

Cheerful Giving from the Heart

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[0 : 0 0] window at the top of the building, I could see down onto a corner that was known as Map Reader's Corner and the number of tourists that would stop at this particular junction, get the big maps out and wonder should they take the road up to Uig or take the other road to Staffan. And isn't that a picture of our life? Which way will you go, will you follow the road that leads to eternal life through Christ? Will you take the other road that leads to eternal separation? So thank you Andy for that very timely address. Not just the children, it's not just children who listen to children's addresses, surely it's ourselves, all of us. Please turn with me again to 2 Corinthians chapter 9 and let's read again from verse 7. You'll find that on page 967, no you won't. Page 968, 2 Corinthians 9 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'm sure most of you know that it's generally at a time of an annual congregational meeting, an annual business meeting, that a minister stands up, gives a short address on the duty of the Christian to give us the Lord has blessed, to respond to the wonderful grace of God and what God has done for us. An annual congregational meeting is a time when we reflect on all that God has blessed us in, in the past year and we take time to consider how we might give for the cause of the gospel, how we should give as the Lord has blessed us. But I often wonder, is that always the best or the best or the only time when we should speak about what we are to give in the Lord's work.

I think there's a number of reasons why it shouldn't just be an annual congregational meeting where the whole matter of our giving to the Lord's work is concerned. I mean for one thing, an annual congregational meeting is not always well attended. I mean when was the last time you got really excited about coming to an annual congregational meeting. And then, you know, there's the fact that it's just once a year that the short address given by the ministers preached and then that's it for the next year.

And then, thirdly, more particularly in the context of what we intend for this year, we hope to move forward as a congregation. And part of that moving forward concerns renovation of the building.

And I think, you know, the whole matter of our giving for the Lord's work, for the Lord's cause, is going to come into sharp focus this year. So, on this particular occasion, the first Lord's Day of a new year, what better opportunity do we have to consider my giving, your giving, for the work of the gospel of the Lord Jesus.

And as we consider our giving, of course we have to consider what we give biblically. So, this is a great opportunity to focus on the whole matter of giving.

[3 : 4 1] We begin a new year, by God's grace, this first Lord's Day of 2018. So, let's, each one of us, examine our hearts.

Particularly examine your heart with respect to the giving of yourself and the giving of the resources that God has given us, God has given you, for the work of the gospel to continue and to be accomplished.

And, you know, this whole idea of the giving from the heart, because it's a test of our hearts that indicates where our true priorities lie. Because, when we look at our hearts, we've got to ask, are our hearts, is my heart, is your heart, responding to the Saviour, the Lord Jesus, who gave himself for you?

Am I seeing the Lord Jesus in what Andy was reading earlier, of the Saviour who was rich, but for our sake became poor, so that you, so that I might become rich in him?

So, we respond to what Jesus has done for us in his giving of himself. Surely, part of that response to the Lord Jesus in giving himself for us is that by thoughtfulness, by willingness, by cheerfulness, we look at how we might give of ourselves to the work of the gospel.

[5 : 09] And in this new year, I mean, this is what, almost a week now, we've been examining our hearts surely, testing our motives, looking at the direction of our lives.

And of course, a new year is a time, yes, when we have cast our minds, our hearts, back to a past year, even the very sins of the past year, not living our lives to the glory of God, casual about attending the means of grace, not committing to the Lord every aspect of our life, whether as individuals or as a congregation.

It's for you and I to continually test our hearts. And included within that testing is how we are in relation to the work of this church that God has placed us in.

So examine. For us, surely, even this first Lord's Day of this new year, to examine our giving, our giving to the Lord's cause and for his glory.

Because, you know, if anything, it's not just what we give, but it's the way that we give that speaks of our hearts in relation to God. I mean, of course, it's something we have to do regularly when we consider our responsibilities and the stewardship of the resources that God has given each one of us.

[6 : 31] But I do believe that this congregation is entering a new chapter in its life. So we look at how Scripture guides and directs us, how you and I are to give for the Lord's work, for the Lord's glory.

Do that in the quiet of your own heart. And come before God with total honesty in your heart. And consider these three aspects that we were just mentioning a moment ago.

Thoughtfulness, willingness, and cheerfulness in what you give and how you give for the cause of the kingdom. But we are being based in Scripture.

So let's just get a wee bit of context to the passages that Andy read earlier. Because we have to understand where we're coming from. Certainly as we were reading these sections of 2 Corinthians.

Because in order to understand what Paul has been writing to the church in Corinth here, you actually have to go back to the first letter that Paul wrote to that church. You've got to go back to chapter 16.

[7 : 34] And it was in chapter 16, 1 Corinthians 16, where we read that Paul has been urging the church in Corinth to emulate the church in Galatia about giving of their resources to help the suffering believers in Jerusalem.

And Paul gave clear instructions. The church in Corinth should set aside a sum of money each week, first day of the week, in keeping as the Lord had prospered them.

But while there was that instruction to give through a regular collection, while the church in Corinth did make a start in making that collection, they hadn't finished through what they'd promised in their heart to give.

And the full collection was incomplete. And it's only in the second, Corinthians 2nd letter, chapter 8, Paul comments on the delay, the delay that these Corinthians had been, as it were, holding back in the full giving of what they'd promised.

And Paul actually uses the example of the church in Macedonia, fellow believers in Macedonia. They'd been exercising the grace of God. They'd been giving generously. They'd been giving fully for the relief of the saints in Jerusalem.

[8 : 58] But it's very clear here that the believers in Corinth, yes, they desired, it was in their heart's desire to help these believers in Jerusalem. But move a year on and the collection is still incomplete.

So Paul's now urging the Corinthians again, he's urging them to finish what they'd begun to do a year earlier. And I think this is a timely reminder to ourselves, to yourself and myself, in our commitment to the Lord, whether it's as a congregation, whether it's as individuals.

I mean, you and I may well have a resolve to give to the Lord's work. I knew your resolution, give to the Lord's work and give them more as the Lord has prospered us. But then there are the excuses.

There's the delay. There's the hesitancy. There's this counting the cost. And the resolution becomes lost in the past.

But surely you and I are to give heed to the present, to the present reality of the needs of the church. God surely is giving us an opportunity to give for His work.

[10 : 07] And He's reminding us here, as Paul's reminding the church in Corinth, we're being reminded of the cost of our salvation paid in full by the Lord Jesus Christ. We think that, when we remember that Jesus paid for your salvation with His very life on the cross, giving of Himself fully, holy for us.

So what the Lord Jesus Christ has done for His people, for what He's done for you and His costly giving of Himself in that, what we might call that superabundant generosity and giving of Himself, surely that in itself should spur you and I on to a giving through generosity, through sacrifice, through a costly manner.

So it's the manner, the manner of our giving is far more important than even the what of our giving us we'll see here in Paul's letter. Let's think firstly thoughtfulness, thoughtfulness and giving.

So I do wonder, and I speak to myself as much as to anyone else, how often do we actually think about what we give to the Lord for His work?

You know, in other words, what criteria do you and I use whether it's when we put our money in the plate or when we set up our standing orders for our weekly contribution?

[11 : 31] There's an appeal as there has been recently for extra help for particular projects. We hope very shortly to present particular projects to the congregation.

What basis, what basis do we use when we give? Well, any basis for giving has to be rooted in Scripture, has to be grounded in God's Word.

And here in Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, we see the principles that are laid out as to our giving, as to what we give, particularly the manner of our giving.

Well, what's Paul telling us here in chapter 9? Each one must give as he's made up his mind. Verse 7, as he's decided in his heart.

Every person who belongs to the congregation, you and I have an obligation to give. Of course, the perennial question is how much?

[12 : 31] And Paul gives the answer here. What he's made up in his mind to give. What he's decided in his heart to give. What he's committed in his heart to give.

Now, choices aren't made in any kind of arbitrary fashion. You know, you and I make choices according to information that's put before us. We make informed choices.

And as far as giving for the Lord's works is concerned, as far as giving for the cause of the kingdom of God is concerned, then there's the principle, the biblical principle that we apply here that we make an informed choice.

This is biblical thinking. Now, it means, of course, that we base the decision on what we give as we find in God's word. Now, for Paul's readers in Corinth, for the church in Corinth, they knew their scripture.

They would know from scripture and from Paul's teaching that giving was no sort of casual thing. The scripture of the Old Testament, Deuteronomy 16, verse 17, each of you must bring a gift in proportion to the way that the Lord, your God, has blessed you.

[13 : 44] And many believers in Corinth would know the words of Malachi 3.10, bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. As we know, the first letter to the church in Corinth, Paul's already sent a letter to that church.

He's been giving directions about their giving, about the cause of the gospel. On the first day of the week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income.

So, the believers in Corinth, they weren't without divine guidance in the whole matter of giving. And of course, neither are we. You and I have the word of God to direct us, to guide us, how we might glorify God.

So, use it. Use it to inform yourself about what you give and the manner that you give. Because you and I are to decide on the basis of following the word of God as God has prospered us.

Giving in proportion as God has blessed each one of us. So, there's that inner resolution of the heart that doesn't just casually throw in a few coins into the plate without thinking about why.

[14 : 59] Why we should give. It's the inner resolution of the heart based on what you and I know. You and I know of the super abundant giving of the Lord Jesus Christ and giving of himself fully.

Fully, because Jesus showed that full commitment and giving of himself to make you rich, to make you spiritually rich in him. And it's that overflowing, overflowing of the grace of giving through the gift of God's grace that should be there in the heart of every believer because you see us, and you're right there in 2 Corinthians 8.

Giving to the Lord's work is an act of grace, is a work of grace because there's a response of grace to the God of all grace who gives to you and I everything that you need for salvation.

So, don't stifle that grace. Don't resolve to some kind selfish, self-centeredness that's so contradictory to the grace that you and I have been given to exercise for the glory of God.

No. Give from the heart. A heart that has decided to worship God through your giving because giving is an act of worship. It's an act of worship to God who is the giver of all good things in the Lord Jesus.

[16 : 32] So, what you decide to give to God, yes, it's between you and God but it's a decision that comes from the very heart. So, test your heart.

Ask yourself, ask yourself this, am I at peace with the decision that I have made regarding what I give for the Lord's work? Ask yourself, is what I give and looking at the manner and the motive of my giving, is it for the Lord's glory?

Is it for the advancement of his kingdom? Is this going to be one of your New Year resolutions to do all for the glory of God? Well, it shouldn't just be a New Year resolution, it should be a daily resolution, not just a New Year one, but you know, a resolution surely that each day resolved to do as I do to the glory of God.

This, my giving is your giving. To God's glory. Is it giving for his sake? For his work to prosper? For the advancement of the kingdom here in Livingston and beyond?

So each one of us, here's a challenge. Bring what you give before the Lord and in the honesty of your heart, ask, is this what I give?

[17 : 54] Is this for the glory of God? does this reveal my heart that truly seeks the furtherance of his kingdom? So there should be that thoughtfulness that seeks nothing else other than the glory of God.

Thoughtfulness involves a determination, a commitment to give, but not just in any kind of casual manner, and not in any kind of impulsive manner, certainly not in any grudging manner as we'll see in our next point, because we do have to look at how we give.

As Paul tells us here, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. Now let's break this down into two parts. Firstly, willingness to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, because how we give is crucial in our commitment to the cause of Christ.

You see, if I grudge, put my weekly envelope in the plate each Lord's Day, if I'm reluctant, even the very first place, to set up my standing order, if I grudge what the church takes from my bank balance each week, if I'm reluctant to give sacrificially, whether it's of money or time or my gifts, if my giving is simply based in compulsion what others tell me to do, I'm not really giving to the cause at all.

There's no joy in giving if it's done reluctantly. There's no blessing to that giving. But the one who's blessed is the one who gives willingly and fully, completely willing to give for the cause of the kingdom of God.

[19 : 38] Because if you've decided what you're to give from the heart, it's from the heart that you'll give. If you're giving to the cause of Christ, if you're wishing to see God's kingdom extend on earth, you will give willingly.

But your heart's desire that your giving will be used for the glory of God and spreading God's word, whether it be at home or overseas. And it's actually worth probing a wee bit more in the way Paul writes this.

Because he's here firstly expressing the negativity of giving. You know, when he speaks of giving reluctantly, he's using a word that speaks of pain and suffering, of distress and grief.

And the inference here is that when we give reluctantly, we're not giving from a willing heart. It's as if Paul's saying we're giving a kind of distress, a pained heart that's giving what's really not in our heart to give.

You know, a heart that's joyless, rather than being joyful in the privilege of giving. I remember someone in another congregation who once told me that he simply couldn't give anything, couldn't give a single thing for the Lord's work because it would cause him so much distress and the prospect of losing what he needed for his family's lifestyle.

[21 : 08] And it was a very, very good lifestyle. But we don't look on our giving to the Lord as some kind of loss. If ever that thought enters your heart, get rid of it immediately.

But no, think, think in the Lord Jesus. Think in him who for the joy, the joy set before him endured the cross. Jesus was willing and fully willing to give of himself fully for you.

You know, Jesus would die the sinner's death on the cross. Jesus despised the shame. He endured the cross. He endured the cross for the sake of his victory over sin and of Satan and death itself.

So if you and I are ever tempted to grudge giving for the sake of the work of the Lord, think in the one whose work it is that you're giving for the advancement of his kingdom.

And be ashamed. I am ashamed. I've been ashamed many, many times. Be ashamed if there's ever that lack of a wholehearted giving for the cause of the gospel of the Lord Jesus.

[22 : 25] So don't grudge giving. Don't give with pain in your heart. But there's a second negative here that Paul focuses on, not under compulsion. The idea here that you're giving simply because it's a sense of duty that's devoid of any joy.

You know, the idea that you have to do it rather than because you're willing to give as the Lord has directed you. The Lord has prospered you. You see, when you give from the heart and you're going to give joyfully and you're going to give voluntarily, you see, there's all the difference in the world between a volunteer and a conscript.

You know, in war, for example, in war, where there's conscription, there's that compulsory joining up to fight. There's not that immediate willingness to engage in battle.

For example, First World War, the initial number of volunteers who joined up out of enthusiasm to fight for the cons. And in our giving for the Lord's work, you give because you want to give.

You give with that joy in your heart because you're willing to give. your voluntary contributions tell of the desire you have to return thanks to the Lord for his goodness to you in giving of his Son for our sake.

[23 : 52] So examine your heart. Examine your heart even with respect to your willingness to give and ask yourself, are you a willing volunteer or do you regard your giving as forced, conscripted giving?

So there's that willingness to give. But then thirdly and finally, there's cheerfulness in giving. Each man should give what he's decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

Now, I'm sure you've heard that expression many times, God loves a cheerful giver. But have you ever stopped to think that your giving can be seen from God's perspective?

No, that the manner of your giving actually evokes a divine response, God's response. That giving cheerfully for the work of the Lord actually evokes a response of God's love.

And you say, how's that? Well, think about what we discover in Scripture. Go to the book of Proverbs, the Old Testament, Proverbs chapter 22, verse 9.

[25 : 01] And you read there of the person who's blessed because he shares his bread with the poor. And we're told there, and you might say quite an unusual description, that the giver has a bountiful eye, literally a good eye, because the eye was considered the window of the soul.

The good eye that tells of the person who's generous. And the wording that you find in that verse in Proverbs, the willingness, the generosity, is someone who's blessed by God.

because the wording of generosity in that Old Testament context is the same word as cheerful, cheerfulness. And one translation of that verse in Proverbs reads these words, a generous man will himself be blessed for he shares his food with the poor.

So generous, same word, cheerful, in this passage in Corinthians. In other words, in other words, cheerful giving is accomplished by a generosity of spirit.

So whether that generosity is in the widow's might of a few coins, or whether it's the large check as God has prospered you, if it's giving from the heart, it's giving in a cheerful manner for the Lord's work.

[26 : 17] And in that cheerful giving, you'll be giving generously. And you'll know that spiritual blessing that the Lord gives to those who do give willingly and cheerfully and generously.

So each one of us here, you and I have got to face this litmus test of scripture. And each one of us is going to ask ourselves, are we willing? Are you willing?

Are you a willing giver, a cheerful giver, a generous giver for the cause of the great work that God has given to us to do here in this little corner, this little part of Scotland, and of course beyond as well?

Well, it's for you and I to constantly examine our hearts, even with respect to our giving. And if you find that somehow generous giving is a problem for you, well pray for the grace to give.

Look to the Lord Jesus who gave himself for you. He gave himself willingly, generously, and cheerfully. And remember as God's word tells us, it's more blessed to give than to receive.

[27 : 30] And pray that God will bless us as a congregation. That God will bestow his blessing upon us, even as a consequence of our giving.

And that you and I will be cheerful givers, that we'll give from the heart for the furtherance of the kingdom of God here on earth. And that you and I will seek to glorify God even through our giving from the heart for the cause of the gospel, for the glory of his name.

Amen. Let us pray. Lord, we thank you for this renewed opportunity to examine our hearts, even with respect to our giving for your work.

May we know, Lord, that the cattle in a thousand hills are yours. May we know that you give, you have given to us all from your heart.

And we thank you, Lord, that you give us that privilege, that grace to give, as you have prospered each one of us. O Lord, help us, we pray.

[28 : 36] Forgive the many times when we have held back that which we ought to have given. Help us, Lord, to give us from the heart, knowing that you are the one who has given to us all that we need for our salvation.

Bless, Lord, the remainder of this service. Bless our fellowship one with another. Bless our time together in the hall afterwards. Bless each and everyone gathered here for worship. Lord, may your word not return to you empty, but accomplish what you desire.

We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.