

2 CORINTHIANS 9:6-11

WHAT'S IN IT FOR ME?

“The point is this: 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. 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. 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, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God.”¹

D*isgruntled Donor Sues Church.* That headline appeared some years back in the Houston Post. A member of a large Pentecostal congregation in the city had drawn the conclusion, based upon a sermon about or an interpretation of **LUKE 6:38**, that God had pledged to reward those who give to support the church. You remember the verse: “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.” The disgruntled former congregant complained that she had donated over eight hundred dollars in a year to her church and had not received any benefit. Viewing giving as an investment, she expected at least a thirty-fold increase, and I would presume she hoped for a hundred-fold return [see **MATTHEW 13:1-9, 18-23**]. Therefore, she sued for the moneys she had given, plus lost income, plus unspecified pecuniary assessment by the courts. The case was ultimately settled out of court when the church returned the eight hundred dollars to the disappointed investor.

Does a Christian have a right to ask, “*What’s in it for me if I give to support my church?*” Though we may view the motives behind such a question as suspect, I would remind you that God has pledged to reveal Himself as generous toward those who are generous toward His work. Saying that, I do not want to lead you into false assumptions concerning God’s obligation toward us—God is not obligated to anyone. It is, however, an axiom of the Faith that the blessings of God are in proportion to the generosity which an individual demonstrates.

THE PRINCIPLE STATED — “Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.” In a previous message, we discovered that there is a law of sowing and reaping which applies to the issue of giving. This law is not a law of material promise; rather it is a law of spiritual proportions. No court can compel God to meet material expectations. Neither can any human parliament reduce the promise of God to mere formulae. Nevertheless, God is pledged to review the heart of His child, taking note of the spirit which motivates giving, and when that spirit reflects the heart of the Master, God will return in abundance His love and care for that soul.

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We discovered in an earlier message that the principle of blessing based upon our own participation in the work of God is stated throughout the Word. For the purpose of refreshing our memories through review, recall some of those passages, especially from the Old Testament. You will remember no doubt the pointed passages from the **PSALMS** and **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**]

“It is well with the man who deals generously and lends;
who conducts his affairs with justice.”

[**PSALM 112:5**].

I have often stated (and the truth is confirmed in this proverb applied to human action)—**attitudes precede action**. In other words, **attitudes are of greater importance than are actions**. God reviews the intent of the heart—the desire which underlies deed, the purpose hidden in the mind of every person—to discover why one does what is done. It is never comfortable to attempt to deceive God, for in the effort one succeeds only in deceiving one's own heart. Consequently, each time the Word of God is read and applied that heart is exposed to itself as deceitful and corrupt. Consequently, the deceiver grows increasingly uncomfortable in the presence of the Lord and until the heart repents the individual resents God and His Word. This is the insight of the author of the Hebrew letter when that unknown saint writes, “The word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account” [**HEBREWS 4:12-13**]. It is the thoughts and the attitudes of the heart which are judged because actions follow attitude.

In this same **SECOND CORINTHIAN LETTER** which we are exploring to discover truths related to our giving, Paul issues a plea for correct thinking. Listen to his words in this letter. “I, Paul, myself entreat you, by the meekness and gentleness of Christ—I who am humble when face to face with you, but bold toward you when I am away!—I beg of you that when I am present I may not have to show boldness with such confidence as I count on showing against some who suspect us of walking according to the flesh. For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ, being ready to punish every disobedience, when your obedience is complete” [**2 CORINTHIANS 10:1-6**].

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Christian thinking leads to warfare with the mind as the child of God struggles to make every thought obedient to Christ. The thinking of this world is associated with that which is destined for dust and is thus unworthy of the mind of the Master. Perhaps we cannot help but be effected by the thinking of this world. In greater or lesser measure I suppose that each of us carries the mindset of this present world into every facet of life. Are we attempting to deceive God? Are we attempting to coerce God? Are we attempting to manipulate God? Are we trading in divine grace? My dear people, we must be ruthless in examining our motives to discover why we do what we do and remove every motive unworthy of Christ.

THE PRINCIPLE APPLIED — “Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.” I am traversing again ground which is undoubtedly familiar for most of you by now. Because information may be familiar does not necessarily mean that it is incorporated into our lives, however. Let’s think through application of the principle the Apostle has enunciated.

Giving is an intimate act. Our moneys represent something far more personal than mere possessions. The request to give of one’s wealth generates an emotional response out of proportion to the request. Our moneys represent our labours, being the expression of the skill with which we have exercised our particular abilities, whether physical or mental. The funds we hold speak in great measure of personal aspirations and represent the fulfilment of past dreams. Consequently, our personal interest in the moneys we donate does not cease when we have given our gifts, whether those gifts are given to the church or whether those gifts are donated to a secular charity or whether those gifts have been given to individuals. We want to know what impact we have had in the world through our investments. Paul recognises this, acknowledging that “Each one must give as he has decided in his heart.” Hopefully, you are convinced that Christian giving that is pleasing to God originates in the heart.

One of the great needs of our own congregation is a closer tie to how our gifts are used. We would benefit in a far greater measure than we can anticipate from an active, vigorous programme designed to insure accountability. A missionary union composed of men and women with spiritual insight to direct us in disbursement of our gifts to insure maximum impact in our giving would bless the entire congregation. A women’s missionary circle willing to involve our women in missionary support and participation in mission activities, or a men’s mission group willing to take leadership in participatory missionary labours would be a blessing for us. We need a body within the structure of the congregation to regularly instruct us where our giving will have the greatest impact, to assess the effect our investments have had in the advance of the Kingdom, and to advise us how we may insure greater effectiveness in Christian investment.

I make the effort to inform our people of needs, permitting each member opportunity to share in meeting those needs. Unfortunately, because we meet but once each week it is far too easy to lose contact with the gifts we bring after they have been given. We would undoubtedly benefit from greater involvement through groups such as those just mentioned. We would benefit from closer interaction with those missionary endeavours we choose to support. If there is a weakness in our present practise, it is the lack of regular accountability to our missionaries through participation in the life of the congregation.

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Paul calls for nothing less than active participation in worship through giving; he seeks to insure that believers do more than merely make a donation. Christians are called to invest their hearts and their love in those in whom they are blessing with their earthly goods. The evidence for the investment of our hearts in those projects which we support and in those servants whom we underwrite will be our active participation in the work offered up to the glory of God.

My fellow elder, Brother Jason, is currently promoting teen and youth ministries within the church. Brother Kurt has begun a ministry to young boys within our congregation. They've had their first outing, sharing in the joys of camping in the Sukunka. If we simply give a gift and cease concern at that point, our giving will have been an utter failure. The gifts we bring should lead us to pray for the success of every outreach, to ask the Master eagerly to insure that we will benefit through expansion of the Kingdom through bringing young men and women to the knowledge of Christ and to enter His service. Our gifts should lead us to seek out our own youth, asking that they make a commitment to Christ and that they consider whether God has called them into Christian service. When God calls them to His service—and He will call some—we should have obtained such confidence in the institutions we have underwritten that we confidently encourage our own youth to prepare there!

Someone with exceptional insight into human character opined that there must exist a sensitive nerve that is connected to our pocketbook. For the average person, the existence of such a nerve explains the experience of discomfort and pain at the request to donate—whatever the origin of the request. Christians, until they are taught in the principles of giving, may likewise experience pain at the thought of giving, however worthy the cause may be! Therefore, the Apostle admonished that “Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion” [2 CORINTHIANS 9:7]. The church that will be pleasing to God is a church that sets the people free to give—or to refrain from giving!

I could wish that each of us was able to give without guilt, just as I could wish that each of us could refrain from giving without guilt. Each person is answerable to God for the administration of the goods placed under his or her control. It is to Him that we must give an accounting, and the greater that with which we are entrusted the greater the accountability. In an ideal situation the elders are responsible to insure that the causes brought before the congregation are worthy of congregational support; and the membership is responsible to respond to the causes presented before them. Nevertheless, no congregation should ever be made to feel guilty because they choose not to respond to a plea. Neither must the leadership of the congregation ever present the needs in such a manner in order to make anyone feel guilty. In this way, only those with whom the Spirit of God is dealing will have reason to experience guilt.

THE PRINCIPLE EXPLAINED — “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;
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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, 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.”

Each believer is accountable for what has been entrusted to them. If my needs have been met, is it not a divine obligation for me to share out of my store? We cannot give to the point of poverty if we are led by the Spirit of God. What is given is no more lost than is seed lost when buried in the earth. For as seed, when planted, promises the yield of a crop, so gifts given to honour God and to serve the interests of His people must of necessity result in a great harvest.

Even should you question the goodness of God, surely you do not question the power of God! The promise before us is that “God is able to make all grace abound to you” [VERSE EIGHT]. God will insure that we enjoy sufficiency in all things at all times; the issue is not whether we will have all that we want, but it is instead a promise that we will have all that we need. **GOD IS PREPARED TO INSURE THAT HIS CHILD RECEIVES ALL THAT IS REQUIRED TO ENSURE SUCCESS IN EVERY SERVICE.** Paul writes, “[God] ... will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness” [2 CORINTHIANS 9:10]. The seed in view here is material needs; and with this promise of provision of material necessity is the promise of an enlarged harvest of righteousness.

Scope in on that last sentence: “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]. In the divine economy there are no losers. The distressed saints in Jerusalem would gain as this service would supply their needs. The Corinthians, providing out of the plenty with which they had been entrusted received the promise that all that was donated so would be restored so that they could be even more generous in the future. As we bless fellow members of the household of faith with our benevolence we know that our goodness demonstrates that we praise God for them. Such action will redound to the praise and glory of God.

We are a fallen people, so it should not be surprising that we are prone to filter what we read through the lens of our own fallen nature. We read the promise before us and immediately we imagine that God promises that our *desires* will be fulfilled. However, think through what is promised. We will be enriched in order that we may be enabled to be generous on every occasion. As result of our generosity—which after all is the result of God’s rich provision—thanksgiving will be offered to God. God gives so that we may be generous; and our generosity—resulting from His largess—results in praise to Him.

Let me rephrase the matter to insure clarity on the issue. What is presented here is no mere general philanthropic ideal. The Apostle is not speaking of charitable gifts as an ideal nor am I encouraging you to provide gifts in a general fashion. Instead, as Christians we are being challenged with the conviction that every person is ultimately dependent upon and accountable to God and that God is praised as fellow believers are affirmed and served in love. Those giving must realise that contributing in this manner is an important sign of obedience to the Gospel of Christ and that those giving thanks are not simply expressing gratitude for human benefactors—they are offering thanks to God.

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Let me challenge you to answer a most personal question, although I do not wish you to give me a personal answer. Did you pray about your giving as you prepared to give this morning? Did you, as you wrote out your cheque or prepared your offering envelope, ask God to direct you so that the amount you would give was what He wanted you to give? And did you ask Him to direct you in distributing your gift? Did you ascertain His mind in how you should apportion the funds you gave? In fact, when did you last pray, asking God to guide you in what you would give? For the most of us, the act of giving is automatic. We make a certain amount and we are used to presenting a gift of a certain size geared to our earnings.

For years, I made it a habit in my giving to balance my chequebook with my giving. I would prepare a gift according to what was available to me to give, and then I would round the gift upward to insure that my chequebook was balanced on an even amount. If the balance in my chequebook was \$335.24, my gift would be \$135.24 so that \$200.00 was left as the balance. This practise permitted me to include a little extra in my giving with each cheque. At other times when there was no money left in my bank account, I would empty my pockets of all change and include the moneys in my giving so that the offering basket would never pass me by.

I have struggled with this practise for some time since a dear lady responsible for counting the gifts commented to me about the practise. She had decided that I must be exceptionally spiritual, praying until God told me the precise amount I should give to the exact cent! I found her comments amusing at first, but as I reflected on her perceptions, I was deeply humbled. I realise that she was right—I should be so sensitive that I wait upon the Lord until I am confident even of the smallest amount which would honour Him.

I understand that I have spoken at length and through many months about issues surrounding our giving. Without question, I have delivered more messages on giving in the past months than most pastors will deliver in a lifetime of preaching. I do not regret the investment of time on this most important matter; I have but fulfilled my responsibility before the Lord as a pastor and a teacher. I am convinced that, generous though this congregation is, we have not yet arrived at the point that we can say universally that we are engaged in worship as we give.

There is little ecstasy evident in our giving. There is scant rejoicing at the opportunity to give. There is far too little evidence that we are investing ourselves through our giving to such an extent that our hearts long for those blessed as result of our gifts. Neither does our giving reflect the blessings we enjoy nor even expect. Consequently we are yet impoverished before the Lord in the currency of heaven since others are not giving thanks to God for our generosity.

Brothers and sisters, let each Christian among us resolve that we will change our habits of giving, bringing them into line with the will of the Father. Let us each as Christian men and women resolve in our heart that beginning immediately we will invest time in prayer, asking the Master to direct us as we prepare our gifts week-by-week so that what we give reflects His will. Let each of us resolve that we will prepare ourselves for worship through seeking His mind, through endeavouring to provide a generous gift for the various causes presented and always as seeking His glory in our giving. Let each Christian prayerfully seek how we may honour Christ through the act of giving, asking especially that He will be glorified in both the gift and in its distribution. Let each of us seek to improve our ability to give so that we may be more generous still so that Christ will be glorified through us.

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If you share the service today as a believer who is out of fellowship with Christ and His people, you must find yourself somewhat irritated at the message. Perhaps the message assaults your sensibilities and insults your sensitivities. Dear fellow believer, as one who would do you good and not evil, I caution that you are the poorer for your lack of participation in this worship. The greater tragedy is that you know that what I have said is true. I would ask you to surrender your anger and hostility, and that you would determine that by His grace you will again walk with the Lord Christ, honouring Him in all things, beginning with the act of worship.

If you are yet outside the Faith, the message today may seem to confirm in your mind the caricature of preachers and more particularly serve to reinforce your prejudice against Christians. All they want, you must imagine, is your money. We neither want nor need your money. We long to see you delivered from darkness and brought into the light of Christ the Lord. That will be accomplished when you have yielded to His call and claimed His offer of life. That offer of life eternal is found in calling on Him as Master and Saviour.

“If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. For the Scripture says, ‘Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.’ For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. For ‘everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved’” [**ROMANS 10:9-13**]. We invite you to life and to light, asking that you enter into the joy of our Lord. Amen.