

2 CORINTHIANS 9:6,7

A PROVERB TO GUIDE OUR GIVING

“Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”¹

“**Who**ever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.” The proverb Paul quotes is obviously ancient; and though we cannot speak with authority of the origin of the proverb it was certainly current among those conversant in the *lingua franca* of the New Testament world—the language we now know as Koine Greek. I suspect that the proverb quoted is as ancient, in one form or another, as agrarian society. Clearly, the proverb has its roots in the ancient soil of this world. So long as man has tilled the soil, I would suppose that similar proverbs have been quoted.

At the outset of the message, I need to be very clear concerning my horticultural abilities. I make no claim to being a horticulturist—my thumb is not green; plants surrender to the inevitability of death when entrusted to my care. Thus, I offer no advice concerning your efforts to grow plants in your yards. However, Paul is not speaking of plants in this proverb, so I am able to draw sound inference concerning what he has written. He is applying a universal truth underlying the proverb to instruct his readers in a biblical principle concerning giving. The greater your gift, the greater the return you may anticipate. Though there may be caveats applied to the proverb, the truth remains that generosity begets blessing. Join me in a study of this ancient proverb to discover how the truth may be applied in contemporary life.

THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR GENEROSITY IN GIVING — “Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully” [2 CORINTHIANS 9:6]. Paul writes with broad strokes at this point. This is not, as many holding to charismatic concepts imagine, a blank cheque with which one may enrich himself with the wealth of this dying world. This is not, as one prominent religious huckster was wont to say, a statement teaching investment of “seed money.” This is a general, spiritual precept given to the people of God. It is worthy of study if for no other reason than to instruct us in actions that are pleasing to God.

The proverb speaks of truth that is witnessed elsewhere in Scripture, especially from the Proverbs. Consider several Proverbs that speak of the blessing attending generosity.

“Honour 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.”

[PROVERBS 3:9, 10]

The principle enunciates a general precept that the individual who sees wealth as entrusted by God will seek to honour God; in turn, that one will be entrusted with even greater wealth.

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Here is another of the Proverbs that is worthy of our careful consideration.

“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.
The people curse him who holds back grain,
but a blessing is on the head of him who sells it.”

[PROVERBS 11:24-26]

It is obvious that this proverb presents a general truth rather than a specific promise. Nevertheless, it holds true that those who are generous will be blessed by those who benefit from their generosity. In fact, the statement in the **25th verse** sounds as if it could have been appropriated by the Apostle for our text in order to communicate the identical truth.

Let me point out two further Proverbs that surely apply in this instance.

“Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the LORD,
and he will repay him for his deed.”

[PROVERBS 19:17]

“Whoever gives to the poor will not want,
but he who hides his eyes will get many a curse.”

[PROVERBS 28:27]

Assuredly, God promises blessings to the generous individual. Generosity should mark the child of God; especially is this true of one who is mature in the Faith. Consequently, churches should be denoted for generosity, though not for naiveté.

In this context, you will perhaps recall the words Jesus spoke to His disciples. “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” [LUKE 6:38]. Though some have distorted His statement by focusing solely on material wealth, it is obvious that the Master spoke of the richest of blessings—fellowship with and power with God.

The point of all these passages, and the point of our text, is that God takes note of the generous individual. The generous person reflects the character of the Father. The wiser one is in administering the grace of God, the greater the goods entrusted by the Father. It is but a concise statement of the parable of the talents that Jesus told on one occasion. You will undoubtedly remember that parable, related in **LUKE 19:11-27**. Jesus told of a man who would be gone for an extended time. He entrusted to three servants considerable wealth. One invested the goods and earned a return of one hundred percent. A second, likewise, invested the goods in some manner; he also earned a return of one hundred percent. The third servant hid the wealth entrusted to his oversight, excusing his action because he feared his master, knowing him to be shrewd and sharp. Of course, upon his return, the master sought his funds from these men.

The first servant had prospered, receiving the master's commendation, "Well done, good servant! Because you have been faithful in a very little, you shall have authority over ten cities" [LUKE 19:17]. Likewise, the second servant received the master's commendation, "And you are to be over five cities" [LUKE 19:19]. However, the third servant was stunned to hear his censure, "I will condemn you with your own words, you wicked servant! You knew that I was a severe man, taking what I did not deposit and reaping what I did not sow? Why then did you not put my money in the bank, and at my coming I might have collected it with interest?" And he said to those who stood by, "Take the mina from him, and give it to the one who has the ten minas" [LUKE 19:22-24].

Just as God notes the generous individual, noting that they see themselves as administrators of the grace of God, so He notes the stinting individual who seems to focus on her own ability, on her own strength or on her own good fortune. Therefore, the Master concluded, "I tell you that to everyone who has, more will be given, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away" [LUKE 19:26].

It would be easy enough to say that the accounting takes place at the return of the Master, and that seems obvious; however, in light of the verses cited from PROVERBS 11, I caution each one listening to recognise that there is an accounting even in this present life. Surely, the blessing of encouraging others, of participating in advancing their welfare and honouring the Lord Christ, has immediate benefits to each of us.

There lived during the early years of the last century, a wonderfully gifted man whom God richly blessed in business. The name of this gifted man was R. G. LeTourneau. LeTourneau was a designer and builder of the great earth moving equipment which was instrumental in permitting North American governments to design and construct the vast network of roads and urban infrastructure which has come to define the modern nations. In the process of building the infrastructure of the nations, LeTourneau earned a vast fortune.

LeTourneau, a Christian, was determined that he would honour God through generosity. At the first, he committed to giving a tenth of his income, which he soon increased to twenty percent. As he kept on earning money he continued increasing the amount he gave to God and the advancement of the Faith until he was donating an astonishing ninety percent of his earnings to the work of the Lord. Near the end of his life, LeTourneau confessed that he had enjoyed life immensely, and especially had he enjoyed contributing to the work of the Lord. His testimony was that as he used a spoon to scoop money out the backdoor of his life, God was shovelling money into his life with a scoop shovel. His testimony was that no one could out give God.

God will be debtor to no one. No mere mortal can so live, can so give, that God becomes indebted to that individual. Job, pondering the deep questions of the divine mind, asks rhetorically of God:

"Behold, he snatches away; who can turn him back?
Who will say to him, 'What are you doing?'"

[JOB 9:12]

The obvious answer to the question is, "No one!"

The Living God is generous beyond all human comprehension. Throughout the Word of God are multiplied statements that speak of His compassion and generosity given to stimulate His people to emulate His noble character. I suppose that each Canadian is familiar with the statement that underscores our Faith and which is recorded in **JOHN 3:16**: “For God so loved the world, that *he gave* his only Son.” God’s love prompted Him to give; and that which He gave was the most precious gift imaginable—His One and Only Son.

Weigh that thought in light of Paul’s testimony provided in the Letter to Roman saints. “While we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” [**ROMANS 5:6-8**].

I have often noted that this example of infinite generosity finds its foundation in the promise of **ISAIAH 9:6**:

“To us a child is born,
to us a son *is given*.”

God is defined by His generosity, by His compassion for fallen mankind and His willingness to give that man might live. How wonderfully does Paul sum up this divine munificence in **GALATIANS 2:20**: “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and *gave himself* for me.” Never forget that God is generous, that God is benevolent to us as a race and as a people.

God, through Malachi, the last writing prophet of the Old Testament era, issued a command, attaching a wonderful promise revealing His generous nature toward His people. “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. I will rebuke the devourer for you, so that it will not destroy the fruits of your soil, and your vine in the field shall not fail to bear, says the LORD of hosts. Then all nations will call you blessed, for you will be a land of delight, says the LORD of hosts” [**MALACHI 3:10-12**].

One must be struck by the admonitions to generosity discovered in the wisdom literature. Listen to and heed two such exhortations from **THE PSALMS** and **THE PROVERBS**.

“The wicked borrows but does not pay back,
but the righteous is generous and gives.”

[**PSALM 37:21**]

“Whoever has a bountiful eye will be blessed,
for he shares his bread with the poor.”

[**PROVERBS 22:9**]

According to the Psalmist, generosity is an expected mark of the righteous. According to the Wise Man, the generous may anticipate blessing because they are considerate of the needy. Let that sink in. If you are not generous toward God and toward those whom He identifies as vulnerable, you reveal a lack of perception of His character. At the very least, we should expect that those whom we consider mature are to be generous; and their generosity toward the work of the Kingdom should be evident to all who know them. You expect your elders to be generous both with their time and with their goods. In like fashion, you expect those who serve in the assembly to be generous with their time and with their goods. Generosity is a mark of maturity. Parsimony, either of time or abilities or goods, marks the individual as immature at best.

Writing the young theologian, Timothy, the Apostle urged him to teach that “[Christians] are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share” [1 TIMOTHY 6:18]. Again, note that the mark of a mature Christian is generosity. Let me summarise this vital point. The character of God reveals generosity and the child reflects the parent in expressing this same spirit of generosity. Generosity, if you will, is synonymous with love for it is an expression of the Spirit of God and *God is love*. I do not need to tell you these truths; you already know them. I do, however, find it necessary to remind us as believers from time-to-time that the spirit of generosity is the true expression of our God.

THE PROMISE OF BLESSING FLOWING FROM GENEROSITY — “Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully” [2 CORINTHIANS 9:6]. We have already discovered that God is pledged to bless the generous heart. The verse before us, however, is quite pointed in the promise that God will remember generosity. You will perhaps recall a previous citation from **THE PROVERBS**:

“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.
The people curse him who holds back grain,
but a blessing is on the head of him who sells it.”

[PROVERBS 11:24-26]

God looks for generosity in order to bless His people by entrusting them with greater goods. As Solomon considered two scenarios, envisioning a generous individual and one who was stinting. Rather than being impoverished by his generosity, the generous man was enriched. The man who thought he was enriching himself by clinging tightly to what he had was impoverished through his greed. Solomon then stated the principle, “One who waters will himself be watered.” God takes note of the generous individual and ensures that he is rewarded for his generosity.

There is also a passage in the Psalms that is worthy of serious consideration in the context of this message. The verses, found in the **112th Psalm**, contrast the life of a righteous individual with the life of one who is said to be wicked.

“It is well with the man who deals generously and lends;
who conducts his affairs with justice.
For the righteous will never be moved;
he will be remembered forever.
He is not afraid of bad news;
his heart is firm, trusting in the LORD.
His heart is steady; he will not be afraid,
until he looks in triumph on his adversaries.
He has distributed freely; he has given to the poor;
his righteousness endures forever;
his horn is exalted in honor.
The wicked man sees it and is angry;
he gnashes his teeth and melts away;
the desire of the wicked will perish!”

[PSALM 112:5-10].

Under the inspiration of the Spirit of God, the Psalmist equates generosity with righteousness. Understand that one does not practise generosity in order to be righteous; but if one is righteous, she will be generous. Righteousness results in generosity; but generosity does not produce righteousness. Generosity is the natural fruit of righteousness.

A Psalm that has been a favourite of mine for many years boldly states:

“I have been young, and now am old,
yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken
or his children begging for bread.
He is ever lending generously,
and his children become a blessing.”

[PSALM 37:25, 26]

I often cited this proverb to my children during their formative years. Times were hard and there wasn't always enough to satisfy every desire the children expressed or even what their mother and I wanted to do for them. Nevertheless, I was quite certain that there would always be food on the table and clothing to cover their bodies if I walked in the way of righteousness. I'm aware that some have cautioned against appropriating this promise since it doesn't fit their theology. I guess I took the position that I would seize upon this promise; and if I was wrong, I knew God to be gracious—He would forgive me for my audacity. God is generous; He is concerned for His glory and that includes providing for the necessities of His own beloved people.

These passages to which I have referred are statements of general principle; though inspired by the Spirit of God, they were based upon the observations of the respective writers. In other words, revealed theology confirms the conclusion drawn from natural theology. Nevertheless, we may take it as divine promise that God takes note of the generous and that He is pledged in turn to show Himself generous toward generous people.

I want to look ahead to note for our benefit the generosity of God that is pledged to His people. ***God pledges His love.*** Paul writes, “Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver” [2 CORINTHIANS 9:7].

More than that, ***God pledges to be generous.*** “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. As it is written,

‘He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor;
his righteousness endures forever.’

“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. You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way” [2 CORINTHIANS 9:8-11a].

God pledges that He will be glorified. “You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God. 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” [2 CORINTHIANS 9:11-13].

Again, ***God pledges that we shall receive friendship.*** “[Those blessed will] long for you and pray for you, because of the surpassing grace of God upon you” [2 CORINTHIANS 9:14].

Finally, you will be conformed to the image of Christ; ***God will make you like His Son.*** “Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift” [2 CORINTHIANS 9:15]! The inexpressible gift is Christ Himself, and you will express His image.

The Corinthian Christians were not noted for generosity or consideration of others. In an earlier letter, the Apostle had found it necessary to take them to task for their lack of compassion. Recall the rebuke that Paul delivered to these self-centred saints. “When you come together, it is not the Lord’s supper that you eat. For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, another gets drunk” [1 CORINTHIANS 11:20, 21]. These professed followers of Christ were inconsiderate of one another at the best and without compassion at the worst. Though they came together at the Lord’s Table, they were not in harmony; there was no unity, no harmony, no sense of oneness in Christ. Those able to care for themselves provided enough for their own comfort while ignoring the hunger and the thirst of fellow saints. Before the Lord Christ, some went without food and drink in the Agape Feasts which preceded the Lord’s Supper!

These actions remind me of an incident that occurred on one occasion at a sister church. Invited to address a Christmas special, I was asked to address the Sunday morning congregation. As is often the case, I was invited to join the pastor and his family for lunch after the Sunday morning service. As soon as the service was over, the pastor and his family bolted for their car and drove away. I asked some of his church members for directions to his house; and since it was a small community I was able to find his house without too much trouble. When I was admitted to the home, the entire family was seated. As the food was placed on the table, multiple hands began to reach for various foods as each began to eat whatever landed on his or her plate.

I waited quietly, and after a rather long time, the pastor blushed and stated, “I’m sorry. We just eat whenever we are hungry.” I commented that as a Christian, I was used to returning grace. I then asked if the family could stop chowing down for a brief time so we could give thanks for God’s goodness. They were rude; but I was more embarrassed at the lack of thought toward the God whom the pastor professed to serve. Much like that pastor and his family, the Corinthians were in no sense considerate; nor were they compassionate. Small wonder, then, that the Apostle found it necessary to remind them of the need for generosity.

Focused on themselves, they were incapable of consideration toward others. In a few sentences beyond our text the Apostle would remind them of the blessings which flowed from generosity. “You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God” [2 CORINTHIANS 9:11]. We are prone to congratulate ourselves that we are not like the Corinthians, and I trust that we are not so self-centred that we forget to be generous; however, these instructions were included in Holy Writ for a reason. It is because we are a fallen race that God has seen fit to include this admonition in the Word. Let us guard our hearts and our minds lest we fall into the trap of focusing on satisfying our own fallen desires to the exclusion of consideration, compassion and generosity toward fellow saints in need.

My dear people, I urge you to always remember compassion and to always endeavour to be a generous people; for we may be assured that God is pledged to show Himself gracious, generous, open-handed, toward those who are themselves generous. If you are a generous person you already know this to be true. If you have yet to discover this truth through generosity, you need to hear it for yourself so that you may arrange your life to honour God and so that you may discover the veracity of His gracious promise.

THE EXPRESSIONS OF GENEROSITY IN GRACE GIVING — According to the text before us, “God loves a cheerful giver.” Note the boldness with which the Apostle states the case. “Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver” [2 CORINTHIANS 9:7]. The expression of generosity among the saints is seen *in forethought* (“Each one must give as he has decided in his heart”), *in willingness* (“Each one must give ... not reluctantly or under compulsion”) and *in joy* (“God loves a cheerful giver”). Let’s explore these expressions of generosity to see if we measure up.

The first expression of generosity is revealed in *the principle of forethought*. When we come to the time when we bring our gifts as an offering, no Christian should be unprepared; each one should have prepared herself or himself to give. One great reason I do not teach that we are to tithe is this principle outlined in Paul’s instructions to the Corinthians. Those participating in the worship of God through giving of their substance are to think. Paul states the case this way. “Each one must give as he has decided in his heart.” Any reasonable application of this principle imposes on the worshipper responsibility for distributing his gifts and not merely to consider that he has given and that is the end of the matter.

May I suggest the following guidelines to assist in your giving? As you weigh what you should give as an act of worship during the time of offering, ask yourself these two questions. “How has God blessed me in the past? What do I anticipate that He will do in the future?”

As you determine the amount you will give as an expression of worship, consider how God has blessed you in the past. I suggest that the individual in love with Christ—the individual aware of divine blessing—of necessity will be a generous individual. It is only as we focus on the moment that we lose sight of God’s goodness. Focused on this transient life, it is far too easy to convince ourselves that it is *our* might, *our* strength, *our* abilities, that have obtained our position and those goods we administer.

There is a dreadful tendency among the redeemed of the Lord to forget His goodness. Moses, speaking in the final days to the people he had led out of Egyptian bondage and on the very verge of the Promised Land, reminded those who had seen God’s goodness of this distressing and awful tendency. Listen to these warnings.

“When the LORD your God brings you into the land that he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give you—with great and good cities that you did not build, and houses full of all good things that you did not fill, and cisterns that you did not dig, and vineyards and olive trees that you did not plant—and when you eat and are full, then take care lest you forget the LORD, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery” [DEUTERONOMY 6:10-12].

The threat of self-satisfaction loomed large in Moses’ thinking; he returned to the theme frequently as he prepared the people for his absence. Here’s another instance of his warning. “Take care lest you forget the LORD your God by not keeping his commandments and his rules and his statutes, which I command you today, lest, when you have eaten and are full and have built good houses and live in them, and when your herds and flocks multiply and your silver and gold is multiplied and all that you have is multiplied, then your heart be lifted up, and you forget the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery” [DEUTERONOMY 8:10-14].

Those most richly blessed appear most prone to forget the richness of blessing they have received. At the last, Moses would sing a song in which he confronted Israel—and, consequently, all the redeemed of God—with the tendency of the fallen heart to depart from the God who has so richly blessed. Moses spoke of Israel as Jeshurun, a term of endearment that God used, warning of the tendency to abandon God in the glow of His rich blessings.

“Jeshurun grew fat, and kicked;
you grew fat, stout and sleek;
then he forsook God who made him
and scoffed at the Rock of his salvation.”

[DEUTERONOMY 32:15]

Just as we should remember how God has blessed us, so we should anticipate how He shall yet bless us in the future. As we look back, remembering His goodness in the past, how can we doubt His goodness in the future? As we come to the time of worship through our giving, then, I encourage each worshipper to anticipate God’s continuing blessings in the future. During the week, as you prepare yourself for worship, give thought to God’s blessings in the past and anticipate that He shall yet bless you in the days to come.

A second expression of generosity is revealed in *willingness to participate in the act of giving*. Paul states that worshippers are to “give ... not reluctantly or under compulsion.” Either we *want* to demonstrate compassion, or we do not wish to be compassionate. There really is no middle ground. I remind you that the attitude precedes the act, and if the heart is right the action becomes acceptable before God. You will recall Paul’s words in an earlier chapter from this same letter: “If the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have” [2 CORINTHIANS 8:12]. Willingness is the precedence that insures that our giving is pleasing before the Lord.

The heart that honours God is a heart that rejoices at the opportunity to give; this is the third expression. The biblical expression is that “God loves a cheerful giver.” It is perhaps a cliché, but a literal translation informs the reader that “God loves a **hilarious** giver.” Infectious joy should mark the opportunity to give. When we worship through giving there should be a smile in our hearts which breaks through to shine on our face. Smile when you give; God loves your smiles.

The Word of God urges Christians to be a generous people. We give—not to receive from God—but we realise that when our actions are pleasing to God He has promised to bless us. As opportunity is presented, let each of us determine that we will be generous in every way. In giving our time, in donating our strength, in presenting our wealth—let us show ourselves generous in every way. In doing this, we may be assured that we will be pleasing to God.

I conclude the message by relating a rather humorous account of a lazy man. A travelling salesman observed a farmer in the southern United States sitting on his front porch during the midday heat. In an effort to strike up a conversation the drummer spoke to the farmer, asking about the crops. “How’s the corn this year?” the salesman asked.

“Didn’t plant corn. Worried there would be too much rain last spring,” replied the farmer.

Nonplussed, the drummer inquired again, “How are your ‘taters doing?”

Again the farmer replied, “Didn’t plant ‘taters. Worried ‘bout ‘tater bugs.”

The salesman was somewhat taken aback, but tried once more. “How about green beans? Did you plant beans?”

“Nope,” responded the patient farmer, “didn’t plant beans ‘cause I was worried about blight.”

“Black-eyed peas?” ventured the salesman.

Once more the farmer replied, “Nope! No black-eyed peas. Worried about drought last summer.”

Curious, now, the drummer asked, “What did you plant this year?”

“Didn’t plant nothing,” replied the farmer patiently. “Didn’t want to take any chances. I’m just playing it safe.”

The farmer in the story is like many Christians. We don’t invest anything in the work of the Kingdom because we don’t want to take chances. Consequently, having invested nothing, we gain nothing, and the work of God is hindered and hampered through such individuals. Let us, as a community of faith, determine that we will invest richly into the ongoing work of God. Amen.