

In the first part of the chapter Paul makes reference again to their generosity. He's gone and told the Macedonians how generous the Corinthians are which has encouraged them to give. He places a bit of gentle pressure on them *But I am sending the brothers in order that our boasting about you in this matter should not prove hollow, but that you may be ready, as I said you would be. 4 For if any Macedonians come with me and find you unprepared, we--not to say anything about you--would be ashamed of having been so confident.* Don't make a fool of me chaps!

Actually historians tell us that Corinth was a prosperous Greek port whereas the Macedonian towns were poor so one would have expected the church at Corinth to have been more generous so they could afford it.

It gives us an interesting conundrum. How much pressure should we place on people to give. In Chapter 8 and now here in chapter 9 Paul urges them to give but making a comparison with the Macedonians and to his own reputation. But on the other hand he made it clear in the previous chapter and here in this one that it was an issue of personal conscience how much anyone gives. I'll try to see how much of an answer we get to that by the end of the evening.

So what do we learn about generosity here in chapter 9?

- Generosity should be pre-meditated

Paul was writing to them so that they could decide how much they were going to give. Although it looks as if Paul is pushing them a bit, it was going to be months before he got there. He wanted them to have thought and prayed about how they were going to give, particularly in the context of what other churches had given. They were in a position to make informed choices.

God has given each of us only a certain amount of wealth – it's a limited resource. How do we give so that it's most effective. By being informed and in a way that ensures it is given wisely. It's quite counterpoint to Paul bouncing it on them when he arrived. Modern fund-raisers always try to bounce a request for money on us by accosting us on the street or ringing us up don't they. This wasn't Paul's way. He was persuasive, yes, but also gave the Corinthians time to make decisions for themselves.

- Generosity is a private matter

7 Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver People should give as they decide in their heart. Giving to the work of God is not about other people, but about us and God. Jesus said much the same thing in Matthew 6:1 *"Make certain you do not perform your religious duties in public so that people will see what you do. If you do these things publicly, you will not have any reward from your Father in heaven. 2 "So when you give something to a needy person, do not make a big show of it, as the hypocrites do in the houses of worship and on the streets. They do it so that people will praise them. I assure you, they have already been paid in full. 3 But when you help a needy person, do it in such a way that even your closest friend will not know about it. 4 Then it will be a private matter. And your Father, who sees what you do in private, will reward you.*

For Jesus, giving was essentially a transaction between us and our heavenly Father. There's nothing in it for us in a worldly sense. This is the idea here in 2 Corinthians – the size of the gift is determined in our heart and the motive should be one that reflects God's grace – it's done willingly and joyfully because we understand the joy that that gift will bring.

- Generosity comes from a free-will

Generosity should be something that's not forced or an obligation, but something that we decide freely to do without feeling that we have to give. Paul gave them months to consider the size of their gift

If we come across any Christian charity, organisation or church who pressurise people for cash, we need to see some red lights flashing. God doesn't need high pressure fund-raising to support the expansion of His kingdom as we shall see in a minute. This chapter seems to be a warning against impulse giving in the way we don't view impulse buying. Why is that so bad? Wait a few minutes and we'll see.

- Generosity should be a joy

We all vary in the joy or otherwise of giving. To show grace to anyone or to give thankfully because of the grace God has shown us should be nothing but a joy. There's nothing more satisfying than seeing God's purposes extended. When obligation sets in or when pressure fund-raising happens, joy goes. *God loves a cheerful giver.* This chapter is a challenge to reflect God's grace by showing the same joy as He did in redeeming us.

- Generosity bears fruit

6 Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously.

This verse is so often used by the prosperity ministers to say that if people give, they will reap an answer to all their financial difficulties. But does it say that? Let's see.

In verse 8 Paul goes on to expand this idea of sowing and reaping:

And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. 9 As it is written: "He has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor; his righteousness endures forever." 10 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. 11 You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.

So when we so by giving with generosity, what does God do?

He does everything according to His grace.

By His grace He makes sure we have all that we need to abound in every good work. What Paul is saying here is that if we have a heart to give, God makes sure we have all we need to abound in every good work. If we want to give, God makes sure we have what we need to do so. We have the willingness, God has the grace and He decides in what way we get to abound in every good work.

Paul quotes Ps 112 9 *He has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor, his righteousness endures forever;* . Our God is the model of generosity as by His grace He gives – the last verse in the passage reminds us of His indescribable gift. Paul links us to the Psalm for continuity.

God multiplies seed sown

But as we scan down to verse 10 we see that if we are cheerful willing givers – gracious givers – God multiplies our ability to give.

10 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.

It is God who supplies the seed. What we've got to give has its origins with God's grace. Therefore when we give, we are recognising God's grace in what we have. That's why Paul does not advocate impulse giving. What we have is given by Him to give so therefore we consider how we sow because it is all about the increase and the harvest that God gives.

If we want to benefit the poor, it is God who makes sure we can supply.

So God is only multiplying what He's given when we sow it. Many commentators see this as an allusion to Isaiah 55:10 *As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater.*

God gives resources so it provides bread for the eaters (the recipients) and more seed for the giver to sow. That is what this is about. So....

God only multiplies when the intention is generosity

So when we sow, our stores are filled. And if our stores are filled, there's more to be sowed. Our harvest of righteousness is enlarged. Verse 11 expands this: *You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.*

In other words, if we are willing cheerful givers that have an intent to use what we have to benefit others, God will make sure we get plenty of resources so that all the praise will go back to HIM. So God does make people rich – when the intention is to give. Note that we become rich in every way. It may not be the cash, but there are other riches God gives – knowing Him, contentment, having non-financial resources, having time, having gifts that can change the lives of others. Auntie Gwen?

Prosperity Ministry?

So is this about personal prosperity? First of all, Paul is addressing the church when he talks about sowing and specifically refers to their giving as a church to relief in Judea. Verse 12 anchors it: *This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of God's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God.*

What a prosperity minister will say: give this seed of however many thousand dollars and God will increase your harvest – your debts will be cleared, you'll get a new house, car or whatever. Just give cheerfully and all this joy will be yours.

In other words, give with the intention of getting more. That isn't what the passage is about. There is the promise of more to those who sow but there is a clear message:

- Giving must be willing and cheerful with a gracious and not a selfish intention
- There must be a recognition we are only sowing what had given.
- God only multiplies what is sown in order that more can be given
- It's not about amount of money, but is also righteousness. Riches are not necessary worldly possessions . Look back to Chapter 8:9 *For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.* The richness in this particular verse is almost certainly not worldly pecuniary gain but all the wealth that comes with His eternal status? How do we measure heavenly riches. I don't have a clue all I know is we have a Lord who encourages us to heavenly treasure.

So giving isn't about getting, but about grace. Giving for God's people starts because we received grace and the gift of His Son. So when we are prepared to willingly and joyfully give in the same gracious way as we have received grace; we have a gracious God who is able to multiply the resources we are prepared to sow in order to change lives and further His kingdom.

Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!

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