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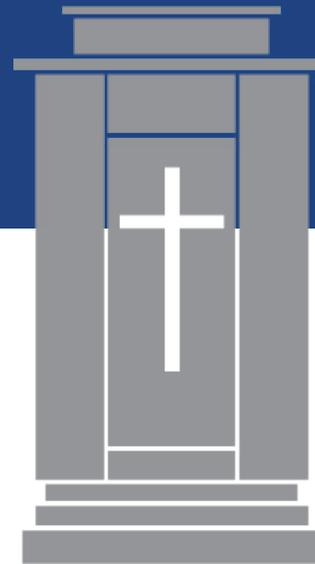


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# IT PAYS TO GIVE

2 CORINTHIANS 9:6-8

*By: H.B. Charles, Jr.*



# SERMON MANUSCRIPT

People have different reasons for going to church. Some are godly. Some are trivial. Some are just plain wrong. But of all the reasons people have for going to church –good, bad, or indifferent – no one says, “I can’t wait to go to church and give my offering!” But you should look forward to the offering because IT PAYS TO GIVE. This is the message of 2 Corinthians 9:6-8.

2 Corinthians 8-9 record Paul’s appeal to the saints of Corinth to help the needy saints in Jerusalem. It is the fullest mentioned of Christian generosity in the New Testament. These two chapters are about money. Yet Paul does not actually use the word in these chapters. And Paul does not command the saints to give. He offers spiritual motivation for generous giving. Our text in one of the primary motivations Paul gives: IT PAYS TO GIVE. This is one of the paradoxical principles of Christian discipleship. We live by dying. We lead by serving. And we receive by giving.

It pays to give. But if you only give because it pays, it will not pay. JIM BAKKER was a popular televangelist who advocated prosperity theology. After the PTL scandal, his fall from glory, and time in prison, Bakker wrote his autobiography. He called it, “I Was Wrong.” And anyone who teaches God wants every Christian to be rich is wrong. Christianity is about more than what is in your bank account. Yet your financial stewardship – particularly your giving – is an objective indicator of your true devotion to God. Matthew 6:21 says, “*For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.*” And it pays to give. 2 Corinthians 9:6-8 teaches the principle, practice and promise of Christian generosity.

## I. THE PRINCIPLE OF CHRISTIAN GENEROSITY

After the flood of Noah, God established the law of the harvest. Genesis 8:22 says, “*While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease.*” This law governs the physical world around us and the spiritual world beyond us. Galatians 6:7-8 says: “*Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.*” In Galatians 6:7-8, Paul states the principle of the harvest in direct application to how we give. Galatians 6:6 says, “*One who is taught the word must share all good things with the one who teaches.*” And

Galatians 6:10 says, “*So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.*” This is the law of the harvest. You will reap what you so. In our text, Paul puts another layer on this principle. You will reap more than what you sow.

Verse 6 says, “*The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.*” The farmer goes into his barn to get seed to plant. But he does not wrestle with how much to plant. He will plant as much seed as he can. The farmer has no guarantees about the future. Like the rich man in Luke 12:16, his land may produce plentifully. Or the ground may fail to produce. There may be a famine in the land. The devourers may devour the harvest. But this does not make the farmer cautious. He does not plant as little seed as possible and save as much seed as he can. He sows as much seed as he can afford. His concern is not what will happen if he sows bountifully and there is an unfruitful season. His concern is what will happen if he sows sparingly and the ground produces plentifully. It is an opportunity he cannot afford to miss. Likewise, giving is an opportunity that you cannot afford to miss.

Note the option in verse 6 is not between giving and not giving. The issue is how much will you give? You can give sparingly and reap sparingly. Or you can give bountifully and reap bountifully. There is a real sense in which we can determine how God will bless. We cannot dictate to God what he will do in our lives. God is God and we are not. But we can participate in the process of our blessings. We can receive the blessings of God sparingly or bountifully by how we give to God. Many Christians wrestle with the question, “Should I tithe based upon my net or my gross?” A simple answer seems to be, “Which one do you want God to bless?”

We participate in determining how God will bless us by how we handle the material possessions he entrusts to us. Therefore, we should give generously, proportionally, and sacrificially. Proverbs 11:24-25 says, “*One gives freely, yet grows all the richer; another withholds what he should give, and only suffers want. Whoever brings blessing will be enriched, and one who waters will himself be watered.*” Malachi 3:10 says, “*Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need.*” And Luke 6:38 says: “*give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you.*”

This is the principle of Christian generosity: You cannot beat God giving! But this is no get-rich-quick scheme. The farmer does not scatter the seed, claim his blessing, and walk away with a harvest in his hands. He has to labor and trust and wait. But if he does all that he can do, the Lord will do all that he cannot do. This is how God works in the lives of those who give generously. Proverbs 3:9-10 says, *“Honor the Lord with your wealth and with the firstfruits of all your produce; then your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will be bursting with wine.”* There once was a farmer who was well known for his generosity. “We cannot understand how you do it,” said his friends. “You give far more than any of the rest of us, and yet you always seem to have more to give.” To which the farmer replied, “Oh, that is easy to explain. You see, I keep shoveling into God’s bin, and God keep shoveling back into mine – and God’s has the bigger shovel.”

## II. THE PRACTICE OF CHRISTIAN GENEROSITY

Verse 7 says: *“Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”* Every Christian has a personal responsibility to give, whether you are rich or poor or even in debt. So verse 7 begins by affirming the duty of Christian giving: “Each one must give.” The rest of the verse emphasizes the practice of Christian generosity, without directly mentioning how much the gift should be. No matter the amount of the offering, God is only pleased when you give intentionally, willingly, and joyfully.

### A. GIVE INTENTIONALLY.

Verse 7 says, *“Each one must give as he has decided in his heart.”* The Greek verb translated “decided” is used only here in the New Testament. It means “to choose beforehand.” It is to purpose to do something. Paul uses it here to say that our giving should be intentional. Before you get to church, you should determine in your heart what you will give. Your giving should be an intentional decision, rather than some thoughtless or emotional or leftover gift. Sometimes we come to the time of giving and say, “Well, God understands. This is all I have left.” But that’s not God’s fault.

God gave you what you started with! 1 Corinthians 16:2 says, *“On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up. As he may prosper...”* These are fundamental instructions for Christian giving. You ought to intentionally lay something aside to give to God the then store it up to give.

### B. GIVE WILLINGLY

There are three kinds of givers – the flint, the sponge, and the honeycomb. Hammer a flint, and you still only get chips and sparks. To get water from a sponge you must squeeze it. And the more you pressure it, the more you will get. But the honeycomb just overflows with its own sweetness. God wants you to be like a honeycomb, with giving that overflows from a heart full of gratitude.

Verse 7 says: *“Each one must give as he has decided in his heart.”* The wording of the text reminds us that no one can make you give. Pastors may ask, pray, instruct, command, or even beg you to give. But you are still free to choose whether or not you will give. No one can make you give. And if you have to be forced to give, God does not want it. The church may accept a coerced offering; but God doesn’t want one penny that you would really rather keep for yourself. On the other hand, if you have nothing to give, but are willing to give, God will accept your willingness as a generous offering. 2 Corinthians 8:12 says: *“For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have.”* God wants you to give willingly. Verse 7 emphasizes the importance of giving willingly with two negative phrases that are the direct opposite of a willing spirit.

First of all, God says DO NOT GIVE RELUCTANTLY. Verse 7 says, *“Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly...”* “Reluctantly” a compound Greek word that means “out of sorrow.” God does not want you to give with reluctance or resistance or resentment. We say, “Give till it hurts.” But that’s not God’s philosophy. God says, “If it is going to hurt you to give it, keep it.” But this is not a loophole that excuses selfish living and stingy habits. If giving produces sorrow in your heart, you should be concerned about your spiritual condition. When you go to a doctor for a check-up, he

or she will begin to poke and prod and press, asking, “Does this hurt? How about this?” If you cry out in pain, one of two things has happened. Either the doctor has pushed too hard. Or there is something wrong with you. And the doctor will say, “We’d better do some more tests. It’s not supposed to hurt there!” So it is when giving comes up in church. Either the preacher has pushed too hard. Or there is something wrong with you. In that case, you need the Great Physician to heal you. It is not supposed to hurt there!

Likewise, God says DO NOT GIVE UNDER COMPUSSION. Verse 7 says, “*Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion...*” “Under compulsion” means “to be in between a bent arm.” It is the picture of one who is in a headlock, being forced to do something. God does not want you to give out of compulsion, manipulation, or intimidation. God does not want sweaty money. God does not want you money you have been holding on so tightly to that the money has become sweaty. God does not mind you holding your material possessions in high esteem. Must you must hold them with an open hand, so that when asks for them he will not have to fight you for them. God wants you to give willingly.

### C. GIVE JOYFULLY.

Verse 7 says, “*Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.*” The word “cheerful” translates a Greek word from which we get our English word “hilarious.” We should give hilariously. Giving should be fun. It should be our joy to give for the glory of God and the work of the ministry and the needs of the poor. God does not want sad givers who give grudgingly or mad givers who give or necessity. God wants glad givers who give joyfully, thankfully, and cheerfully.

We are cheerful receivers. We are not cheerful givers. We do not really have a framework for it. How can I give cheerfully? You can give cheerfully when you recognize that you

are giving to God. When you give to the church, you are not really giving to the church. You are giving to God through the church. Your giving is an act of worship. The offering Paul is appealing for in 2 Corinthians 8-9 was for the needy saints in Jerusalem. But it was still an act of worship to God. In 1 Corinthians 16:2, Paul says, “*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.*” They could have given on any day of the week. But Paul instructs them to give on the Lord’s Day so they would not forget their giving was an act of worship. It is an acknowledgement of God sovereign authority over our lives. It is an investment in the kingdom of heaven. And it is an opportunity to say “thank you” to God for his goodness to you.

A family gave a sizable contribution to the church in memory of their son who had died in war. When the announcement was made of the generous donation, a woman whispered to her husband, “Let’s give the same amount for our boy! Her husband said, “What are you talking about? Our son wasn’t killed.” “That’s just the point,” she said. “Let’s give as an expression of our gratitude to God for sparing his life.” This ought to be your attitude as you give to God. You ought to give cheerfully. God loves a cheerful giver. Herein we find an awkward but powerful means of experiencing the love of God in our daily lives. Give cheerfully! God loves a cheerful giver.

### III. THE PROMISE OF CHRISTIAN GENEROSITY

God the Father is mentioned twice in this passage. In verse 7, our giving is linked to the love of God: “*God loves a cheerful giver.*” In verse 8, our giving is linked to the power of God: “*And God is able to make all grace abound to you.*” 1 Peter 5:10 calls God “*the God of all grace.*” There are different kinds of grace. But God is the source of it all. The grace of God saves, sanctifies, strengthens, sustains, and supplies what we need from day to day. Do not allow doubt, worry, or fear cause you to rob God. God is able to make all grace abound toward you. Psalm 84:11 says: “*For the Lord God is a sun and shield; the Lord bestows favor and honor. No good thing does he withhold from those who walk uprightly.*” This is the promise of Christian generosity. 2 Corinthians 9:8 says: “*And God is able to make all grace to you, so that having sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.*” This verse states the extent and intent of God’s sovereign grace in our lives.

## A. THE EXTENT OF GOD'S SOVEREIGN GRACE

Verse 8 says, *“And God is able...”* Stop right there. This is shouting material all by itself. VANCE HAVNER wrote: *“This is the victory that overcomes the world when we are shipwrecked on God and stranded on omnipotence!”* God is able. In Acts 20:32, Paul says to the Ephesians elders, *“And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.”* Ephesians 3:20 says, *“Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us.”* Jude 24 says, *“Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present your blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy.”* God is able. That is enough to rest your faith on. But Paul adds, *“And God is able to make all grace abound to you.”*

This is unique expression of divine omnipotence. God is able to work in your life so that your giving results in self-enrichment, not self-improvement. As you pour out in giving; God can pour in by grace. And you will abound in the grace of God. What kind of grace will you abound in? All grace! What does it mean to abound in all grace? Verse 8 answers: *“And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times...”* Notice the superlatives and all-inclusive phrases here. You will have all sufficiency – everything you need. God will not give you everything you ask or want or desire. It is a promise that God will meet your needs. Philippians 4:19 says, *“And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.”* Good will make sure you have sufficient resources to meet your needs. What needs? *“In all things.”* God will meet your financial needs. But God will also meet your physical and relational and emotional and spiritual needs. You will have all sufficiency in all things. When? At all times. It does not matter when it is. Recession. Bad economy. Unemployment. Financial reversal. Unexpected bills. Huge debts. God will take care of you.

## B. THE INTENT OF GOD'S SOVEREIGN GRACE

Verse 8 says: *“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.”* Note that the word abound is used twice in this verse. God makes all grace abound to you so that you may abound in every good work. God makes his grace abound so that you may abound. The Lord blesses us to make us generous, not to make us prosperous. We do not give to receive. We give to receive to give some more. Verse 8 says, *“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.”* Your life is to be a river of God's blessings, not a reservoir. God blesses you to make you a blessing to others. And God will soon stop sending blessings to you if he cannot send a blessing to you.

God has a purpose for your life. God wants you to abound in every good work. This is an important statement about the Christian life. We are saved by grace. Ephesians 2:8-9 says, *“By grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”* We are saved by the grace we receive, not by the good works we perform. Yet God saves by grace for good works. Ephesians 2:10 says, *“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”* God has purposed that you should abound in good works. So God causes all grace abound to you, ensuring that you have all sufficiency in all things at all times. In The Treasure Principle, RANDY ALCORN writes: *“Suppose you have something important you want to get to someone who needs it. You wrap it up and hand it over to the FedEx guy. What would you think if instead of delivering the package, he took it home, opened it, and kept it for himself? You'd say, ‘This guy doesn't get it. The packages don't belong to him. He's just the middleman. His job is to get them from me to the person I want him to hand them off to. Just because God put His money in our hands doesn't mean He intends for it to stay there!’”*

In 2 Corinthians 8-9, Paul challenges the saints at Corinth to give to help the needy saints in Jerusalem. But in the closing verse of this section, Paul moves from instruction to celebration. And his clos-

ing exclamation of praise is the ultimate proof that it pays to give. 2 Corinthians 9:15 declares, “*Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift.*” The KJV calls it an “unspeakable gift.” The NKJV calls it an “indescribable” gift.” EUGENE PETERSON’S The Message paraphrase says, “No language can praise it enough!” This is what God did when he sent his son – the Lord Jesus Christ – into the world to be our Savior and Lord. He gave us a gift to wonderful for words to express. But even though it is an inexpressible gift, Paul says we can at least thank him for it. Remember that giving is not about trying to buy God’s favor or blessing or forgiveness. It is simply giving thanks to God for all that he has already done for you through Jesus Christ.

HOW CAN I SAY THANKS FOR THE THINGS YOU  
HAVE DONE FOR ME  
THINGS SO UNDESERVED, YET YOU GIVE TO  
PROVE YOUR LOVE FOR ME?  
THE VOICES OF A MILLION ANGELS COULD NOT  
EXPRESS MY GRATITUDE  
ALL THAT I AM AND EVER HOPE TO BE, I OWE IT  
ALL TO THEE.

TO GOD BE THE GLORY, TO GOD BE THE GLORY!  
TO GOD BE THE GLORY FOR THE THINGS HE HAS  
DONE!  
WITH HIS BLOOD HE HAS SAVED ME, WITH HIS  
POWER HE HAS RAISED ME  
TO GOD BE THE GLORY FOR THE THINGS HE HAS  
DONE.