

The Cheerful Giver

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[0 : 00] Please turn to Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, on page 1164 of the Church Bible.!

We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of! The extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part, for they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means of their own accord, begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints.

And this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord, and then, by the will of God, to us. Accordingly, we urged Titus that as he had started, so he should complete among you this act of grace.

But as you excel in everything, in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you, see that you excel in this act of grace also.

I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you, by his poverty, might become rich.

[1 : 40] And in this matter, I gave my judgment. This benefits you, who, a year ago, started not only to do this work, but also to desire to do it.

So now finish doing it as well, so that your readiness in desiring it may be matched by your completing it out of what you have. For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have.

For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened, but that as a matter of fairness, your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need.

That there may be fairness. As it is written, whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack.

And now 9.6. The point is this. Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.

[2 : 52] 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, 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 flowing from your confession of the gospel of Christ, and the generosity of your contribution for them and for all others, while they long for you and pray for you because of the surpassing grace of God upon you.

[4 : 19] Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift. Thanks, Irene, for reading. You'll have noticed I was walking slightly faster to the thing today because we've got nine points.

You will see on the back of your service sheets nine points, although compared to the Puritans, I'm told they used to have at least between 15 and 30 points, so we can count ourselves lucky this morning.

Let's pray. Father, we do pray that you would quieten our hearts and please open them to your word and open your word to our hearts.

And we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, as I say, an ambitious task today to try to hear the message of these two chapters in 2 Corinthians, nine principles for the cheerful giver.

If you've just joined us, you've joined us in the middle of a four-part series on God and money, and we're gradually getting more practical. So we've had two talks on some of the big principles, and we're gradually going to be getting a bit more practical here.

[5 : 35] This is the most sustained passage about giving in the New Testament, I think. And that's why we're here. It's full of wisdom and full of inspiration from the Apostle Paul.

I think there are basically nine principles here for the cheerful giver. Paul takes his time, and so I think we need to take our time. And I think it makes sense to hear them all together as well.

So you could sort of pick a couple of verses out of this section. I was very tempted to do that, to extract them. But then I think you risk distorting the tone of these chapters.

So that's why we're going to try and quickfire through the whole thing. Just a step back briefly before we dive into these nine principles.

A bit of background to this letter. The reason Paul sends it is that he's heard that the church in Corinth are beginning to accept and to listen to what he describes as super apostles.

[6 : 39] Impressive Christian teachers who seem brilliant on the outside. Great speakers and all of that stuff. But they're leading the church in Corinth away from Paul, and therefore away from the true gospel, and therefore away from Jesus.

So there's a real danger in Corinth that these Corinthians will drift away from the gospel. Paul is confident that they won't, but he writes this letter.

He writes this letter so that they would open their hearts wide again to him, chapter 7. Not because he's on some kind of power trip, but so that they would stick with the true gospel and the true Jesus, therefore, for the rest of their lives.

Now, alongside this, he has also been collecting among the Gentile churches, where he's been doing mission, in Macedonia and Greece.

He's been collecting for the relief of the saints. Verse 4. 8 verse 4. There was probably a famine in Jerusalem.

[7 : 46] There were Christians in Jerusalem who were poor and in need of help. And Paul was collecting for them. Previously, the Corinthians had said they would like to contribute to this gift.

And so Paul comes on to this in the second half of his letter. He gives two whole chapters to it. Massive airtime. And we'll come on to why that might be.

I think the crux is there. The climax is there in 9 verse 6 and 7. Whoever sows sparingly will reap sparingly. Whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.

And then verse 7. Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. I think the surrounding text is there in order to turn us into, help us to be cheerful givers.

That's what he wants to achieve. And don't, if we're Christian here today, don't we all want to be a cheerful giver? That's what we want, isn't it?

[8 : 57] We love the idea of bringing pleasure to God our Father through how we use our money. And yet, we often find it so hard.

Well, let's look at these nine principles for the cheerful giver. Number one, giving is God's gift. 8 verse 1.

We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia.

Giving is God's gift. He starts by drawing their attention to the inspiring example of the Macedonian church. That's the church of Philippi and Thessalonica.

But this is a really strange way to introduce it, isn't it? Verse 1. We want you to know about the grace of God that has been given. Giving is itself a gift of God's grace.

[9 : 58] Do we realize that? Of course it is, just like every other change in our hearts that God brings through Jesus. The heart that wants to give cheerfully, well, that itself is a gift of God's grace.

Two things to note here, I think. Number one, to give is better for the giver than for the receiver. It's a gift of God's grace to be a giver.

It's something we should want. To become a generous giver is part of the grace of God in our lives. I wonder if you realize that. Secondly, it means that if we're struggling in this area, let's be honest, all of us at times, the place to start is to pray.

It is God who must change our hearts. It is God who gives the cheerful heart. And God who gives the opportunity.

Even this comes from God. So cheerful giving is a gift of the grace of God. And he loves to give that gift. He gave it to the Macedonian church.

[11 : 15] He can give it to you. The prayer would be something like this. Lord, please take away my reluctant heart. Give me a cheerful giving heart. One thing I think it would be great to pray off the back of this series is that this same grace of God might be given among us as a whole church family.

Not just a small minority of us, but all of us. The same grace that he gave to the Macedonians. And I think we can also give thanks.

From what I hear, I don't have access to any of the details, neither do I want them. But from what I hear, God has given us the gift of this grace.

So firstly, giving is God's gift. Secondly, the Macedonians gave more than was wise. You see that? Verse 2. In a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part.

For they gave according to their means, and as I can testify, beyond their means of their own accord. Begging us earnestly for the favour of taking part in the relief of the saints.

[12 : 31] And this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord, and then by the will of God to us. So Paul holds up these Macedonian Christians, the church in Philippi, the church in Thessalonica.

And through Paul, God holds them up as an example to his church throughout the ages. Do you see verse 2? They themselves were poor. Extreme poverty.

Imagine perhaps a church in rural Zambia, themselves scraping by, living in mud huts, begging for a chance to give to Christians in Syria who they'd heard were in desperate need.

It's that kind of thing, isn't it? They gave beyond their means. Do you see that? In verse 3. In other words, they gave more than they could afford.

They risked having to go without themselves. They were already poor. They made themselves poorer in faith that God would provide.

[13 : 42] And the surprise perhaps for some of us here is that Paul doesn't rebuke them as being unwise for giving more than they could afford.

He holds them up as an example. Verse 4. They begged for the privilege. They didn't want to miss out on an opportunity to love their fellow Christians in need, even though they themselves probably could have done with some help.

Isn't that beautiful? They were begging, Paul, please let us help, even though we can't really afford it. They gave freely, under no pressure from man or from the apostle.

Verse 5. They gave themselves first to the Lord. Lord, please look after us as we give. And then to man.

They gave more than was wise. And the Lord God holds them up to the church in Corinth and to the church throughout history and says, look at these guys and be inspired by their example.

[14 : 58] Well, we'll come back to that in a minute. Thirdly, giving is a proof that we are genuine disciples of Jesus. Verse 7.

As you excel in everything, in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in Bible handling, in expository Bible teaching ministry, in speaking truth in love, in understanding the Bible, in Cornhill, in training, in great growth groups, in all earnestness, and in our love for you, see that you also excel in this act of grace as well, giving.

Verse 8. I say this not as a command, but as, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine. Verse 24.

Do you see it says it again? Verse 24. So give proof before the churches of your love and of our boasting about you to these men. We won't pause here for long, but it is very interesting.

Paul has spent seven chapters explaining why he is a true apostle and ending with the appeal to widen your hearts to me. And then the first thing he does is he says, now prove yourselves to be genuine disciples of the Lord Jesus with your wallet.

[16 : 22] This means that one of the major proofs that we have genuinely accepted the gospel of Jesus Christ will be seen with what we do with our money.

I love his gentleness. Verse 8. Do you see that? I say this not as a command. He wants it to be willing. Paul is not beating them over the head, but saying, you are true Christians.

Now prove it. There may be someone here today who has not yet started giving regularly. You're a Christian. You've come to faith.

Your wallet, perhaps you might say, has not yet quite been converted. Hear Paul's words for you. Prove that you really have understood and accepted the gospel.

That your love for Jesus and his people is genuine. The fourth principle is that giving flows out from knowing Jesus Christ.

[17 : 26] 8 verse 9. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you, by his poverty, might become rich.

This is quite a well-known verse. You might see it on a fridge magnet or something like that. But actually, in its context, why does Paul say this verse to the Corinthians?

Well, he says, think of what Christ has done for you. He made himself poor so that you might be rich. He reframes the gospel, the gospel message, in terms of riches and wealth.

And so Paul effectively asks the question, I think, to the Corinthians and to us, now will you honour him, that's Christ, by doing the same for others, specifically here for your brothers and sisters in Christ who need help?

So I think Paul writes this to remind the Corinthians that financial giving is simply the overflow of a heart that has truly understood the gospel. someone described this kind of thing in these words that I think is very helpful.

[18 : 42] They said, it's like paying forward what Jesus has done for us. He's made us rich with eternal riches that can never be taken away, peace with God, eternal life.

He did so by becoming poor for us on the cross, by taking our sin on himself and the punishment that it deserved, thereby making peace.

And so financial giving is not about paying God back. We cannot and will not ever be able to do that. That would be an offence to his grace.

But financial giving rather is about paying forward to others what Christ has done for us from a position of riches that every Christian has, riches that can never be taken away, the peace that we now have with God and eternal riches and life to come.

From that position we can give now out of gratitude and desire to honour Jesus by becoming like him. In other words, we can pay forward to others what he has already done for us.

[19 : 56] It's the overflow of knowing him. Well, that alone I think could be motivation enough for the cheerful giver. Principle number five, the danger of good intentions only.

So, read with me verse 10. And in this matter I give my judgment. This benefits you who a year ago started not only to do this work but also to desire to do it.

So now finish doing it as well so that your readiness in desiring it may be matched by your completing it out of what you have. This is so true to life, isn't it?

It looks like they had started something a year ago. Perhaps the announcement was made to give or the need for giving and a few people made pledges.

It was a good start and Paul now says complete what you started. He knows the danger therefore, I think, of good intentions never materialising and he's concerned that this might happen in the Corinthian church and we all know the same, don't we?

[21 : 08] I think there's a principle here for all of us. Somehow we can remain in a state of good intention when it comes to financial giving without actually finishing. We're really good at procrastinating.

You know, I'll sort it all out after Christmas or when this or that or the other is paid for then I'll start giving or I'll just wait for the next pay rise and then it never actually happens.

So let's make sure our readiness in desiring to give is matched by our completing it, Paul says. The other thing is it takes time and effort to give, doesn't it?

It's administration to set stuff up, to do the calculations. Often that could be the barrier. Well then, time well spent organising our giving is time well spent.

So the danger of good intentions only, Paul says, let your desiring to give be matched by your actually giving. So that's number five.

[22 : 08] Number six, principle number six. The balance and this is what I've called the balance and freedom of giving. The balance and freedom of giving. So we come here to a really interesting and important thing that Paul says in verses 12 to 15 of chapter eight.

Let me just read them again. for if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have. For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened, but that as a matter of fairness, your abundance at this present time should supply their need so that their abundance may supply your need, that there may be fairness.

As it is written, whoever gathered much had nothing left over and whoever gathered little had no lack. So in verse 12, he says, I want you to give out of what you have, not out of what you don't have.

For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened. Paul does not ask them to give so much that they become in need themselves and burdened by poverty.

There's enough for everyone to go round, just as there was back in the Exodus with the manna from heaven. There's enough for everyone. But where we have more than we need, we give out of fairness.

[23 : 30] And when the roles are reversed, others will be able to give to you. That's the principle that Paul's talking about here. That's the point. And yet, we've just had the example of the Macedonians who gave beyond their means, held up by Paul.

So what's going on, Paul? Which is it? Well, I've called this principle the balance and freedom of giving because I think the point is this.

I think Paul holds up the Macedonians because there's nothing wrong with what they did. In fact, it was wonderful. There's nothing wrong with giving beyond your means, with giving unwisely.

God commends it in the case of the Macedonians and he will look after us if we do. And yet, he stops short of requiring it. Do you see?

So what is required is fairness. When you have an abundance more than you need, make sure your first port of call is, can I give this to others who need it more or to churches who don't have?

[24 : 42] But Paul leaves the door open to anyone who is prompted by the spirits to be more Macedonian, if you like, and sometimes to give even beyond what seems to be sensible, perhaps in response to a particular situation, in faith that God will provide, which he will.

There's no requirement to impoverish ourselves as we give and yet, there is nothing wrong with doing that and a lot right with doing it, with giving beyond what seems wise, if we first give ourselves to the Lord and do so out of a cheerful, willing heart.

And so what I think we have here is the balance and freedom of giving. Just three brief implications of this point. Number one, I think this, well, this certainly means that a church or ministry where people are pressured to give more than they can afford is wrong and an abuse of power.

Some churches, you may find that. Well, Paul doesn't do that. He does not require of the Corinthians more than they can afford. The second thing is, I think this means that there will be various approaches to giving within the church, none of which are necessarily wrong.

There's freedom. So some might be more gung-ho givers, regularly putting themselves at financial risk. People might say, well, they're acting unwisely, but I think Paul would say they're just being Macedonian and God will provide.

[26 : 12] Others might be a bit more verse 12 givers, a bit more balance in general. Well, there's freedom. Or it may be that it may vary at different moments in life.

This, of course, was a response to a particular need that the Macedonians were giving towards. They were so filled with love for their fellow believers in need that they gave even what they couldn't afford.

And thirdly, implication of this principle. we shouldn't miss that the principle here is fairness in verse 14. Well, end of verse 13.

I say this as a matter of fairness. Your abundance at the present time shouldn't supply their need. Now, if I can just speak frankly to us here at Grace Church, as Christians living in London and even more frankly, as Christians living in this part of London, it is surely right that we contribute as a church that we contribute out of our relative abundance to the needs of Christians elsewhere in the world.

We give 9% of our total budget to mission and to helping churches in need. Could that be more? Should it be more?

[27 : 32] Perhaps. Well, number 7, principle number 7, large-scale giving should be properly administered and that's verses 18 to 21.

So, in verse 18, Paul speaks of this brother who's famous among the churches for preaching the gospel and he's actually been travelling round with them as they've been gathering this collection and he explains why in verse 20 he says, we take this course so that no one should blame us about this generous gift that is being administered by us for we aim at what is honourable not only in the Lord's sight but also in the sight of man.

So, I think there's a principle here for us. This man, this brother who is unnamed travels with them so that no one could accuse them of dodgy business as they collect all this money of sticking their hand into the money bag.

And there's a principle here therefore of accountability for us. The finances of our church should never be the preserve of one person within the church whether the treasurer or the church leader or indeed even of maybe just one or two people but should have multiple eyes on them and ideally some external eyes.

The set up at Grace Church is that we've got a treasurer an assistant treasurer a church council and charities commission and stewardship and the accounts are in the public domain for all to see.

[29 : 12] It's good practice and actually it's an example of how investing time into proper administration of our finances with accountability is part of our godliness as a church.

Principle number eight and we're nearly there. This is the last big one. We've got a very brief one number nine. Principle number eight giving is a risk-free investment for eternity and Paul brings the whole thing to a climax at this point in verses nine sorry chapter nine verse six to fifteen.

Just look down at chapter chapter nine verse six. The point is this whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.

The point of these last few verses the climax is that giving is a risk-free investment. Giving is an investment for eternity. Do you see in verse six you will reap bountifully.

It's not burning money to give it away. I once heard of you may have heard of the footballer Ryan Giggs play for Man United in the 90s.

[30 : 43] I grew up in Manchester and there was a story that did the rounds that in his young days just having started at Man United he was sitting in a pub and someone came up to him possibly had had one or two too many but he said to Ryan Giggs he recognised him and said what can you do that I can't?

What can you do that I can't? And Ryan Giggs apparently pulled out a £50 note and a lighter and just lit it in front of him and burnt £50 to demonstrate his point.

Now we might think that giving away our money is a bit like just throwing our money into the ether but Paul says no that couldn't be further from the truth giving is an investment for eternity whoever sows bountifully will reap bountifully and before he we'll just talk about what the reaping actually is in a second but before he expands on what that investment is he reassures the Corinthians that their giving is risk free even in the present so just look at verse 8 he says you will not be left out of pocket material things at all times you may abound in every good work it's one of the great worries isn't it as we give I don't know if you have that have this certainly we do in our family the temptation to worry that will we have enough what about the future what if this that or the other thing happens well the promise of verse 8 and of verse 10 is that as we give

God will resupply just look again look at verse 10 with me he who supplies the seed both the seed to the sower and the bread for food will supply and multiply both your seed for sowing in other words all that you need in order to be able to give and increase the harvest of your righteousness the point here is that he won't let us go without he will make all grace abound to you so that you have all sufficiency in all things at all times as you give he will replenish so that you can give again that's the point and so therefore give in faith now this is not the prosperity gospel which says give and God will make you rich in this world it's not the prosperity gospel but it is the sufficiency gospel give and oh yeah he will make sure you have enough he will make his grace abound to you all sufficiency at all times it's not the prosperity gospel but it is the sufficiency gospel and so therefore give in faith knowing that you will always be well supplied will be resupplied resupplied replenished replenished what kind of life do you want to live well

God is saying you can be like the pipe never lacking enough to be giving because he will resupply that's the promise here I think and so therefore don't worry give in faith give even like the Macedonians and you will never be without enough and as my youth leader once said I think helpfully you cannot out give God well that's always been our experience so giving is risk free and also giving is an investment for eternity you will reap a harvest of righteousness that will last forever so bountifully reap bountifully verse nine his righteousness endures forever verse ten he will increase the harvest of your righteousness what then is this harvest of righteousness when you go back to psalm 112 where this verse in verse ten in verse nine is quoted from you find that this righteous man who is distributed freely to the poor you find psalm 112 saying his name will last forever and his horn will be exalted in honour his name will last forever and his horn will be exalted in honour and so therefore

[36 : 10] I think what this harvest of righteousness means is a life that will never be forgotten everlasting honour for a life well lived and for money well spent for the sake of others you might rephrase it his honour or his vindication will last forever there will be a few more jewels perhaps in the crown of righteousness that God himself will honour his people with honour and joy for the Christian in eternity and glory to God glory for God in thanksgivings do you see there in verse 11 which through us will produce thanksgiving to God there will be a harvest of righteousness in eternity honour and joy for the Christian glory for God as you give so you could live a tight fist

Christian life verse six sow sparingly give yeah yeah give a little but but but but not much there won't be much to show for that in eternity at least in that respect sow sparingly reap sparingly or you could live a life of generous giving in faith that life will resound in eternity thanksgiving glory honour and joy I think that's Paul's point verse six whoever sows sparingly will reap sparingly whoever sows bountifully will reap bountifully well how do you want to invest your money and finally number nine how and how much to give we'll come on to this a bit more next week but there it is in verse seven each one must give as he's decided in his heart not reluctantly or under compulsion for

God loves a cheerful giver there is complete freedom as to how much and how is cheerfully not reluctantly but each one must decide before the Lord and God loves a cheerful giver so here are some principles pray for the grace of God giving is a gift look at the Macedonians what an example they are look at Christ don't you want to overflow in response to him to honor him to pay forward what he has done for you look at God's promise of an eternal impact an eternal harvest a harvest of righteousness that will resound forever and look at the present promise of God to give us all that we need we will never be without enough and give with a cheerful heart how much neither

I nor anybody else can say that is a matter between you and the Lord we'll come to this next week we'll talk about tithing but there is no tithing in the new covenant that was an old covenant thing we'll talk a bit more about that next week will you commit to a life of sowing sparingly and reaping sparingly or will you commit to a life of sowing bountifully and reaping bountifully let's pray for God loves a cheerful giver father how we long to bring pleasure to you by how we give may you send your may you work in us by your spirit to give us increasingly cheerful giving hearts and please would we be those who so bountifully looking to that glorious reward to come and we ask it in

Jesus name amen