

The Giver's Reward
II Corinthians 9:6-15

Introduction

*You gave You gave Your life away
You gave You gave Your life away
You gave You gave Your life away for me*

*Your grace has broken ev'ry chain
My sins are gone my debt's been paid
You gave You gave Your life away for me
For me*

We give because he gave. Giving, for the Christian who has known God's extravagant grace, should be joyous and natural. But for many, it is an uncomfortable topic. And sometimes, we come up with all kinds of interesting approaches to the subject. Check out these creative folks:

The Skinny on Tithing – Video Clip

The Bible says that God loves a cheerful giver. And while I don't think those approaches are biblical, I thought they would inspire a bit of hilarity.

The most significant teaching on giving is found in chapters eight and nine of II Corinthians. The Apostle Paul had spent at least 18 months with the remarkable congregation in Corinth. It was one of the most strategic places in the ancient world since it was a major hub for commerce. Like any port city, it was rife with immorality, but the Corinthians had heard the gospel and the church was established. They were especially graced with many spiritual gifts which resulted in many benefits as well as pitfalls. In his first letter to them, Paul spent a lot of time straightening out their misunderstandings and misapplication of the spiritual gifts that they had been given. In addition to having a lot of spiritual gifts, they were also relatively wealthy in comparison to other churches of their day.

While the apostle was away from the church, several false teachers had come to Corinth and began to mislead them. Their primary mode of attack was to diminish the authority of the Apostle Paul. In II Corinthians, Paul vigorously defends his ministry. He wrote the letter from Macedonia where he was ministering among very poor churches. Even in their poverty, they had given an extravagant financial gift to help the beleaguered church in Jerusalem. Paul had sent Titus and another church leader to Corinth to help them prepare a financial gift as well. Chapters 8 and 9 deal specifically with the topic of the gift and what Warren Wiersbe calls, “grace giving.” Our text is from the final verses of chapter 9.

Text – II Corinthians 9:6-15

The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work. As it is written,

“He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor;
his righteousness endures forever.”

He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. 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 that comes 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. Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!

A Gift Freely Given (vs. 6-7)

It is interesting that in this, the longest passage regarding giving in the New Testament, that there is no mention of the word “tithe.” Christians who honor the authority of Scripture differ as to

whether or not a tithe – a tenth of one’s income – is expected to be given. Those who say Christians are obligated to give a tithe point out that the principle was established even before the Jewish Law when Abraham gave a tithe to Melchizedek, the priest (Gen. 14:20). Those, on the other hand, who maintain that a tenth is not required, cite the absence of such a command in the New Testament and especially in Paul’s teaching to the Corinthians. I believe the standard for giving is actually higher and deeper than the Old Testament tithe because it goes beyond the outward expression of the law and penetrates to the spiritual realities of the heart. We have known and received the extravagant giving of God. In chapter 8, Paul told the Corinthians, “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.” (vs. 9) The amount we give, which should be in proportion to our income, is a reflection of our devotion to God and our faith in him. *The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.* For most American Christians, I think that proportion can be and should be at least a tenth.

Paul’s teaching is “grace giving,” a reflection of the grace and goodness that God has given to you. It is not law, but love. Put it in these terms: imagine if you were required to love your mother. I know there are cases of mothers who are not good. But in the vast majority of cases, mothers are self-giving to their children. Children just naturally love their mothers. It’s not a law. It’s a response. It’s a grace. In the same way, we give freely because we have freely received the grace of God.

In the case of the Corinthians, it seems obvious from the story that they had promised a particular gift and now Paul was encouraging them to follow through with the commitment that they had made. “Now concerning the collection for the saints: as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do. On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper...” (I Cor. 16:1-2) To give spontaneously to a need is a special joy. But the foundation of Christian giving is intentional, proportional, and regular giving. The person who is offended by the pastor’s sermon on giving hasn’t experienced the extravagant giving and grace of God. If your giving isn’t regular, proportional, and intentional your heart

should be saddened by your lack. I don't say that in a condemning sense at all. In the apostle's words, giving should not be "under compulsion." But regular and extravagant giving should be the response of those who have known God's grace. Throughout Paul's whole passage on giving, it is clear that it is a direct response to the grace that we have received. And when we give that way, we can't help but be happy and overjoyed.

The Giver's Reward (vs. 8-11)

We give because God gave; not so that we would receive some benefit. The "investment giver" we saw in the video is a distortion of biblical principles. It's the "blab it and grab it prosperity gospel" that has been propagated for far too long in our culture. It is self-centered and motivated by greed. Nothing could be further from the essence of the gospel. It is a stench in the nostrils of God and those who have preached it and profited from it will one day stand accountable at the Judgment Seat.

We give simply in response to God's goodness, not for our benefit. But you can't out-give God. The Scriptures are clear. When we give, God gives back – even more than we gave. Many times people are reluctant to give because they are afraid that they won't be able to make it. That was "the excuse maker" in the video clip we saw. Hear me. God promises to provide for you when you give to him. That's why giving is not only an act of love and thanksgiving, but also of faith.

And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work. As it is written,

*"He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor;
his righteousness endures forever."*

He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God.

The “grace” that Paul is talking about in verse 8 is material grace. You’ll have what you need. And it is my testimony, as well as that of countless others, that when you give, God somehow provides even more. The gas goes further. The utilities are lower. Car repairs are fewer. Money shows up in unexpected places. It’s uncanny, but true. I have never met someone who gives regularly and proportionately to God who has regretted it. Never. I think that’s why, for those who have experienced God’s faithfulness when they give, giving is a real joy. They look for ways to give more.

For God’s Glory (vs. 12-16)

And look at the result of giving.

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 that comes 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.

The gift of the Corinthians would not only serve a practical purpose – that of supplying the physical needs of the church in Jerusalem – it would also make a significant impact in the spiritual world. Beyond the physical provision, the gift from the Corinthians would result in thanksgiving and glory being given to God. As Jesus taught his disciples to pray, his kingdom would come and be manifest “on earth as it is in heaven.” The church in Jerusalem would share fellowship with the Corinthians not only because of the gift, but because they also both received and embraced the gospel. For anyone who has ministered with Christians from other countries, the fellowship that transcends geography, language, and culture is a beautiful thing! For those who have given to the Kenyan ministry, this is what I will experience a month from now. Not only have your gifts provided my airfare, but also Bibles, food, and transportation for our needy brothers and sisters half way around the world. The beauty of our fellowship is too profound to put into words.

Secondly, the gift that the Corinthians would give would result in an outpouring of prayer on their behalf from the church in Jerusalem. It is a wonderful balancing act of grace. The church

in Jerusalem was rich in spiritual life – they were the “mother church” to all first churches in the New Testament – but poor in material things. The church in Corinth was materially rich but poor in spiritual matters. The financial gift that the Corinthians would give would result in an outpouring of spiritual blessing through the prayers of the Jerusalem church.

When you give of your material wealth to God it results in the furtherance of his kingdom and multiplied spiritual blessings for you. That is my testimony and that of many in this room.

Why Here? Why Now?

So why should you give to the ministry of First Baptist Church? And why should you give now? First, you give because God gave. Don't give out of guilt. No one is pressuring you. You give out of love, not law. And you give as an expression of your devotion to God and your trust in him. Whatever you give...is a reflection of your love of God and your faith in him.

Second, let me encourage you to give because God is surely at work in this church. There are some who will say, “Well pastor, we really haven't grown much in attendance or giving since you've been here.” Numbers are indicators but they don't show everything.

- There is something profound happening in our youth ministry. Students are coming in large numbers, but more importantly, some are coming to faith. Leaders are being disciplined. Students are being loved. God is at work.
- Aberdeen Christian School left our building in a great spirit of celebration because of a door that God miraculously opened rather than compulsion which would have torn us apart. Consequently, both ministries are being blessed. It was the hand of God. God is at work.
- We are in the process of considering a significant building refresh. Throughout, the process has been transparent. The congregation has had and will continue to have a strong voice in the process. There haven't been any political power plays or manipulation. Enthusiasm is high. And even though we are far from done and we don't know exactly where it will land, we remain unified. God is at work.

- On Wednesday nights, about a dozen people have begun the journey of the *Experiencing God Study*. It will take them deep and for those who persevere, it will change their lives. God is at work.
- Beneath the surface, unseen by most, one of the most profound changes that is happening is the change in culture on the deacon board. This is one of the greatest joys of ministry for me. Through their study of *Pursuing God's Will Together*, they are being molded into spiritual shepherds asking deep questions. The change is not clear to all, because not all are involved, but it is profound. God is at work.

God is at work. And the invitation is open for you to join him. In the coming year we will need more resources to continue moving forward. Our budget this year has been bare-bones and we will most likely need to spend 100% of it. In order to move forward rather than stand still in the coming year, we'll need more resources. I'm not selling anything. I'm inviting you into God's work in progress. Of course, we will be looking at a substantial call for promised giving in the year to come for the building refresh we believe we need to do. Pastor Dave and Becka will have a new addition to their family in the coming year. Most of you know what that means. They'll need more resources to cover living and insurance needs. But we cannot look just to our own selves. We are making inroads into the community. As we become more externally-focused, we'll need more resources to serve outside these walls. As we look outward, we'll want to increase our missions budget.

God is surely at work in First Baptist Church. There is Holy Spirit momentum moving us forward. To put it in human terms: "this is a worthy cause." As Paul said to the Corinthians, I say to you, as you excel in so many things, I encourage you to excel all the more in this grace of giving."

We give because Christ gave the ultimate gift to us. Our giving is a reflection of our love, devotion, and faith to him. Let it be extravagant.

"Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!"

Prayer