

Considering Commitment (Evening Service)

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[0 : 0 0] well the point is this the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully i have to tell you i really like that verse second corinthians chapter 9 verse 6 and when i was thinking about this first i thought i might just try and apply that verse to my car now some of you know my little barina well it's just clocked over 100 k's and i have to tell you it's getting weary i mean it rattles a bit uh the suspension needs suspending it's a bit slow off the line at the lights that's probably a clutch problem but anyway i mean there's just so many great cars on the road every time i'm out there i just see them well friday night we're up at the men's camp some of them are here tonight which is just terrific so the guys are sitting around and i have to tell you talk about covetousness this is it this is an audi s8 v10 apologies i didn't get this scan to put up there for the ones at the back this is some sleek car let me sort of describe this to you a little bit six speed manual gearbox leather seats gps tracking system and the ad just simply describes it this way i mean you don't need a lot of words just exhilarating trouble is uh how on earth am i going to afford it i mean as i was drooling about this bit of european machinery that's when i remembered the verse the point is this the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly and the one who sows bountifully is also going to reap bountifully hallelujah i tell you let me share with you my financial logic see if i increase my weekly giving to the church by i don't know let's say three times that's not going to break the bank um then i reckon god will provide me with a car just worth heaps more than the price of a new barina so you can see why i'm excited can't you i mean the sort of the audi keys i can just feel them in my hot little hand give a little extra to the church get a fantastic car i mean that is a deal so what do you think how do you think i'm going with my biblical interpretation do you think i've got sort of the right biblical principle of giving well turn with me to second corinthians 9 and it'll be useful if you've all got your bibles open because the passage at one level is straightforward but it's also just got some interesting logic through it so page 942 and as we look at second corinthians 9 we're going to see what god actually has to say about giving and the context of this for us it's not just about dollars we're talking about our time we're talking about our energy we're talking about the use of our gifts or our talents in fact for us in western society for western christians giving of time is probably the most costly gift paul's already mentioned in the notices that next sunday is commitment sunday and inside look in inside look there's a blue form like this which just simply lists a great range of ministry activities and also there's a little white form there for financial commitment for the year ahead and each of us needs to prayerfully consider and respond during the course of this week well i want to tell you about julie and bob clark julie and bob they were just stunned to receive a

letter from their church just back in july the church asked them to participate in the life of the church straightforward or worship elsewhere i mean they basically called us free we were free loaders said julie we were free loaders says bob now in a trend that may signal that tough times are ahead for wallflower christians bellwether megachurch faith community has asked non-participating members to simply stop attending no more mr nice church says the executive pastor newly hired from singular wireless bigger is not always better providing free services indefinitely to complacent christians that's just simply not our mission free loading christians you see they were straining the church's nursery and the facility resources they were harming the church's ability to reach the lost at least that's what the pastor thought when your bottom line is saving souls you get impatient you get impatient with people who interfere with that goal so faith community what did they do well they just simply sent out polite letters polite but firm to families who attend church services and freebie events but they never volunteer they never tithe and they don't belong to a small group or any other ministry well the church estimates that of its 8 000 regular attendees only about half of them have volunteered over the last three years and a third have never given a cent to the church well before

now we'd made people feel comfortable and welcome and we tried to coax them to give a little bit more well says a staff member but that's changed we're done with being the community nanny well surprisingly this move to disinvite people has drawn a positive response from men in the community who like the idea of this sort of in-your-face church well i thought a church that doesn't allow wusses that rocks that was bob clark who received one of the letters he admires the church for telling him basically to go and get lost well above is a fictional piece of satire which i found on an interesting little website called larknews.com friends the church is a body and that's not fiction we we we are the members of that body and god has so arranged it that the body only functions as we give in fact giving what god has already lovingly and graciously given us think about it this way think of money dollars in your pocket we actually only have them first and foremost because of god's providential care for us think about our spiritual gifts our talents they are sovereignly given to us by the holy spirit and no christian misses out think about our time it's only the lord who actually sustains our life so i want us to just initially consider the background to these two chapters in fact chapter eight and chapter nine which are one unit so we come into this halfway through paul's address of this one subject and paul if you like i think one way to describe him is paul is the church's first great appeal organizer he's been organizing a collection actually for some years from the greek christians first of all the greek christians up in the north the macedonian so they would be churches like philippi and thessalonica and then he's also been organizing it amongst the archaic churches in the south so churches like corinth and also athens and the collection was for poor struggling jewish christians back in judea the collection was just not a transfer of money the collection was actually a symbol of jewish and gentile solidarity because through christ's death that dividing wall had been broken down and a new single reconciled humanity was being formed us the church and so the willingness of the corinthian church in the south to give had actually been a tremendous example for the ones up north the macedonians and then the macedonians were now providing an example back to the corinthians let's think about our situation then at holy trinity as we serve the lord with our time with our money with our gifts talents we actually act as a spur to other anglican parishes that we act as a spur and encouragement to other churches in melbourne and indeed in the wider world scene well these corinthians are ready to give look with me at verse two paul writes to them for i know your eagerness which is the subject of my boasting about you to the people up north to the people of macedonia saying that archaia has been ready since last year and your zeal has stirred up most of them so far so good then look at verse three but i'm sending the brothers that was titus and two others in order that our boasting about you may not prove to have been empty in this case so that you may be ready as i said you would be otherwise if some macedonians come with me and find that you're not ready we would be humiliated to say nothing of you in this undertaking so i thought it necessary to urge the brothers to go on ahead to you and arrange in advance for this bountiful gift that you have promised you see the corinthians haven't actually completed what they had enthusiastically begun they needed to be ready they needed to complete the project feel like they needed to deliver on what they'd promised and as i've been mulling this over i thought yeah i can i can relate to that pretty easily i wonder if you can relate to that wonder if we as a church can relate to that starting but not fully delivering i mean if you think of where we're located we're surrounded in an area with just lots of kids and lots of youth and yet we're still struggling to fill sunday school teacher positions we're still struggling to come up with leaders for sebs and girls club next year well i was reminded this week in my own life of having good intentions and yet how easy it is not to complete i received a letter from andy priddo known to many if not most of you here the letter outlined the chronic state of finances amongst the christian union the cu staff at melbourne uni and this is a vital ministry and there is just a serious shortage of funds so as i read the letter i was prompted by the holy spirit to not only respond with a gift but also indeed as to the amount but i didn't immediately write the check now of course i can justify this by arguing that paul was off on holidays and i was having a busy week but it's actually very easy to put things off to put things off to not complete

well i have now completed so what about us here then at holy trinity what is it that we need to complete what is it that we need to finish or perhaps as we look at those response forms in inside look for next sunday the question might be indeed what do we actually need to start well paul's going to send titus and two other companions ahead of him to corinth and the reason for if you like sending this advance party is spelled out back in chapter 8 verse 20 and also in verse 5 so just flick back a page and look at verse 20 of chapter 8 paul writes we intend that no one should blame us about this generous gift that we're administering for we intend to do what is right not only in the

lord's sight but also in the sight of others you see the collection is to be completed before paul gets there so that any suspicion that's presently sort of surrounding us to his motives will be completely dispelled well then if you turn back to chapter 9 and look at verse 5 in verse 5 you'll see there the terms bountiful gift and voluntary gift and in fact in the greek this is exactly the same word and that word just most basically means blessing or the idea is a gift of blessing so the corinth the corinthians giving is to be what it's to be a response to god's grace in their lives and friends that's actually the bottom line christian giving in all of its forms is a response to god's grace so look again at verse 5 paul actually in the verse he points out two opposite ways of giving so firstly there's a generosity that flows from experiencing god's blessing and trusting in his promises it's one way to give there's another way to give which is at the end of the verse it's what we might call begrudging giving the word that we've got translated there in the nrsv is extortion the idea is actually one of covetousness so if you're like if you're giving like this you've got a great focus on yourself either what you're going to get or how much you're going to keep wanting as much as possible for ourselves well what do you reckon i think that sounds a fair bit like my audi s8 v10 doesn't it you see we don't give to get we actually give so that we might be a blessing and the result is that god is glorified well in my fictional i have to add fictional personal illustration my apparent generosity increasing my church giving actually had nothing to do with a spirit of true generosity flowing from god's grace in fact that scheme had everything simply to do with me and tragically that's reflective of so much as what's simply called today the prosperity gospel of which verses picked out completely at random and out of context from this chapter are often cited so up to verse five paul's actually been focusing on they need to complete what they've started and now in the remainder of the chapter he goes on and he addresses why participating in this ministry should be and must be characterized by generosity and joy well these greek christians they just had tremendous enthusiasm i know greeks have that anyway but these greek christians had tremendous enthusiasm so we're sort of jumping between eight and nine but

just again flick back that page to chapter eight and look at verses two to four paul writes for during a severe ordeal of affliction their abundant joy and their extreme poverty had overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part for as i can testify they voluntarily gave according to their means and indeed even beyond their means and notice for begging us earnestly for the privilege of sharing in this ministry to the saints and we ought to ask the question immediately why so why were these christians so willing to give begging for the privilege of being in this partnership with paul well both chapter eight and nine actually give us the answer these christians these greek christians understood that christian giving is a grace grace grace in fact is the central term used in both of these chapters eight and nine and i want us just we're just going to flick through this i'll just read these verses to get a feel for as they read this in greek how much that word would have just stuck in their brain eight verse one we want you to know brothers and sisters about the grace of god verse four begging us earnestly for the privilege the word is grace begging us for the grace of sharing in this ministry to the saints verse six so we should also complete this generous undertaking the word again is grace complete this grace among you verse seven so we want you to excel also in this generous undertaking we want you to excel in this grace the verse nine for you you know the generous act again you know the grace of our lord jesus christ but though he was rich yet for our sakes he became poor so that by his poverty you might become rich verse 19 while we're administering this generous undertaking while we're administering this grace for the glory of the lord himself and then over to nine verse eight and god is able to provide you with every blessing god is able to provide you with every every grace in abundance and verse 14 because of the surpassing grace of god that he has given you we certainly don't have to have been to ridley to get the thrust of those two chapters but but why is giving a grace i mean we know that grace is a characteristic of god grace is the generosity of god so why is our giving a grace why is our giving a grace and in seeking to answer that i want to take you through a stream of grace through this chapter you see christian giving is a grace because christian giving is an expression of god's grace within us you see god's grace has been revealed towards us in christ and god's grace has been put in us by the holy spirit so you might want to just simply look at the first diagram thanks trev there we go we'll be right by the second diagram and the first diagram just simply shows that god gives his grace grace to his people there we go god simply gives his grace we've looked at that verse back in chapter 8 the beginning and at

[20 : 20] the end the second last verse of chapter 9 god gives his grace to his people and we'll look at those verses verses 8 to 11 in just a moment friends what i want you to see in this the starting

point is god he gives his people his grace verse 14 because of the surpassing grace of god that he has given you well how does god express his grace he expresses his grace by providing our material and also our spiritual needs and that enablement of our material and spiritual needs enables us to do what to sow generously and cheerfully thanks trev so we've been provided by god to us and what do we do we so generously and cheerfully and if you're looking there at the text you'll see that verse 6 simply begins this way with those little words the point is this simple words but he's actually linking back to verse 5 because this is what he's saying in connection with this question of giving either generously or grudgingly the point is this do you see the importance of that verse 5 you're going to give it this way or you're giving it this way the point is this the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully each of you must give as you've made up your mind not reluctantly or under compulsion for god loves a cheerful giver well how do we sow bountifully and again look back at verse 5 we sow bountifully by this gift of blessing a bountiful gift a voluntary gift and we'll have the next one up thanks trev so we give a gift of blessing whether money our talents gifts our time to others notice in verse 7 that the key point is actually not so much how much you give but that we give as freely as possible we give of our money we give of our time we give of our talents and gifts because when it comes to christian service the thing that's critical is actually having proper motives and that is especially true in the giving of money the lord is much more concerned with why we give than how much we give so it's a question of having a right heart attitude therefore it just sort of flows on doesn't it that we should never give in order to receive the praise of others but we give because we love god and we desire to see his name on it and glorified it's been said that there are actually three kinds of givers one's described simply as a flint a sponge and a honeycomb it's a pretty easy illustration to get anything out of a flint what do you do you hammer it and what happens when you hammer it you get chips and sparks to get water out of a sponge what do you have to do squeeze it and the more pressure you apply what happens the more you get but the honeycomb just simply overflows with its own sweetness so the question is what kind of giver am i flint sponge honeycomb the question is what kind of giver are you the question corporately is what kind of giver

is holy trinity god tells us that he loves a cheerful giver well where have we got to so far think of it this way sowing that is truly generous has these characteristics it's not to be characterized by manipulating the situation to our advantage like the end of verse five sowing that's truly generous won't be sort of oh i regret that i've got to do this verse seven sowing that's generous will not be surrender or pressure rather sowing that's generous is going to be giving our money our time our gifts our talents delighting in the service of god delighting in the ministry delighting in worshiping our lord well the results of the cheerful giving are then spelled out for us in verse eight and god is able to provide to provide you with every blessing in abundance so that by always having enough of everything you may share abundantly in every good work as it's written he scatters abroad he gives 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 for your great generosity and if you were to look up verse nine you'd see that it's quoting from psalm 112 in verse 10 there are allusions to isaiah 55 and hosea 10 we won't look at those now but if you were to look at the context of those it becomes very clear very quickly that seed and harvest can't simply be equated with material provisions you see god's promise in verse 10 is not to make us materially rich god's promise is actually to use us as instruments of his presence in the salvation of others so what happens when we give well not only does god actually take care of us and our needs that's his promise but in surprising ways in ways that wow i didn't realize that might have happened it sort of came out of left field god provides opportunities for us to actually further participate in giving and so if you think of that agricultural metaphor that's been running through these verses it's this simple we reap to do what to sow back more that's what the holy spirit is teaching us in the passage and trev will have the next one up thanks mate and so we sow generously we give a gift of blessing to others and what do the others do what do the recipients do they give thanks to god they give thanks to god god the greatest giver and god is glorified so you see where have we come to we've come exactly to where we started god and trev let's come up to the next one and we'll just go through that god gives his grace to us his people and we then so generously we so cheerfully thanks trev and we so generously and cheerfully to others by giving them a gift of blessing and what do the recipients do they lift their hearts in praise to god and god is glorified friends giving christian giving generous giving starts with

god it ends with god it ends with god and it's all about grace and so paul concludes by simply saying in

verse 15 thanks be to god for his indescribable gift paul's message is this let's just give thanks to god for his supremely generous gift of the lord jesus christ for you know the generous grace of our lord jesus christ that though he was rich mega rich yet for your sakes he became poor so that by his poverty you might become rich friends giving is actually an act of faith in response to god's grace giving of our time giving of our talents and gifts giving out their money it's an act of faith it's an act of faith in response to god's grace so when we go to fill in the forms for next week we don't want to have an attitude something like this oh okay then all right okay if i have to i'll contribute to the church you see we are the church we belong to god and therefore we belong to one another so should we give absolutely but not under compulsion you see in giving we emphasize that we're god's people through whom god glorifies himself our generosity has to be grace driven the macedonians well they were cheerful givers their abundant giving was what it was just the natural working out of their joy in the grace of god so let me say this before we consider our commitment forms for next sunday uh before i consider them before you consider them i need to you need to reflect on the grace of god in our life we need to reflect on the grace of god in this community the church that meets at holy trinity doncaster god has revealed his great grace to us in christ and he's put his grace in us with the indwelling of the holy spirit it's an amazing god who we worship and serve an amazing god who as we actually respond to his grace in giving what happens god graciously gives us more opportunities and means to give more for the extension of his kingdom to the praise of his glorious grace amen