

Part 2 - Christian Giving

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[0 : 00] I said that at the beginning we were going to look at two scenes that were related to each other, but we were managing money, and we were going to tell you that, of course, I think, officer, but even within the congregation, and within the church. But I also want to talk about money, and that, again, is equally biblical, equally biblical, and I'm going to read from 2 Corinthians chapter 9, 2 Corinthians chapter 9, and a very short passage from verse 6, page 1165, 2 Corinthians chapter 9, and verse 6, where Paul is talking to the Corinthian church, and he's encouraging them in many different ways, but one of them being the contribution that they make to the work of the gospel.

And we read what he says in verse 6. 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 made up his mind, 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.

[1 : 47] You will be enriched in every way for all your generosity, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. Now, some people feel awkward about this whole subject of money.

Some people are quite critical about it. They say, well, all the church is looking for is money. And I hope that I don't have to answer that criticism. I hope that we don't fall into that category.

I hope that we are more familiar with the Bible than to fall into the trap of thinking that the church is about money. The church is not about money. The church is, as I said before, about spreading the gospel.

And the money that we're going to talk about today, again, this evening, is money that is contributed for the spreading of the gospel. It's not to make someone rich.

It's not for any selfish purpose. It's simply given for the good and for the well-being of the church. But there's something else as well.

[2 : 49] When we give our money to the church, it's not simply a duty. It's an act of worship. Somebody said to me once, don't ever say as a minister, let us begin the worship of God by singing.

Do you know what he meant by that? What he meant by that was that the worship has already begun. The moment a person comes in the door and places their contribution in the plate, it is an act of worship.

And you know, in some senses, the person was right in saying that. We all, I suppose, we all have this habit of saying, we'll begin. But in actual fact, for you, your worship has begun already.

Other people feel awkward about talking about this, especially ministers, because they think that this is a plea. This is not a plea at all. And what I'm going to talk about today is not any kind of personal plea.

It is a reminder of what the Bible tells us is our great privilege as people who belong to the Lord Jesus Christ and to belong to his church.

[3 : 56] In other words, I'm in this as much as you are. And I think it's good to start by reminding ourselves that when, that coming into a place of worship is not simply about reading the Bible, although we do read the Bible.

It's not simply about singing or hearing or praying. It's also about contributing to the work of the church. Sometimes I feel that, and I suppose I'm as guilty as anyone, of downgrading or belittling

our act of putting our money in the plate as something that's just a kind of an add-on. Well, it's not an add-on. It is a hugely important and integral part of our worship. Can I remind us, and again, I'm reminding myself as well, of what we do when we give our money to the Lord. We're saying to the Lord, that here is part of what you've given to me. You know, that's what the Old Testament believers did in Israel. They gave the first fruits to the Lord as an act of thanksgiving. I suppose there's no, it's a good connection, what we're talking about here, to our thanksgiving on Thursday. But here is an act of thanksgiving in which we're saying to the Lord, Lord, Lord, you have done everything for me.

[5 : 21] I depend upon you for every breath I take, for every move I make, for every single word that I speak.

I depend upon you for my thoughts and my health and my strength and my intelligence, and I depend upon you for all the good things that I have in this world.

But there's more to it than that. A person who belongs to Jesus can say more than that. He can say that his life has been changed by the Lord and reoriented so that God takes the very central place and he recognizes what God has given to him in a way that nobody else can.

And we're coming to the Lord not just to throw money into the plate, but to say, here is part of my earnings that the Lord has given to me and I wish to consecrate that to the work that the Lord is doing throughout the world.

That's what we're doing when we give to the Lord. And the apostle in this passage, he tells us what should be in our minds as we give to the Lord.

[6 : 34] First of all, he tells us at the beginning, he says in verse 7, each one must give as he has made up his mind.

You know, there's so much information in this passage as to the way in which we are to give of what God has given us. Each one must give as he has made up his mind.

Do you know what that means? It means that, and this is why I wanted to bring the whole congregation together because there are times, I believe, where we must stop and review our givings like we must review everything else.

And I make no apology in saying that. We must review what we give to the Lord. Here's what the apostle tells us.

Each one has his give as he has made up his mind. In other words, it's a kind of a, where you sit down and where you work out. How much? Not just a question of, oh, I wonder how much change I've got in my pocket.

[7 : 38] And if I have a, so much change, well, that's what I'm going to give. I'll give him what's left over. After I've taken, I've taken it all for myself.

If there's any left over, I'll give it to the Lord. That's what, that's exactly the opposite from what the apostle is talking about here. Each one, in other words, our giving to the Lord must be our top priority.

Because after all, look at what the Lord has done for us. Each one must give as he has made up his mind, having prepared beforehand and made a decision on what he is going to give or she is going to give.

Then the next thing he tells us is that our giving must not be reluctant. Our giving must not be reluctant or under compulsion.

You know, there are some churches and as soon as you become a member in that church, you're told how much of your income to give. They say, they sit you down and they say, well, this is what we expect from you because you're making so much.

[8 : 41] They ask you what your salary is and they say, this is what we expect for you. If you are going to belong to this church, this is what we're going to expect from you. Well, I have to say with all respect, I don't agree with that at all because I think it goes right against what the apostle is telling us here.

The apostle is saying that it is not under compulsion, that our giving is voluntary. It's between ourselves and the Lord.

It's an act of secret worship in which we come to the Lord and nobody else knows what we give to the Lord because it's an act in which we give between ourselves and the Lord.

But it should be an act of rejoicing. Not the kind of reluctant trying to part with money, trying to bring ourselves and unable to bring ourselves to part with what we really would prefer to be spending on

ourselves.

Well, if that's the way it's going to be, then maybe it's better not to give the money at all because that's not a spirit of worship at all. The Bible tells us that God loves a cheerful giver.

[9 : 56] You know what a cheerful giver is? A cheerful giver is someone whose heart has been changed by the gospel, who's come to a living encounter with Jesus Christ and who has put Jesus first and who wants more than anything else to dedicate himself and to consecrate himself and his goods to the Lord himself.

God loves a cheerful giver. So these are, these are, this is what the apostle says ought to be in our minds as we give.

Now, as I say, I make no apology for bringing this subject up. I think it's every minister's duty to bring it up for all of us. And I use the word us, not you and me, but all of us together because we belong to a congregation of God's people.

We are a worshipping people and we are called together to be part of the church of Jesus Christ as we bring the gospel to various parts of the world.

We belong to a particular denomination of the church of Jesus. And whilst we belong to the worldwide church of Jesus and whilst we might say, well, I don't like the idea of denominations, I don't think there should be anything as denominations, the fact is we don't live in a perfect world.

[11 : 12] In an ideal world, there would only be one church. But for some reason, whatever the reason is, that's the way it is at the moment. And the gospel operates through and God tolerates our own divisiveness and separation and division.

God tolerates that and still at the same time, he blesses his church in the various denominations there are as we preach the gospel and as we bring his word to the areas and the communities around us, both locally and overseas and as we provide ministry.

The denomination that we belong to is the Free Church of Scotland. I love our denomination. I love it.

I was brought up in it. I was converted in it. I heard the gospel in it. I love it because of the people that I know and I love in that church.

The church is about the people that belong to God and that come together to worship God. These are the people I know. I love other churches and I'm not saying that our church is better than they are.

[12 : 23] I would never say that. I would never say that our church is the only true church. I would never say that. But that's the church that God has placed me in and I have to recognize that by providence that's where he's placed me and I have no good reason to go anywhere else because the church I belong to loves the gospel, loves the Bible.

The reason we exist is for the gospel and our great goal is to spread the gospel into various parts of the world and if you keep that in mind that's our ultimate aim.

That's why we belong to the church of Christ but I hope that's why we belong to our particular denomination. What I'm saying is this. Let's give it our all.

Let's go for it. In so far as our church loves the Lord I know we're not perfect and you can maybe say well I know this and that and the next thing about our denomination that I don't like.

Well I'll tell you this. If you could tell me three things that you don't like about our denomination I could tell you 30. No problem. If anyone is conscious of the weaknesses and failures and everything of our church you'll never find a perfect church in this world.

[13 : 40] You will not. You may think that there's one across the grass is green and across the other side. You'll go there and you'll discover that it's not. Every church has their problems and their difficulties and their challenges and particularly in the day in which we belong.

We face horrendous challenges in the world in which we live. It's hugely difficult to be a Christian in our world. The pressures the influences the voices everything is against us and yet we're called you and I have been put into this world we haven't been put into a hundred years ago we've been put into it now to live for the Lord Jesus Christ now and to present the gospel and to worship together now and to provide for that church.

The church is the kingdom of God the only certainty there is in this world. Do you know what Jesus said? He said heaven and earth will pass away but my words will never pass away.

You look at the great institutions in the world people used to say as safe as banks even the banks are shown to have feet of clay aren't they?

the great governments of the world the great empires of the world anybody knows their history will tell you that you can go back a thousand years and there are some empires that were unstoppable and they're nothing today but you know what is unstoppable?

[15 : 19] What's unstoppable is the kingdom of Jesus Christ the church Jesus said upon this rock I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it so if we're investing if we're giving to the Lord's cause it cannot fail now I'm not saying that our denomination cannot fail I'm saying that the Lord's cause cannot fail and part of the Lord's cause is what we put into it now I've already said I've already talked about our contribution as people whether you're a minister or an elder or a deacon or a member or an adherent everyone is supporting I hope the cause of Christ in some way or another but part of that support is what we put in to the plate every time we come to church on a Sunday either morning or evening or hopefully both and we're giving to the

Lord's cause can I just just very briefly can I really will you bear with me just because I do believe that this is so important because I believe one of the mistakes we've made as a denomination is not to communicate the work that has been going on in our denomination that will give you the confidence as a supporter of that work we need to have the confidence and the enthusiasm about what our church is doing can I just very very briefly say that the work of our church is divided into three first of all there's what we call home missions and home missions takes in the various congregations that are some of them stronger ones like this one but you know when you belong to a strong congregation like this it's hard for us to appreciate what what those in smaller congregations have to go through and have to face the discouragement I can't imagine I remember I remember Kenny Stewart who used to be here he said to me once he said you know he said you and I have never had the experience of a small congregation we don't know the challenges and the frustrations and the difficulties that our brothers have and he was right and it's the same when you belong to this congregation we don't appreciate and I would like when we consider the wider work of our church to consider it to think for a moment of all the various congregations some of them are only 20 or 15 and they're gathering together as we are and there are people there who are hungry to hear God's word and there are people who are reaching out I hope into their communities and trying to bring the gospel in and there are various places in Scotland where that has been greatly fruitful there are other areas where it hasn't been dramatically fruitful we can't just support the flourishing congregations we've got to support the smaller congregations as well in the hope that one day they will be flourishing who knows what God will do but I would like us the danger in a congregation like this is to become complacent to imagine that somehow every congregation is strong it's not and we have to be aware of the that's home missions there are congregations which we are planting new congregations in areas like Dunfermline and still in places like Kirkcaldy remember the enthusiasm that there was when Ian McCaskill went to South Uist and he planted a congregation there it's one thing to be enthusiastic at the beginning let's continue to be enthusiastic for the work of the church that we belong to then there's international missions the historic places where we've been South Africa where people ministers are being trained for the gospel local men are being trained to preach the gospel to various does that not make us excited that the church is vibrant and flourishing in many of these places in South Africa and that people are hearing the gospel and being saved that ought to really thrill us to think of the work there and then there is the work of training ministers at home ministers and missionaries in our college in Edinburgh do we remember the work that goes on there we have one of the finest institutions in the world in theological training and sometimes we tend to forget that we have such a facility we forget those who work there we think oh they're professors they don't need prayer of course they need prayer everyone needs prayer ministers need prayer missionaries need prayer we all need we all need to be involved it's all one work then there is there is work locally as well our presbytery at the moment is last weekend last week rather it approved the appointment of an alcohol worker throughout the presbytery isn't that fantastic you should be leaping up and down at the thought of somebody who's going to be paid by this presbytery a full time alcohol worker to try to bring through the means of the gospel to bring relief and help to those who have addiction problems you know perfectly well the problem of addiction in these parts in Lewis and Harris and Uist our presbytery has responded by that by setting up this appointment and these and many many other areas there will be more and more opportunities both locally and as a presbytery as well as the ongoing work and I want you to be confident that you are part of that work a vital part of that work and I hope that just by just giving a taste of that that you become infused

and more infused of the glorious work that the Lord has called us into you'll never buy your way into heaven and if there's anybody here tonight thinks well I better up my giving in order to get closer to heaven you might as well stop now because money didn't buy anyone their way into heaven only the Lord can save you and bring you to know himself will you come and will you discover yourself what God can do for you and then you can catch some of the excitement that there is in serving our great God and a great saviour you'll forgive me for doing something a little bit different this evening but I do think it was important let's pray together father in heaven once again we pray that you will receive and accept our worship a worship that has begun perhaps a long time ago as we've anticipated coming in to meet with you and as we've come in the door and as we've placed our contribution we pray that you will take it and accept it and use it mightily for your kingdom we ask lord that you will make us concerned more and more concerned about the work that our church is involved in and the work of other churches and other agencies and organizations we thank you lord for giving us so much we pray lord that we will be generous in the way in which we devote ourselves to your kingdom in jesus name amen we're going to close by singing in psalm 65 you'll forgive me for taking so long this evening it's just a one-off