

2 Corinthians 9:6-15
(Malachi 3:6-18; Mark 10:17-31)
“The Grace of Giving: Joyful Generosity”

Introduction

Paul wrote this letter to counter the teaching of false apostles who had preached a first-century version of the prosperity gospel to the church in Corinth. As a result of this teaching, the Corinthian Christians had stopped collecting money for the poor in Jerusalem, a collection that they had begun to make and promised to complete. In chapters eight and nine, Paul gives his fullest teaching on the importance of generosity as a response to God’s grace and an expression of our love for one another.

We come now to the final section of Paul’s appeal as he summarizes what he has written and, in his own words, brings home the point of his teaching. His words are clear, their meaning is clear, and I will simply underscore the four main points he makes in summary.

Body

1. The basis of generous giving (9:6).

Paul makes a point often made in the Scriptures: we may expect to reap as generously as we have sown. Of course, this is the very kind of promise that is regularly abused and misapplied by prosperity teachers today and that had surely been used by the false teachers whom Paul opposed. This verse must not be taken out of context and made the basis of a prosperity gospel that promises great wealth to those who give generously to God’s work. It must rather be understood in the light of what we will look at in a few moments – namely, at what Paul teaches in verses eight through eleven – that God will provide everything we need in order that we may do all that he has called us to do. It is not an invitation to reap what this world may consider great riches, but rather to reap from the riches of God’s grace all that we need to accomplish the work he has called us to do and to enjoy fellowship with him.

2. The basis of cheerful giving (9:7).

It is better to give out of duty than not to give at all, but to do so is to miss the joy that should always mark generosity and that turns it from mere duty to one of the greatest joys in life. Paul says that God loves to see his children delighting to do his will rather than grimly obeying while all the while wishing that we did not have to. As John Piper reminds us in nearly everything he writes, God is most glorified when we are most satisfied in

him, and we who are his should be most satisfied when God is most glorified. That well captures Paul's point in this verse.

3. The basis of confident giving (9:8-11).

I suspect that during a period of economic uncertainty, many are fearful of giving generously, out of concern that they may promise, or actually give, what they later realize they needed to provide for themselves and those they love. Paul addresses that concern in these verses. His words are remarkable: "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" (9:8). The source of our confidence is "all grace" abounding to us. God is pleased to make us his children and co-heirs with Christ. He delights in providing for our needs even as we who are parents love to provide for our children's needs. So he promises that, as we obey this call to generosity, we will have "all sufficiency in all things at all times." Thus, we need not fear, but rejoice in seeing the Lord "supply every need according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:19).

4. The basis of effective giving (9:12-14).

If you would give effectively, you should ask yourself two very simple, but very important, questions: First, are you confident that your gift will meet the real needs of God's people? Of course, we give beyond the church in seeking to meet real human needs, whether or not the recipients know the Lord. But, Paul is concerned that, within the household of God, we recognize our responsibility to one another, to provide for those in need. Just as "charity begins at home," so too Christians should first recognize that in Christ our family extends throughout the world. Where there are known needs within God's household that we can relieve, we should begin there. Secondly, will the gift bring glory to God, by demonstrating his care for his children, and by demonstrating his Spirit's presence at work in us, moving us to respond with joyful generosity to the needs of others?

Conclusion

Paul ends by expressing his gratitude "to God for his inexpressible gift" (9:15). This should always be the reason, the motive, the ground, of our generosity. If we would receive such an undeserved gift as the Lord has given us in rescuing us and making us his dearly loved children, how can we refuse to give generously, cheerfully, confidently and effectively, to advance the work of Christ and to meet the needs of hurting and broken people in our own community and around the world?

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