

Life Together

*Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?
If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him.
For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.
(1 Corinthians 3:16-17. ESV)*

*And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same
image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.
(2 Corinthians 3:18. ESV)*

A Theology Of Christian Giving – Part 2

April 17th, 2016

2 Corinthians 9:1-15

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Introduction:

Good morning! Open your Bibles to 2 Corinthians 9:1; that's on page 968 in your pew Bibles. This is part 2 of a message that we began back on April 3rd and in that message I mentioned that the correct response to silliness is not silence it is sound teaching. There has been a lot of silliness floating around the fringes of the Evangelical world concerning this matter of money. The so-called Prosperity Gospel is a devastating error that brings harm upon the people of God and shame upon the name of Christ. It is an embarrassment and we have responded to that with far too much silence. We didn't want to be associated with it and so for a long time we have said very little about money and about the biblical teaching concerning Christian giving. That needs to stop. You don't meet silly with silence you meet it and defeat it with sound teaching and so we have slowed down here and been very deliberate in our treatment of 2 Corinthians 9 which aims to provide a general theology of Christian giving. Let me remind you of the passage under discussion and then summarize the ground we have already covered. Hear now the Word of the Lord:

¹ Now it is superfluous for me to write to you about the ministry for the saints, ² for I know your readiness, of which I boast about you to the people of Macedonia, saying that Achaia has been ready since last year. And your zeal has stirred up most of them. ³ But I am sending the brothers so that our boasting about you may not prove empty in this matter, so that you may be ready, as I said you would be. ⁴ Otherwise, if some Macedonians come with me and find that you are not ready, we would be humiliated—to say nothing of you—for being so confident. ⁵ So I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to go on ahead to you and arrange in advance for the gift you have promised, so that it

may be ready as a willing gift, not as an exaction.

⁶The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. ⁷Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. ⁸And 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. ⁹As it is written, “He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever.”

¹⁰He 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. ¹¹You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. ¹²For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God. ¹³By 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, ¹⁴while they long for you and pray for you, because of the surpassing grace of God upon you. ¹⁵Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift! (2 Corinthians 9:1–15 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God.

A General Theology Of Christian Giving:

In the first message on this topic we identified 9 principles of Christian giving. Looking at the passage as a whole and looking at verses 1-9 of chapter 9 in particular we mentioned the following:

- 1. Christian giving is entirely dependent upon the prior grace of God**
- 2. Christian giving is internally rather than externally motivated**
- 3. Christian giving should be faithful, regular and deliberate**
- 4. Christian giving should be bountiful, ambitious and in hope**
- 5. Christian giving is not intended to impoverish the individual giver**
- 6. Christian giving is not intended to replace human labour and responsibility**
- 7. Christian giving should err on the side of generosity**

Our 8th principle then comes to us from verse 10:

¹⁰He 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. (v. 10. ESV)

From that we understand that:

- 8. Christian giving relies upon the faithfulness of God**

This is one of those verses that is abused by preachers of the so-called Prosperity Gospel. They read that verse and then say to a poor old lady living home on a pension: “Send us \$100 – sow into our ministry – and God will send you \$10,000 – he will multiply your seed!” A careful look at the passage reveals just how ignorant and abusive that interpretation is. In the first part of verse 10 the emphasis is clearly on two things. Seed and bread. We’ve already mentioned that Christian giving is not intended to impoverish the individual giver. Back in verse 8 we read that:

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. (2 Corinthians 9:8 ESV)

God is able to make sure that you have ENOUGH and that you have something to GIVE. Bread represents “enough”. What are we told to pray for in the Lord’s Prayer? Our daily BREAD. We are told to ask God for ENOUGH. Not riches, not luxury, not super-abundance – God never tells us to ask him for that, rather he tells us to ask him for ENOUGH. And he tells us to ask him for something to invest in the kingdom enterprise. That’s what seed is. Seed is your ability to contribute to the Gospel mission. God wants you to have enough and something to share – that is all that is promised in this passage. That’s all that is promised in any passage! The Gospel does not promise to make you rich. It promises to provide enough and eventually, even to give you something to share. That’s what Paul always encouraged new believers to aspire to.

Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need. (Ephesians 4:28 ESV)

There is no Prosperity Gospel in the Bible. There is a Sufficiency Gospel. There is a Sharing Gospel. There is the promise enough and the promise of something to share.

But having said all of that, it still takes faith to believe what the Bible ACTUALLY promises. Listen, I’ve got 5 kids. They’re hungry all the time, a couple of them have good English teeth that require regular dentistry and they all need to make their way through college and university and so every time I put my offering in the plate it is an act of faith. I need help from God to believe what this passage is actually saying. It is saying that God will replace what I give such that I do not fall into need and such that I still have enough to share. Believing with 5 hungry, snaggly tooth, uneducated children takes a great deal of personal faith. Each time I put that in the offering plate there are two simultaneous emotions in my very human heart. There is JOY. I am

glad to have a share in what God does through this amazing church. God is doing good things – GOSPEL things here in Orillia and around the world through this money. I have a share in that, thanks be to God! I am excited about that. I am eager to put that money in the plate because I am convinced that there is no better kingdom investment than a healthy local church – whether that local church is in Orillia or Chandigarh or Santa Domingo – there is nothing like the church when it works! Thanks be to God! So I’m putting it in with JOY IN MY HEART! But I’m also putting it in with need and dependence and even a little desperation in my heart. I’m saying YEAH GOD and HELP ME JESUS every time I put that money in the plate. I need God to do what he says that he is going to do. I need him to replace this money so that I can feed, medicate and educate my kids. And I need more still to continue to invest in the work. I’m JOYFUL and NEEDFUL every time I give. But I want to tell you this – God has NEVER LET ME DOWN. EVER. God wants to be tested in this matter – he wants to show himself faithful. Malachi 3:10 says:

Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby **put me to the test**, says the LORD of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need. (Malachi 3:10 ESV)

Giving is an act of faith. It puts God to the test – this is a GOD AUTHORIZED TEST. God says – DO IT. Put your money out there and just see if I let you starve to death. God’s not going to do that. Do you remember the story of the Widow’s Mite? She did it – she put God to the test. She put in what she needed to live and Jesus saw. Now do you think that story would be in the Bible if the next day her body was discovered in the gutter because God let her starve to death? No! God saw – Jesus saw – that’s the point of the story. God sees. He knows. You can trust him. He will make sure that you have enough and something to share. Test him in this and you will discover that God is able.

9. Christian giving seeks a harvest of righteousness

The second thing I want to say about this verse, and also our 9th principle of Christian giving is that Christian giving seeks a harvest of righteousness. Look at the second half of verse 10 and the first half of verse 11; God will:

¹⁰ multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. ¹¹ You will be enriched in every way

to be generous in every way, which through us will produce (2 Corinthians 9:10–11 ESV)

This too goes right at the heart of the major flaw in the Prosperity Gospel; the issue of motivation. In both verses there is a desire for God to increase the seed. We want God to give more – that sounds like Prosperity Gospel – but notice WHY we want God to do more. So that we can increase our harvest in the field in verse 10 and so that we can be GENEROUS in every way in verse 11. A real Christian wants more from God so that they can do more in the field. They want to see a bigger harvest, they want a share in every good work. They are not asking for more so that they can spend it on themselves! That is the major flaw in the Prosperity Gospel. Listen to how the preachers of the Prosperity Gospel talk and tell me if it sounds like the Apostle Paul. Joyce Meyer was investigated by the American Congress for her lavish lifestyle – including the use of a golden toilet seat – all while claiming to be a charitable Christian ministry. Listen to what she has to say; this is a direct quote:

“If you stay in your faith, you are going to get paid. I’m living now in my reward.”¹

Does that sound like the Apostle Paul? Does that sound like Jesus who said:

“Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.” (Matthew 8:20 ESV)

If you want to receive from God so that you can enjoy your best life now then you have TOTALLY missed the Gospel. You are deceived and deceiving. Real Christians look to God for enough and for seed to invest in the kingdom of HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS. They are seeking first the KINGDOM OF GOD and they are trusting God for all that they need.

10. Christian giving is about more than meeting physical needs

Hear that carefully. Not “less than” but “more than”. Not indifferent too but looking ultimately for more than. Look at the end of verse 11 and the whole of verse 12. Paul says that when God gives and his people invest it will produce a harvest of righteousness and:

¹¹ thanksgiving to God. ¹² For the ministry of this service is **not only supplying the needs of the saints** but is also

¹ <http://www.deliveredbygrace.com/exposing-joyce-meyer/> or see Health, Wealth And Happiness by David Jones and Russell Woodbridge, page 67.

overflowing in many thanksgivings to God. (2 Corinthians 9:11–12 ESV)

It is not ONLY SUPPLYING THE NEEDS OF THE SAINTS. Christian giving is not simply about addressing human need. Jesus said ‘the poor you will always have with you’ – Matthew 26:11. There will never be a day – until the return of Jesus - when all human suffering and want has been eliminated from the earth. We aren’t going to take up the offering next week and NAIL THIS THING once and for all. As long as there is sin and corruption and injustice in the world there will be poverty and suffering. As long as people like Vladimir Putin are stuffing public cash in off shore accounts in places like Panama there will always be poor among us. Sin creates injustice creates poverty creates need. And if all you are doing is targeting need then you might as well drip the ocean dry with a tea cup. Christian giving ultimately aims at more. We want to give in a way that needs are met and eyes are turned to Christ!

That is why you have to be so careful in your giving. You see a commercial on TV with hungry kids and a number you can call right now with your credit card number but if that giving does not result in the Gospel being preached and people getting saved and filled with the Holy Spirit then you are not engaged in Christian giving. That is just mindless, and ultimately pointless, emotional response. Feeding people on the way to hell is not Christian charity. Now, that isn’t to say that we simply carpet bomb hungry people with Gospel tracts. No – what we do is we meet physical needs in a way that facilitates Gospel sharing.

Let me give you an example. One of the projects we invest in here is called Guardians of Hope. It is an AIDS evangelism program. In India AIDS tends to travel along the trucking lines. Men drive their trucks all over India delivering supplies and they are away from their wives for months at time. They sleep with prostitutes, they get AIDS and they die but not before giving it to their wives. The women, who’ve done nothing wrong, they end up without a husband, with no source of income and with a deadly disease that will ultimately claim their lives. Guardians of Hope steps into that awful scenario. It provides food and medicine and care and in that context women hear about the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I’ve seen it. We’ve been there. Our ladies have washed the feet of those ladies. And we’ve told them – our partners have told them – that there is a God who cares about their bodies and their souls. His name is Jesus. And he came to live and die and rise again so that they could be with him one day. Healed. Whole and eternal. No disease. No shame. No hunger. No dying. Come.

And they do. No one else cares for them. In India there is still a lot of stigma around AIDS, people aren't sure how it transmits so no one wants to touch them, they are marginalized and because Hinduism teaches that heaven and hell are here on earth then when something bad happens people perceive that as karma. You are getting what you deserve. These women are literally in hell and Jesus brings them hope. Your money is invested in that project. You don't get that with the Red Cross. Christian giving is about more than simply meeting physical needs.

11. Christian giving widens the circle of praise

I take that from the same passage. In verse 12 Paul talks about how their giving will result in more and more people giving thanks to God. I have seen this too. I was in India a while back and a grandmother was at the Guardians of Hope program sharing her testimony to us and to the younger ladies. Her son and daughter in law had died of AIDS and she was now raising the children. This is what she said:

“The Hindu gods didn't care about me. No one helped me. But then I met the Christian God Jesus. He cared about me. He provided for my grandchildren and for me and so now we worship the Christian God.”

That may not be good theology but that is good DOXOLOGY! We'll get to the whole monotheism thing later, but the point is that your giving resulted in a gloriously WIDENED circle of praise. Thanks be to God.

12. Christian giving provides evidence of saving faith

Look at verse 13:

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 (2 Corinthians 9:13 ESV)

One commentator puts it this way:

“The collection is simultaneously a confession of Christ and a meeting of needs.”²

Bible readers understand this. The Bible makes it very clear that God seeks to verify the truthfulness of our words by examining the evidence of our actions. This is one of the first things we learn in Scripture. In Genesis 15 the Bible says:

And he (Abraham) believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness. (Genesis 15:6 ESV)

So Abraham believed in God. He professed faith so that should be the end of it right? Well not so fast. In Genesis 22 – 7 chapters later and many years later, the Bible says this:

¹ After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, “Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.”² He said, “Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.” (Genesis 22:1–2 ESV)

After these things – after Abraham’s profession of faith God tested him. In the New Testament the Apostle James comments on this story and says:

You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works (James 2:22 ESV)

When faith is real everything you love goes on the altar. That isn’t what makes you a Christian, that is just what Christians do.

13. Christian giving builds unity and inspires intercessory prayer

Look at verse 14; Paul says that you are going to give and they are going to praise God:

while they long for you and pray for you, because of the surpassing grace of God upon you. (2 Corinthians 9:14 ESV)

You have to remember the context in order to appreciate that verse. The original goal for the Jerusalem Offering was to forestall a potential rupture in the early church. There were Jewish Christians and there were Gentile Christians and Paul was very concerned for there to be only

² Mark Seifrid, *The Second Letter to the Corinthians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 365.

ONE TRUE CHURCH of Jesus Christ. He didn't want division he wanted unity and he knew that nothing builds unity like sharing in suffering. So if you could sacrifice so that they could have enough they will thank God and they will incline their affections toward you. More than that, they will pray for you. You have to hear what the Old Puritan Matthew Henry said about that. He said:

Those whose wants were supplied would make the best return they were able, by sending up many prayers to God for those who had relieved them ... and, as this is the only recompense the poor can make, so it is often greatly for the advantage of the rich.³

Listen to me church, we want people in India and people in the Dominican and people in South Africa to be praying for our church. Do you think that God closes his ear to the prayers of those poor women who come to Christ through the AIDs evangelism program in India? Do you think he saves them to ignore them? I would think that their every prayer is precious in the eyes of the Lord; I would think that their every utterance is taken by angels and stored in golden bowls before the throne of God Almighty; I would think that we would be very eager to be rich in such prayers. I would think that we would want such women to know our church by name.

Christian giving builds unity and inspires intercessory prayer.

14. Christian giving redounds to the glory of God

That's a word from the King James Bible. In the old KJV the Apostle Paul would say:

abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God. (2 Corinthians 4:15 KJV)

To redound means "to contribute greatly to a person's credit"⁴. In street level English, Christian giving makes God look good; Christian giving helps people relate to God as their Creator and Redeemer. Paul says that multiple times in this passage. In verse 13 he says that the poor in Jerusalem will:

will glorify God (2 Corinthians 9:13 ESV)

³Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible (Unabridged)*, Accordance electronic ed. (Altamonte Springs: OakTree Software, 2004), n.p.

⁴ Strong's Greek Dictionary.

They will experience God's goodness and provision and they will learn through this experience that God hears our prayers, God answers prayer, God sees our suffering and he RESPONDS! He is a loving God; he is a Sovereign God and he is good. Do you know that there are people in our world that don't believe that because WE ATE THEIR SEED! God gave us two portions, one for our needs and one for theirs – he did everything well but they don't know that because they went to bed hungry and we went to bed fat. When we withhold the seed we rob God of glory, when we release the seed God is proven GOOD – that's what's on the line here. The glory of God among the nations!

God promised that he would bless the world. He saw the world languishing in sin and he promised that blessing would come. He said to Abraham:

in your offspring all the nations of the earth shall be blessed (Genesis 26:4 ESV)

Now ultimately we know that the offspring of Abraham that brings blessing to all people is Jesus Christ – the Bible says:

Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, "And to offsprings," referring to many, but referring to one, "And to your offspring," who is Christ. (Galatians 3:16 ESV)

So ultimately the blessing of God will come to the nations because of Jesus Christ! We can't save the world but Jesus can – amen! Amen, but then Paul goes right on to say:

And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring (Galatians 3:29 ESV)

If we are in Christ then we are Abraham's offspring. We are – in a lesser and derivative way – we are the offspring by whom God means to bless all the peoples of the earth. We are partners in redemption – JR. PARTNERS absolutely, we can only give because we have received in Christ; all Christian giving is dependent upon prior grace – absolutely! We are debtors to grace but we are also partners in blessing. It is to that we have been called.

So don't eat the seed. We are blessed in Christ and so that we may bless in Christ. That's the call, that's the LIFE, that's the opportunity and this is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God.