

November 15, 2009

II Corinthians 9:1-15

### **“Give Generously, Give Freely, Give Cheerfully”**

One Sunday in worship a minister stood before his congregation and said I’ve got good news and I’ve got bad news. The good news is that we have enough money to pay for the building program. The bad news is that it is still out there in your pockets.

Well today we are going to spend some time together talking about one of two subjects that will get you in trouble in the church- Money. Of course, we are not just going to talk about money, but also about stewardship in the life of the Christian.

Did you know that the Bible contains more than five hundred references to prayer and almost five hundred to faith, but more than two thousand references to money and possessions? Of the thirty-eight parables that Jesus told sixteen addressed the subject of money. Did you know that Jesus said more about money than he did heaven and hell combined? One out of every ten verses in the gospels speaks about money and possessions.

If this is so then why are we so private about our money and possessions when Jesus talked about so much about it?

Today we have heard a passage from the Apostle Paul’s second letter to the Corinthians. Paul has written this letter to this church because he was planning on paying them a visit in order to collect an offering from them in order to take the Christians in Jerusalem.

The church in Jerusalem was the mother church of all churches. This was the place where Christianity was born. It was the place where Jesus spent much of his time, the area where the many of the first converts were made, and the place where the Temple for God’s chosen people, the Israelites, was located at.

The Christians there in Jerusalem were having a difficult time because of famine and persecution, and Paul felt that it was the duty of Gentile Christians to help the mother church out in her time of need. It was the least they could do for the church that had given birth to them through the ministry of Paul.

This mission was serious business for Paul. It was life or death for him. He wanted to go to a place where there was great persecution of Christians and the enemies of Jesus believed that the apostle Paul was the chief person to blame for leading people astray.

He had developed an ugly reputation for being a man who was leading Jewish people away from the Law of Moses. This was a no, no. His detractors were angry enough to kill him. Paul sensed this growing animosity.

In the book of Acts Luke tells us the story of Paul meeting with the elders of Ephesus in order to say a final goodbye to them. He tells them that the time had come for him to deliver the offering that he had collected and take it to Jerusalem in order to help the struggling Christians there. He tells them in that final farewell that it could mean the death of him.

- And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns that prisons and hardships are facing me. (Acts 21:22-23)

Paul was on to something. When he arrived in Jerusalem he was unjustly accused of undermining the Law of Moses and bringing a Gentile into the inner area of the Jewish Temple. A riot broke out and Paul was arrested.

The question is why was Paul willing to risk all of this for an offering?

It was because Jesus Christ had radically changed his life while on the road to Damascus.

Paul began down the road that day as the number one persecutor of the church, but before he was finished walking it the resurrected Christ had appeared to him and had converted his dead heart to faith in Jesus. He now understood what Jesus had done for him on the cross. How his death paid the penalty owed for our sins and how his life of righteousness stood as a perfect substitute for his own unrighteousness.

Christ had accomplished for Paul what Paul could not accomplish for himself. A perfect life of righteousness and a perfect, once for all, sacrifice for his sin, thus forever satisfying God's divine justice and wrath that was owed for his sin. Now Paul had life with God and he wanted more than anything for his own people, the Jews, to come to faith in Jesus. Paul was willing to share in the sufferings of Christ in order for this to happen. This burning desire led to his commitment to collect the offering.

This is the context of our scripture passage today and there is a great lesson for us in it.

The lesson is this: A person will not give to God as God calls him to give apart from spiritual rebirth and regeneration. This means, generally speaking, that if there is a giving problem there is usually a spiritual problem. The human heart is inherently selfish and unless it has been born again Christ it will remain as such. He who has ears let him hear.

Let us now look more closely at our text, paying particular attention to verses 6-7.

I have entitled the message "Give Generously, Give Freely, Give Cheerfully," taking my title from these two verses.

### **Give Generously**

First, God wants Christians to give generously.

In this text Paul talks about the generous gift that God has called them to give (v.5) and then he gives them the exhortation in v. 6 that if they "sow sparingly" (that is if they give little, or what is left over after all the bills are paid and they have gotten all the things they wanted) that they will "reap sparingly," but if they "give generously" they will "reap generously."

Obviously, Paul's point is that the Corinthians are to give generously in their offering to the church in Jerusalem. He is saying to them that there is great blessing if they give in such a way, not just material, but also spiritual.

The point is not that they are to give in order to get rich, the Bible does not teach that, but simply that there is blessing in generous giving and that God will more than meet their needs in their generosity. They will not miss the money they have given! God will take care of them.

The basis for their generously is God himself. God has richly blessed the Corinthians and all peoples of the earth, with His abundance of natural resources and God has especially blessed them in the indescribable generosity of giving his Son to them, the Lord Jesus Christ, in order that their sins could be forgiven. "He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all, will not that much more also give us all things?" (Rom. 8:32)

If God had been that generous to them in the giving up of his Son, who bore the wrath and curse of God for their sins, how could they not be generous in their giving? As great hymn "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross" says, this sacrifice "demands my soul my life, and my all," including my offerings.

### **Give Freely**

Second, God wants us to give freely.

This point comes from v. 7. "Each man (person) should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly, or under compulsion."

What Paul is saying here is that our giving should be of our own free will. It's almost as if he were saying that if you can't give the offering of your own free will, if you must be cajoled, brow-beaten, bribed, or made to feel guilty, in order to give then it would be better for you not to give.

Why would this be so? Because God always looks at the heart.

In the Old Testament, especially in the writings of the prophets and in the Psalms, the Lord often says through his messengers that God is not interested in our outward sacrifices and rituals when our hearts are not right. Motive is of upmost importance to God. If our motives are not right in our giving then in a very real sense we negate our offering and God is not interested in it.

The Lord wants us to give because we want to give it, freely and not begrudgingly.

Again, this requirement of the Lord shows us of our need to have our hearts changed by Christ in order that we may give of our own free will. God must remove from us our hearts of stone in order to give in such a fashion.

Once again, the basis for our giving freely is God. God has not ever given us anything begrudgingly.

The Bible tells us that we have a gracious Heavenly Father who freely desires to give good gifts for his children, specially the gift of the Spirit. (Lk. 11:11-12)

As we think about the gift of Christ, which is the gift of Christmas, it must be said that there was never a doubt in the mind of the Father as to what he would do to save his people. Will I give my Son? Or will I hold him back? I will give him up with resentment in my heart, or will I give him freely and unbegrudgingly so that my people will be saved from sin and spared from spiritual death? Out of free love for us God gave the gift of his Son. As God has freely given to us so let us give freely to God.

### **Give Cheerfully**

Third, God wants us to give cheerfully.

This point comes from the conclusion of v. 7. "For God loves a cheerful giver."

This point is closely related to the second one in that if one does not give cheerfully he can't not give freely. If there is no joy in the life of the Christian about giving then he will not give his offering freely and unbegrudgingly.

Again, our standard for giving cheerfully is God. The writer of Hebrews tells us Jesus Christ endured the agony of the cross because of the joy that was before him. The joy that was before him was the salvation of his people. This gave him strength to give his life as an offering for his people.

Likewise, the joy that was set before the Corinthians was the salvation and wellbeing of the struggling church in Jerusalem, and Paul was encouraging the Corinthians to give to God's people with great cheer and joy.

Again, just as it was in the second point, this point of giving cheerfully is addressing the matters of the heart and our motives in giving.

The Lord wants us to give our offerings with joy.

When the joy of Jesus Christ is in our lives we will give generously and freely; when its not we won't. It's that simple. How much we give, the way we give, and our attitude in giving says a lot about the spiritual condition of our souls.

### **Conclusion**

In our text today Paul tells us that our offerings have a direct bearing on the lives of others.

1. Our offerings meet the physical and spiritual needs of God's people (v.12).

2. Our offerings cause others to give praise and thanksgiving to God for His provisions. God uses our offerings to lead other people in the fulfillment of man's chief end in life, which is to glorify God.
3. Our offerings cause the recipients of the offering to pray for us. This would be v. 14, "And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you."

So as you can see, there is great benefit- both for us and for others- in the giving of our offerings. But the most important reason that we give is because of God and his generosity freely and unbegrudgingly to us in the person of Jesus Christ, who for the joy set before him endured the suffering of the cross so that we might have life restored to God. That's why we give. And that's why we especially give now in this season of uncertainty.

The times are tough but it's now time for us Christians to rise up and give when it really counts.

God, in the midst of an economic downturn, has given us a grand opportunity to prove Himself to be true. "Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse that there may be food in my house. Test me in this, says the Lord Almighty, and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out a blessing that you will not have enough for it." (Mal. 3:10)

When you make your pledge this week "give generously, give freely, and give cheerfully," all for the glory of God.

Amen.