

The Lens: How the Gospel Shapes Giving Money, Part 2

December 27, 2015

2 Corinthians 9:6-15

The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. 7 Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. 8 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. 9 As it is written,

“He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor;

his righteousness endures forever.”

10 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. 11 You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. 12 For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God. 13 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, 14 while they long for you and pray for you, because of the surpassing grace of God upon you. 15 Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!

NOTES:

To understand money, we must understand the context Biblically. That is, we must understand what the Bible says about money in its whole so that we can understand specifically what 2 Corinthians 9 teach us about money. Here is a quote I found quite interesting about money from Richard Halverson, the chaplain of the U.S. Senate,

“Jesus Christ said more about money than about any other single thing because, when it comes to a man's real nature, money is of first importance. Money is an exact index to a man's true character. All through Scripture there is an intimate correlation between the development of a man's character and how he handles his money.”

Here is what Jesus taught on the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew's gospel:

Lay Up Treasures in Heaven

¹⁹“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, ²⁰but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

²²“The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, ²³but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!

²⁴“No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.”¹

2 Corinthians 9:6-15

Verse 6

Commentaries on text, see footnotes for references:

6 Paul encourages his readers to make the generous gift referred to in v 5, by reminding them of an agricultural truism: *Whoever sows generously will also reap generously*. The ‘sowing’ and ‘reaping’ in this context refer to the contribution the Corinthians are to make and the results of that contribution, respectively. (The hoped-for result is described in vs 12–14).²

¹ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2001), Mt 6:19–24.

² D. A. Carson et al., eds., *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, 4th ed. (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), 1200–1201.

Ver. 6.—**But this I say.** The Greek only has “But this.” The ellipse can hardly be “I say.” It is an accusative used absolutely—“as to their.” Compare “But one thing” (Phil. 3:14). **Shall reap also sparingly.** In the Greek the more emphatic order is “sparingly also shall reap.” The metaphor of the harvest implies that the more generous the gift the richer will be the return; and that “withholding more than is meet” will only tend to poverty (Prov. 11:24, 25; 19:17; 22:9). (For “sowing” and “reaping” in this connection, comp. 1 Cor. 9:11.) Bountifully; literally, *with blessings*; Vulgate, *in benedictionibus* (comp. Gal. 6:7, 8). Bountifulness blesses both him that gives and him that takes.³

C. Reward of generosity (9:6–15)

In the grace of God Christians are rewarded in three ways for their generosity: (1) the givers are enriched (vv. 6–10); (2) the receivers’ needs are met (vv. 11–12); and (3) God, the Source of all blessing, is praised (vv. 13–15).

9:6–7. Why should the Corinthians give generously? (v. 5) Paul gave two reasons. (1) A principle holds true in both the natural and the spiritual spheres: the size of a harvest corresponds to the scope of the sowing (cf. Prov. 11:24–26). A man may enjoy all his grain by eating it, or he may “lose” some of it by sowing it and later reaping a bountiful harvest. A spiritual harvest, of course, may differ in kind from the seed sown. Material seed may reap a spiritual harvest (2 Cor. 9:9; cf. 1 Cor. 9:11). (2) Another reason for giving generously is that God loves generosity. God prizes not the size of the gift (cf. Acts 11:29; 1 Cor. 16:2), but the giver’s sincerity (**not reluctantly**), spontaneity (not **under compulsion**), and joyful willingness (**a cheerful giver**).⁴

9:8. Ultimately Christians can dispense only what they have received, whether material (Acts 14:17) or spiritual (Rom. 5:17). The good work is done through God’s enabling (cf. Phil. 1:6). Regardless of how desperate one’s circumstances, a person who wants to give can do so in dependence on God (cf. Phil. 4:11–13; e.g., the widow of Zarephath, 1 Kings 17:9–16; and the Macedonians, 2 Cor. 8:1–3). Once again Paul sounded the note that man’s inability, by contrast, showcases God’s work (4:7). This verse is full of words indicating inclusiveness in God’s enabling: **all grace ... in all things at all times, having all that you need ... in every good work.** In the words “all things,” “all times,” and “all ... you need,” the Greek heaps three words one after the other: *panti pantote pasan*. **God** is indeed sufficient! His “every” grace *abounds* so that believers can **abound** “in every good work.”

9:9–10. The abounding grace mentioned in verse 8 refers to more than provision for one’s needs of the moment. Charity reaps an eternal reward (cf. Prov. 19:17; Matt. 25:40). A person

³ H. D. M. Spence-Jones, ed., *2 Corinthians*, The Pulpit Commentary (London; New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1909), 219.

⁴ David K. Lowery, “2 Corinthians,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 575.

who “fears the Lord” (Ps. 112:1) and **gives gifts to the poor** (from Ps. 112:9, which Paul quoted) will be vindicated on the last day (cf. Matt. 6:1). Practical **righteousness endures forever** not only through the deeds but in the doer as he is progressively transformed into Christlikeness (2 Cor. 3:18). Ultimately a believer’s reward is the culmination of the process (Phil. 3:14, 21). The One who supplies what is needed is God alone (Phil. 2:13). God (**who supplies seed ... and bread**) enlarges **the harvest** (rewards or blessings) that results from righteous, generous living. The riches of **righteousness** are inestimable (cf. 6:10).

9:11–13. The more one gives to others, the more he is enriched, and thus he **can be generous on every occasion**. Such a generous spirit toward others results in more and more people giving **thanksgiving to God**.⁵

God is the subject of V. 8: And God...“Now he who supplies the seed ...” If “his righteousness” refers to God’s righteousness, then the meaning would accord with what Paul has maintained throughout this section; charity comes from God. The Lord is gracious and merciful to provide all that we need and shows his righteousness in scattering gifts to the poor. The charitable acts of Christians, then, are all “part of that larger righteousness of God by which they themselves live and in which they will remain forever (v. 9).” Their righteous acts are “taken as the acts of God.”¹⁴⁷⁶

9:10 God is the one who provides, scatters, and multiplies. God is the source of the seed (Isa 55:10–11), which is likened to righteousness (Hos 10:12), and God produces the crop. Paul’s interpretation of the psalm is drawn from his observation of the farming process. The seed planted provides a harvest and enough seed to plant next year’s harvest. But this statement also reflects the basic confession of Judaism that God graciously provides all of the bounty of nature. The Hebrew would have understood the opening phrase of Jesus’ parable of the rich fool, “the ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop” (Luke 12:16), to mean that God produced the crop. This idea also emerges in the parable of the seed that grows of itself (*automatē*) and the farmer does not know how (Mark 4:26–29). Paul’s statement that he planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth (1 Cor 3:6) shows that he shares this basic presupposition that all harvests come from God, not from the farmers. The one who is generous acts on the assured faith that God bountifully supplies bread for the sower and multiplies the seed corn for future harvests.

The phrase “the harvest of your righteousness” now applies “righteousness” to humans, “your righteousness.” The harvest of righteous deeds, like the harvest of the field, does not come from us, but from God. The righteousness that we become through Christ’s sacrificial death (5:21) works itself out in our sacrificial generosity to others. A lack of generosity calls into question whether or not we have truly received the righteousness of God. Paul’s point is that God

⁵ David K. Lowery, “2 Corinthians,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 575.

⁶ David E. Garland, *2 Corinthians*, vol. 29, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 410.

makes us righteous through Christ and gives us seed money for a harvest of generosity. The more we sow, the greater the harvest; and the greater the harvest now, the greater the harvest will be in the future.

The principle Paul lays out is similar to the crass economic principle that the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. The generous get richer; the miserly grow poorer—a truth memorably captured in secular literature by the characters of Ebenezer Scrooge and Silas Marner. But growing richer may not mean wealth the way the world measures wealth. They are spiritually richer and regard whatever material resources they may possess as providing enough for themselves (see 1 Tim 6:8) and enough to give to others who have nothing. The problem with being tight-fisted is that the closed fist prevents us from receiving anything more from God. When we are open handed with others, our hands are also open to receive more from God. MacGregor writes:

A selfish man is never rich. His day is as long as his neighbour's, yet he has no leisure except for his own amusements, no sympathy or concern beyond his own perplexities, no strength but to fight his own battles, and no money except for his own need; what haunts his mind at every turn is the dread of having too little for himself.

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.

9:11 The first half of the verse summarizes Paul's point in the previous verses: God will provide the means for them to be generous. They will not be enriched so that they can become like the rich fool who sits back in comfort and says to himself, "You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry" (Luke 12:19). They are enriched solely to give them every opportunity to be generous with others. God is generous in giving people wealth so that they may be generous with others. What we do with our money, then, becomes a litmus test for our relationship to God. If we try to hoard it or to spend it all on ourselves, that should set off alarm bells that our relationship with God is out of balance or worse, nonexistent. The rich fool with his bulging barns and bumper crop wondered where he could store all his good things to preserve them all for himself. It apparently never crossed his mind that he had plenty of storage in the mouths of the needy. Those who are decisive and resourceful in trying to find ways to use God's bounty to help others, as the rich fool was decisive and resourceful in finding ways to feather his own luxuriant nest, are those who are righteous in God's eyes (see 8:2) and who live out God's righteousness.

In the middle of outlining the principles explaining why the Corinthians should be generous, Paul reminds them that he is not talking about generosity in general. He wants them to be generous for this particular project that is "being worked through us." Paul is the agent who initiated the undertaking that will allow their generosity not only to issue in a harvest of righteousness but also to produce a worldwide impact on Christ's church. The project that he is administering brings a focus to their giving which amplifies its significance. It therefore requires that they emulate the Macedonians (8:5) in giving themselves first to the Lord and then to Paul in giving to the ministry for the saints.

The second half of the verse introduces the theme of thanksgiving by those who receive their

gifts, and this idea is developed in the next verse (see 1:11; 4:15). Giving to others becomes a kind of thank-offering to God that multiplies itself. We thank God for what we have received; others thank God for what they have received from us.⁷

9:11–13. The more one gives to others, the more he is enriched, and thus he **can be generous on every occasion**. Such a generous spirit toward others results in more and more people giving **thanksgiving to God**.

One expression of this generosity was the contribution to the Jerusalem saints, administered by Paul. **Not only** would **this service** (vv. 12–13; cf. 8:4; 9:1) meet the pressing **needs of** Jerusalem Christians **but** it would **also overflow in many expressions of thanks to God** and bring **praise to God**. The Corinthian participation in this charitable gesture would demonstrate the reality of their **confession** and the vitality of their spiritual lives.

9:14–15. Because the Corinthians sent material aid, they reaped the intercessory **prayers** of the Jerusalem Christians who in praising **God** invoked His blessings on their Corinthian brethren. This spirit of selflessness is a consequence of God's **surpassing grace** (cf. "grace" in 8:1, 9; 9:8) supremely expressed in the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ (8:9). This section on giving concludes (9:15) where it began (8:1), with the grace of God. **Thanks** in 9:15 is the word *charis* ("grace, favor"). Believers are to bestow "favor" on **God** because of His favors bestowed on them. **His greatest gift** (*dōrea*) is eternal salvation, spiritual riches, through His rich Son who became poor (8:9). Such a gift is **indescribable** (*anekdiēgētō*, "unable to recount or tell fully," used only here in the NT). Those who have benefited from such a spiritual gift (stemming from God's grace) should not hesitate to benefit others with material gifts. The Corinthians finished this work and sent a gift to Jerusalem (Rom. 15:26).⁸

Ver. 11.—**To all bountifulness**; rather, *to all simplicity*, or "singleness of heart" (ch. 8:2). **Through us**. We are the agents in collecting and distributing your gifts (ch. 8:19, 20). **Thanksgiving to God**. From the recipients of your single-hearted generosity.

Ver. 12.—**For the administration of this service**. The word "liturgy," here rendered "service," is used in the same connection in Rom 15:27. Generally it means "religious service" (Acts 13:6; Phil. 2:17; Heb. 10:11). Here it more resembles its classic sense of "a public office discharged for the good of the state," such as undertaking the office of a *choragus* (see ver. 10). **Not only**. St. Paul is anxious to emphasize the *religious* side of the contribution fully as much as its *philanthropic* object. **Is abundant**. It *overflows* as it were in the form of thanksgivings to God.

⁷ David E. Garland, *2 Corinthians*, vol. 29, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 411–413.

⁸ David K. Lowery, "2 Corinthians," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 575–576.

Ver. 13.—**By the experiment of this ministration**; rather, *by the test (of your love) furnished by this ministration* (ch. 8:2). **For your professed subjection**; literally, *for the submission of your confession to the gospel of Christ*. **And for your liberal distribution unto them**; rather, *and for the simplicity of your fellowship towards them*. A large contribution would prove two things; namely, (1) that the Corinthians showed due subjection to the truths and duties which they theoretically accepted as resulting from the gospel; and (2) that they were united to their Jewish Christian brethren and to all others in single-hearted fellowship. It is very doubtful whether *haplotēs* ever means “liberality,” and *koinōnia* is here better understood of “communion” than of “communication.” **Unto all men**. For if the Corinthians behaved with such brotherly kindness to the once-despised Jews, who were now their Christian brethren, they would be not likely to refuse fellowship with any others.

Ver. 14.—**And by their prayer for you**. These words are joined by our Authorized Version with “glorifying God.” The saints at Jerusalem would, in consequence of the proved sincerity of the Corinthians, glorify God with thanksgiving for their faithfulness and kindness, by prayer for them. The Revisers take the clause with the following participle, “while they themselves also, with supplication on your behalf, long after you by reason of the exceeding grace of God in you.” This is the only right view of the construction. **Long after you for the exceeding grace of God in you**; literally, *yearn for you because of the grace of God which overabounds to you*.

Ver. 15.—**Thanks be unto God**. Nothing ever seems so much to disburden the full heart of St. Paul after deep emotion as an utterance of thanksgiving (Rom. 7:25; 9:5; 11:33; 1 Cor. 15:57; Gal. 1:5; 1 Tim. 1:17). The thanksgiving here is like a great sigh of relief. The subject of it is perfectly general. **It is not a mere** “Amen” uttered, as it were, by St. Paul at the end of the thanksgivings of the saints at Jerusalem which he has been presupposing; but an offering of thanks to God for the issues of grace in general, all summed up in one act of “inestimable love” (John 3:16; Rom. 6:23; 11:33; Eph. 3:19).

Romans 15:26

²⁶For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem.

Romans tells us that the Corinthians did follow through in their pledge to contribute to the church Jerusalem. I pray that as we study Gods Word together that we will live more open handedly for the glory of God!

⁹ H. D. M. Spence-Jones, ed., *2 Corinthians*, The Pulpit Commentary (London; New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1909), 220.