hear. He says, "*I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine.*" He encourages them

by the example of Christ, saying in **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 by his poverty might become rich.”*

He tells them to make every effort to complete what they had expressed the desire to do a year earlier. He says, *“So now finish doing it as well, so that your readiness in desiring it may be matched by your completing it out of what you have. 12) For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have.”*

And then going on to chapter 9, we come to the text that I want us to draw a lesson from this morning. It’s a lesson from the mind and heart of God. [9:1-12].

I am so thankful that this passage was written for us and passed on to us down through the ages. I am thankful because this passage along with the experiences God has given me, I think I have begun to see the truth of what Paul said here, and of what Jesus said, according to **Acts 20:35**, that *“It is more blessed to give than to receive.”*

Have you thought about that, and have you thought about the implications of verse 7 in our text? *“God loves a cheerful giver.”* Notice, Paul didn’t say, “God loves a big giver.” He said, *“God loves a cheerful giver.”*

Now let me quickly deal with something because you may be thinking, “I thought God loves everybody.” Well it may surprise you, that isn’t true! It is true in the sense that God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, and that Christ tasted death for every man.

But there is another sense, in which God does not love everyone. There are some people God hates. “Oh no,” you say, God doesn’t hate anyone, he just hates what some people do. He hates the sin, but he loves the sinner.” If you think that, you need to rethink it. You are mistaken on two grounds. One, the Bible does not say that, and number two, the Bible in fact says the very opposite.

Take for example, **Psalm 5:5** *“The boastful shall not stand before your eyes; you hate all evildoers.”* Or, **Psalms 11:5** *“The LORD tests the righteous, but his soul hates the wicked and the one who loves violence.”* Or consider that whole **Proverbs 6:16-19** passage where the Bible speaks of six things the Lord hates, seven that are an abomination to him. You see, the reality is, you cannot separate the sin from the sinner. Lying is not going to go to hell. Unforgiven liars are going to go to hell. Blasphemy is not a sin that is going to be punished with everlasting fire. Unforgiven blasphemers are going to be punished with everlasting fire.

It is true that God is love, and therefore, passages such as Romans 5:8 can speak of God loving even those who are sinners. However, in 2 Corinthians 9:7, Paul is not just saying that God loves cheerful givers because He is a God of love. He is saying that a cheerful giver is someone in whom God finds special delight and pleasure. He is someone to whom God binds himself to

keep and honor and bless. The heart of a cheerful giver matches the heart of a loving God in a very special way. That is what Paul is saying.

So who wouldn't want to be a cheerful giver? Especially, what Christian is there that wouldn't want to be a cheerful giver? In this passage, Paul is trying to motivate the Christians, not just to give, but to give cheerfully. Look at the reasons he gives why Christians ought to be cheerful givers.

Using the analogy of sowing and reaping, Paul first of all says, *"keep this in mind. If you sow sparingly you will reap sparingly. And if you sow bountifully, you will also reap bountifully."* There are a lot of you who have been putting in your gardens this spring, both vegetables and flowers. I put out four tomato plants, but take a guess at how many brother Vern Ellis put out? He put out 40! Now guess who is going to have the most tomatoes? There is no question who is going to have the most, is there? Not only is he just a better gardener than me, he sows more bountifully than I do.

Paul applies that principle to giving, and here's his point: knowing that you are going to reap generously enables you to give generously. You have decided you are going to give a certain amount, and you have been generous in determining the amount you are going to give. That makes it possible for you to give it cheerfully. Paul said God does not want you giving *"reluctantly."* When we give to God, it is not like someone has put a gun to our head and demanded our money. We give generously and we give it cheerfully!

So many people are reluctant givers. If they give at all, so many people give sparingly because they resent using their money for anything other than what they want. They see giving to the church like paying for a meal, or paying taxes. They resent having to do that, and so instead of giving it cheerfully and giving generously, they give reluctantly, and they give as little as they can. Consequently, they never find any real joy or pleasure in giving. Paul is trying to help us with that. He's trying to help us learn how to live a life that is happier, richer—not just in terms of things, but in terms of pleasure, of satisfaction.

Now, Paul is not saying what many of these "health and wealth" preachers are saying today. Such men as that are trying to motivate people to give, and to give generously in order to get more. Actually they are doing it so they can get more, but they want people to believe that if they will give them more, they will get more themselves. And if you are not careful, you might think that is what Paul is saying here, but it isn't. This is not a "get rich quick" scheme. This is not about you getting richer. In fact, notice carefully, what Paul is saying. **Verse 8**, he says: *"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."* What's God doing? Is he making you richer? No, it isn't about you at all is it? What He is doing is that He is enabling you to do even more for others!

It's as if God is saying, *"If you find pleasure and derive satisfaction from helping others, then let me show you how you can have more pleasure and find more satisfaction than you have ever*

dreamed of having!" He says, "I will make **ALL GRACE ABOUT TO YOU...SO THAT HAVING ALL SUFFICIENCY...IN ALL THINGS...AT ALL TIMES...YOU MAY ABOUT IN EVERY GOOD WORK!**"

Now friends, if that doesn't bring a smile to your face and warm your heart, you might as well go down to Trout Funeral Home and ask them to put you in the ground because you are already dead!

Understand, it isn't about us anymore. It is certainly not about us getting richer and richer so we can be rich and have everything our hearts have ever wanted. It is about learning what really makes us happy in life, and as Jesus said, "*It is more blessed to give than to receive.*"

You may have seen this, but someone took a picture of week before last in the aftermath of the tornado that struck Moore. It was a plaque or sign laying there in all the rubble, and it said, "***The most important things in life are not things!***" And that is so true, isn't it! The most important things in life are not things. God is not in the business of making people rich so they can live the good life. He is in the business of blessing you so you can find true pleasure in that which is the most important thing in life!

And Paul reinforces that point there in **verse 10**, when he writes: "*He who supplies seed—referring to God of course—"to the sower"—referring to you and me—"and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness.*" He says God supplies the seed in the first place. He is the one who provides you with your daily bread, and he says God will multiply your seed. Well why would you want or need more seed? So you can take it down to the seed bank and have this huge pile of seed? No, seed is pretty much useless unless and until it is sown, and so God multiplies your seed for sowing, so there can be an ever greater increase in the harvest of your righteousness.

But notice too, Paul gives yet another, very important reason why giving should bring us such pleasure. Look at **verses 11 and 12**. Paul says: "*You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God.*"

Do you want God to be honored and praised and loved and thanked? If so, Paul says, here is one way you can help make that happen. You make the decision that you are going to give, and Paul wasn't just talking about giving on the Lord's Day. He was talking about in any and every opportunity God gives to you, when you give bountifully, you will reap bountifully. Not only that, your seed for sowing is multiplied, and as God enables you to meet need after need, the praise and thanksgiving to God begins to flow!

"*God loves a cheerful giver. It is more blessed to give than it is to receive.*" Do you believe those two scriptures? Are you a giver, and are you a cheerful giver? Or are you someone whose heart is hard and soul is withered? Are you someone who resents it and grumbles when the preacher talks about these things? God is not the big tax man in the sky; He is the one who

wants to bless you so you can get the pleasure of doing more and more for others, while God gets more and more praise and thanksgiving.

I believe that was what Paul was trying to help the Corinthians see and understand, and to do and experience. He wanted them to know the pleasure that comes from being a cheerful giver. I hope you know that pleasure, but it might be that your life is not even in a right relationship with God. If you are not a Christian, the place to begin putting this lesson into practice is to become obedient to the gospel. If you have done that, but have been failing to live up to your confession, or even living in a way that has put that relationship in danger, we would encourage you as well this morning to humble yourself and respond to God's invitation. If you know this is what you need to do this morning, will you come while together we stand and sing.

Invitation

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