

2 Corinthians 9:6-15
(Malachi 3:6-12; Matthew 6:19-34)
“A Call to Mission: Give!”

Introduction

We come this morning to the final of the four commitments that we are encouraged to renew each year at our global mission conference, which begins next Sunday. We have looked the past three Sundays at the calls to pray, to go and to serve, and this morning we are focusing on the call to give. So let me, once again, remind you of the global context of this call.

We have already spoken of the continuing relevance of Jesus' words, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest" (Matthew 9:37f). Today, the global population is 7.5 billion people. One third of those, 2.5 billion people, identify themselves as Christian. Within that 2.5 billion Christians are 750 million evangelicals, which I use in its historic sense of those who believe that salvation is through God's Son, that a person must be born of God's Spirit to have eternal life, that salvation comes through the proclaiming of the gospel of Christ, and that we have been entrusted with the mission of God, the mission of making disciples of all nations, baptizing them and teaching them to believe and obey God's Word. However, 90% of all missionaries labor among people already evangelized, with only 10% of the mission force reaching out to the unevangelized and only 3% reaching out to those completely unreached by the gospel.

But let me now add to those labor statistics the financial side of the challenge: Christians make up a third of the world's people, but make over half of the world's annual income and spend 98% on ourselves. The average American Christian gives only one penny per day to global mission. Of that penny per day, only 1% goes toward reaching the unreached. Which means that the average Christian in the United States gives only three cents per year toward reaching those not yet reached with the gospel. Astonishing! Yet churches across America are still full and vibrant with music, preaching and ministries to all ages. We maintain our campuses beautifully and ministers like me live quite well. Yet all the while, each day more than 70,000 people die who have never heard the gospel of Jesus.

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 prosperity 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 look this morning at the final section of Paul's appeal as he summarizes what he has written and 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 as an appeal to each of us to reconsider our level of giving to the mission of God.

Body

1. A call to 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. A call to 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 into 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. A call to confident giving (9:8-11).

I suspect that during a period of political and cultural uncertainty, many are fearful of giving generously, out of concern that they may promise, or actually give, what they may later realize they need in order 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 in God's promise that all his grace will abound 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. A call to effective giving (9:12-14).

If you would give effectively, you should ask yourself two very simple, but very important, questions that Paul suggests in these final verses: *First*, are you confident that your gift will meet the real needs of real people, in a way that “will produce thanksgiving to God” (9:11-12)? *Secondly*, will the gift bring glory to God, by demonstrating that your generosity arises from your “confession of the gospel of Christ” (9:13)?

Two examples of ministries that you are now supporting through your gifts to our global mission fund, ministries that fulfill these apostolic criteria of effectiveness and that should greatly encourage you and make clear that your giving is being used wonderfully to pursue the mission of God, are the China partnership with Mali and our partnerships with European churches that are reaching refugees from the middle east. Find out more about these and others at next week’s global mission conference.

Conclusion

Paul ends by expressing his gratitude “to God for his inexpressible gift” (9:15). This should always be the reason, the motive and 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?

Will you hear this call to faithful, even costly, engagement in the mission of God through generous giving? If you aren’t yet giving to the work of Christ throughout the world, start now. If you are giving, ask yourself what is your level of commitment to the great commission of the one we call Lord. Would a person doing your taxes realize immediately how serious you are about being a disciple of Jesus Christ? Life passes so quickly. Don’t waste your precious life, your time, your gifts, your resources, your hopes and dreams, on what so quickly passes away.

And if you are afraid, remember the promise on which generous Christians have rested down through the centuries, and which many of us here this morning have found ever true: “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). When we have found this true, we join with Paul in saying from the heart, “Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!” (9:15).