

## **How Much Should I Give? 2 Corinthians 9**

We have been studying 2 Corinthians 8 the past two weeks, which is about Christian giving, and we've already seen some helpful principles that bring clarity to some common misunderstandings and may alleviate some guilt:

- Give according to what you have, not what you don't have. You don't have to give yourself into poverty even if somebody else does. The Holy Spirit may move you at times to give more than you think you can to meet a particular need. If he does, you will experience joy, not guilt. But in general, we are to give from the abundance that God has supplied.
- Practice planned giving. As God blesses you, set some of that money aside on a regular basis so that you're ready to give. As needs come up, ask God to help you decide which ones to give to, then follow through.
- Look for churches and ministries with good financial integrity so that you can give confidently and joyfully.

Now we come to chapter 9 and some important principles that have to do with why we should give and how much we should give. One of the big questions about Christian giving is: How much should I give? I wrestle with this all the time. God has supplied abundantly, all my needs are met, I have extra money to put aside, but how much should I give? There are enough needs and opportunities that I could give it all away – am I supposed to do that? What about saving for retirement? What about paying off my mortgage early? What about going on vacation? What about buying deer stands and cell cameras? Ice cream and coffee? There are all kinds of ways to spend the extra money that God has provided. How am I supposed to decide much I should give?

One of the common approaches people take is the principle of tithes and offerings. This comes from the OT commands to the people of Israel and can be a simple pattern to follow in our lives today. Most people generally understand a tithe to be 10% of your income that is given to the local church to support the pastors and ministries of the church. Something like this was practiced in Israel to support the Levites and ministry of the priests.

Then there are offerings which are in addition to the tithe. So you give 10% to the local church and then offerings are above and beyond that with no particular designated amount. It's kind of between you and God and whatever you feel like you should give. This too was practiced in the nation of Israel for various reasons and has become very common in the church.

So tithes and offerings are a biblical pattern and a good pattern. And if you're looking for a simple approach to get started in Christian giving, it's a great place to start. But if that's as far as it goes for you, you might miss the whole point of what God is trying to accomplish in your life when it comes to Christian giving. You need to realize there's more to it than that. God is more concerned about how you give than how much you give, and we'll see that in our passage today. And if we understand how God wants us to give, it will also help us with how much.

Paul was taking up an offering at the church in Corinth to help the saints in Judea who were in poverty, and he really wanted the people to give generously, but even more than that, he wanted them to give for the right reasons. He writes about that in chapter 9. He sent Titus and two other guys with this letter to encourage the people to start gathering the offering so it would be ready by the time he got there. In chapter 8 he urged them to follow through on their desire to help, and now, in chapter 9 he talks more about why their gift is so important.

Read 1 Corinthians 9:1-5.

*Now it is superfluous for me to write to you about the ministry for the saints, <sup>2</sup>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. <sup>3</sup>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. <sup>4</sup>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. <sup>5</sup>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.*

So he tells them he realizes he didn't need to write to them about the offering because he knew how eager they were to help. But the reason he did and the reason he is sending the 3 brothers to collect the offering is because it was really important that the offering be ready by the time he got there. He had been boasting about their readiness to the Macedonians and if he brought some of them along, it would be humiliating for him and the Corinthians if the gift was not ready. Furthermore, he did not want the offering to end up being last minute when he showed up because that would be like an exaction and not a willing gift.

Paul's concerns make more sense if you think about the same kind of situation happening with us and Gary Sandmann. When Gary was here he told us about a new ministry need in Los Canelos that he is trying to raise funds for this coming year. Some of us were eager to help and Gary could see that. He might be back home right now, boasting about us and telling the people how eager we were to meet that need. They're all excited and can't wait to see how God moves in us to give.

But Gary's been gone for a few weeks now and it can be easy to forget about the need or to put money aside to help meet it. Weeks turn into months and all of a sudden it's next summer and Gary shows up with 3 people from Los Canelos. He can't wait for them to see how God has provided through our generous giving. How humiliating would it be for him and us if we had to tell him we weren't ready? We forgot... It would be embarrassing. And then we'd take up an offering on the spot and give because we feel bad, but it would be nothing compared to what it could have been.

Paul was sending the 3 brothers so that wouldn't happen. He didn't want to be humiliated, but, even more importantly, we'll see as we go on, he really didn't want the offering to end up being an exaction instead of a willing gift. A lot was on the line. A willing gift was really important and he explains why in the rest of this chapter. Of all the things he writes about giving, this seems to be the most important – a willing gift.

1 Corinthians 9:6-9

<sup>6</sup>*The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.* <sup>7</sup>*Each one must give as he*

*has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.<sup>8</sup> 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.<sup>9</sup> As it is written, “He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever.”*

It begins with a proverb in Verse 6 that applies to many different things in the Christian life including giving, which is why Paul uses it here. The truth it teaches comes from an agricultural context and Colin Kruse confirms that it means “the size of the harvest is directly proportional to the amount of seed sown.” If you sow just a little seed, you can expect to reap a small harvest, but if you sow a lot of seed, you can expect a bountiful harvest.

Paul uses these ideas throughout the rest of this chapter, which helps us understand what he has in mind. First of all, is he saying that if you give a little money, you will get a little financial blessing in return, but if you give a lot of money, you can expect a big financial blessing? A lot of people try to make it mean that, but that’s not what Paul is saying and you can see that as he goes along. It’s not about the amount of money.

In verse 7 he tells us what he has in mind when it comes to sowing. To sow sparingly is to give reluctantly or under compulsion – the very thing he was trying to avoid in Corinth. To sow bountifully is to give freely, willingly, and cheerfully. That’s what Paul was after. It really doesn’t have to do with an amount of money, big or small, it has to do with the attitude of your heart. One of the greatest offerings ever given was only a penny – read Mark 12:41-43.

The amount Paul instructed them to give was: “what you’ve decided in your heart to give.” It needs to be an amount that you give freely, willingly, and cheerfully, not reluctantly or under compulsion. So tithes and offerings can be a good pattern to follow, but it’s not a rule for Christians today. Our rule is to give freely, willingly and cheerfully what we’ve decided in our hearts to give. It includes prayer, seeking the Lord and what his will is, and then joyfully giving as he leads. You might end up deciding that God wants you to give 10%, but it could be less than that or more than that. God loves a cheerful giver. That’s what he’s after. This isn’t just an act of duty and obedience, it’s an act of worship. Giving is an expression of the heart.

But there's even more to it than that and Paul describes that as we keep going. There's something that comes before cheerful giving and something that comes after. In verses 8-9 Paul says: *"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. <sup>9</sup> As it is written, "He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever."* This is what happens before cheerful giving takes place and how God enables it.

God doesn't just stand back and watch to see if we'll give bountifully, he actually gives us everything we need in order to make that happen. God graciously gives us all things – everything we need at all times to be able to do all the good works he's called us to do, including joyful giving. He is our Provider and it's because he's blessed us that we are able to be a blessing to others.

So it starts with God richly blessing us and pouring out his grace in our lives, giving us everything we need. With that grace we are then able to give joyfully and willingly to bless others. And now we get to what comes after, which is the harvest. The proverb says: "Whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully." What does he have in mind?

1 Corinthians 9:10-15

*<sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. <sup>12</sup> For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God. <sup>13</sup> 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, <sup>14</sup> while they long for you and pray for you, because of the surpassing grace of God upon you. <sup>15</sup> Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!*

I think a good summary of what he's saying is in verse 11: *"You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will*

*produce thanksgiving to God.*” So Paul was telling the Corinthians that God would provide everything they needed so they could be filled with joy and give generously from their hearts he would even multiply their seed for sowing, and when the Judean believers received their gift they would overflow with thanksgivings to God for his grace among the Gentiles. The unthinkable would happen – where there were dividing walls of hostility there would now be praise to God and the Jewish believers would actually long for and pray for the Gentile believers, convinced of God’s grace upon them and of their salvation.

Paul could see all this wrapped up in that love offering, which is why it was so important that they gave freely, willingly, and joyfully. God enriches us in every way so that we can give joyously and generously from our hearts, and as those gifts are distributed, they will overflow in praise and thanksgiving to God and deep affection among believers.

And I really think this captures God’s heart and desire when it comes to Christian giving today. God wants to bless us and enrich us in every way so that our hearts are full of joy and generosity and the desire to be a blessing to others for his glory. He wants giving to be worship. If that’s where our hearts are at, the amount will be whatever he puts on our hearts. What we need to do is to pray and trust God – pray that he will transform us into this kind of givers and trust that he will pour out his blessings all along the way.