

# The Cheerful Giver

2 Corinthians 8:1-15; 9:6-15

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The last few weeks we have focused on church membership. Mark began with the Old Covenant showing us how, from the very beginning God, intended for His people to be set apart. Dan followed with Acts 2 and his picture frame of what early membership looked like in Acts, and how, if you know what you are looking for, “membership” is found all through the Bible. I am grateful and deeply appreciate each elder and they’re willingness to preach and allow the Lord to use them for this series. One thing to keep in mind is that these sermons are not merely to convince non-members that they should become members of Clearcreek Chapel, but also to remind current members what commitment and devotion should consist of in the church.

Today I am going to look at one of characteristics of membership that is shown in the Acts passage: sharing. A vital part of being a healthy, growing, vibrant church is regularly and cheerfully participating in the grace of giving. God alone provides each of us with the grace to give. He gives each of us the resources and the desire and the gifting to give. Joyful, generous giving has been characteristic of God’s people since time began. Today, we are going to trace the idea of giving from the Old Testament into the New, where Paul clearly defines his expectations for giving in the New Covenant church. In his second letter to the Corinthians Paul uses two Old Testament quotes and references. He expects his listeners to connect the idea of sacrificial giving from the Old Covenant and apply them to both the Jew and the Gentile in the New. Because we often use the word tithing to characterize giving in the New Covenant I want to trace tithing beginning in the Old Testament. And since the Old Covenant’s teaching on giving was clear, and since we have a new freedom in Christ as the fulfillment of the Old Covenant, our new freedom should compel us to give even more than the Old Covenant law demanded. Let’s pray.

## **Sacrificial Giving in the Old Testament**

Before we look at our texts this morning I want us to go back and trace the idea of sacrificial giving all the way back to Genesis. It is important to look at God’s over-arching desire to have his people be a set apart as generous givers, and yet be wholly dependent on Him for daily provision and blessings. Giving has always been a chief characteristic of God’s people, both in their sacrifice to God in worship, and in the care of one another in biblical equality.

### **Cain and Abel (Genesis 4, Hebrews 11)**

The idea of presenting an offering to the Lord is initially brought to the forefront in Genesis with the story of Cain and Abel. Hebrews 11 helps us understand that Abel’s offering was acceptable to God because of his faith. But we also begin to see the idea of an “offering” that consists of the “best” of what one has to offer. God expected the first fruits, the first born, and the choicest part (for example “the fat portions”) when presenting an offering to the Lord. God

was not pleased with the second best, nor the attitude and lack of faith that accompanied such a sacrifice. The idea of an offering to the Lord predates the Law of the Covenant, and scriptural accounts often revealed the attitude behind the offering; whether the heart was turned towards God by faith or whether the giver was simply going through the motions.

### **Abraham and Melchizedek** (Genesis 14; Hebrews 7)

You continue to see pre-Law demonstrations of sacrifice and offerings throughout the Old Testament. One important illustration of pre-law giving was that of Abraham in Genesis 14:20, when Abraham gave Melchizedek a tenth of everything he owned (Hebrews chapter 7 uses the word tithe to describing Abraham's offering). Melchizedek is *like the Son of God* in the sense that he foreshadows Christ's unique and never-ending priesthood. In technical terms, he is a 'type' or pattern of Christ.<sup>1</sup> Hebrews tells us that it is significant that Abraham gave Melchizedek a tenth of all he had; giving to Melchizedek was like giving to Christ. In Genesis 28, After Jacob's dream of the ladder from heaven, Jacob committed to give the Lord a tenth of all that he had and would be given. Genesis 28:22 says, "And of all that you give me I will give a full tenth to you." There are various offerings throughout both the Old and New Testaments to denote a regular sacrifice and a "giving back to God what is due".

### **The Old Testament Tithe**

The word "tithe" is initially used in Leviticus, and is both specific and an over-arching command to the Israelites to give the first and the best 10% of their annual produce or earnings back to the Lord as an "offering". The two terms "tithe and offerings" are often used together. Tithes were used to support the Priests and activities of the Tabernacle and eventually the Temple. The idea was that an "offering" was giving back to God by giving to the priests. In this way the people of God proclaimed gratitude to God's for his gifting of life and increase.

Tithing was also a way to support and provide an inheritance for the Priests. Freewill offerings and contributions were also to be given by the people in addition to the tithe and Numbers 18:24 clarifies the tithe as a contribution to the Lord. Even the Priests were commanded to tithe on what they had received from the people. The Priests were also commanded to choose from the "best of the best" of what they had received from the people for their own tithe back to the Lord.

Nehemiah 10:39 proclaims that, "We will not neglect the house of our God," and shows that giving and tithing while rebuilding of the Temple was vital to the covenant and culture of who the Israelites were as a people of God. Nehemiah understood that recommitting the people to set aside their regular tithes and offerings to the Lord was vital in re-establishing the God-focused culture and life of the Jewish people even in the middle of reconstructing the walls of Jerusalem.

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<sup>1</sup> Carson, D. A., France, R. T., Motyer, J. A., & Wenham, G. J. (Eds.). (1994). *New Bible commentary: 21st century edition* (4th ed., p. 1337). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press.

My last observation on tithing from the Old Testament come from Malachi. In chapter 3 the whole nation of Israel is accused of robbing God by failing to bring the full tithe into the storehouse. The nation of Israel was being cursed because they failed to take tithing to God seriously. In verse 12 it says that all nations would call them blessed and their land would be a land of delight if they would follow the law completely through tithing, and not rob God.

### **Generosity of God's people in the Wilderness and into the New (Exodus 16)**

Imbedded in the practice of tithes and offerings is the whole idea that generosity should identify God's people. Even in the gathering of quail and manna in the desert, the people of Israel were punished for hoarding resources and failing to help provide for one another and trust in God's daily provision. Even though God miraculously provided food for the Israelites, they were commanded to daily gather and share their resources (which God provided) to the point where nothing was left over and no one was in lack (2 Cor. 8:15; Ex. 16:18). Those who gathered more than they needed for the day were commanded to give to those who were unable to gather enough. So the idea that those who have more should be giving more was an expected principle of life in wilderness community. On the other hand, hoarders were punished as it revealed a heart rebellious and dependent on self rather than the Lord's daily provision.

Because of the way we view the Old Testament in its types and pictures pointing to Christ I believe that the idea of tithing is an over-arching principle of scripture that should inform us to not only give back the first and very best we have to the Lord, but also desire to give generously to the New Covenant community. You can see this lifestyle of giving in Acts 2:42-47 where the needs of the early church were great, but the giving was greater;

*"And all who believed were together and had all things in common. <sup>45</sup> And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. <sup>46</sup> And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, <sup>47</sup> praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved."*

### **Paul's Original Directive (1 Corinthians 16:1-4)**

In Paul's first letter to the Corinthians he explained a directive that he had given all of the churches of Galatia, that "On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come." Paul desired that the Gentile churches give regularly for the needs of the church. Systematic, regular giving would be used to help churches suffering financial hardship and persecution, as well as further unifying Jewish and Gentile believers. Jewish believers had been hit hard by outbreaks of famine in the region around AD 41-54, and Paul instructed the Gentile churches set aside money weekly so that the money could be used to relieve believers in other parts of the region who suffering great financial and economic ruin. So that brings us to our texts this morning. Let's read in 2 Corinthians beginning at chapter 8;

### **Giving Out of Poverty (2 Corinthians 8:1-5)**

*We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, <sup>2</sup>for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. <sup>3</sup>For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, <sup>4</sup>begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints— <sup>5</sup>and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us.*

Paul begins his explanation of church giving by using the Macedonian Church as an example of beautiful, joyful giving over and beyond their means. The Macedonian Church was in severe poverty and affliction, and yet begged Paul for the opportunity to give to the Jerusalem Church. So giving is not just for the wealthy, and not just for those who are comfortable and doing well. Look at Paul's description of the heart of the Macedonian Church regarding the collection for the Church at Jerusalem. First of all, their giving is described as grace-based. And even in their own severe test of affliction, they were overflowing with joy and generosity and earnestly begged Paul to allow them to take part in this ministry of giving. Paul also describes their sacrificial giving as giving themselves first to the Lord. It was as if the Macedonian's were truly offering themselves first as a self-sacrifice to the Lord, accompanied by glad generous hearts.

### **Giving is Not a Command but a Show of Fruit (2 Corinthians 8: 6-8)**

It is interesting to note that Paul is quick to clarify that giving in the New Covenant is not a command, as it was in the Old Covenant, but is a reflection of our heart, and of the love and grace that is expected from God's people in the New Covenant, verse 6;

*<sup>6</sup>Accordingly, we urged Titus that as he had started, so he should complete among you this act of grace. <sup>7</sup>But as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you—see that you excel in this act of grace also. <sup>8</sup>I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine.*

Paul desired that the Corinthians excel in the grace of giving as much as the other gifts they had excelled in; faith, speech, knowledge, eagerness and love. The grace of giving was to be pursued within the church as much as these other God-given gifts that the Corinthians prized within their community.

### **Giving Out of Richness (2 Corinthians 8:9)**

Paul switches illustrations in verse 9, looking at giving from yet a different perspective, that of giving from a position of wealth. After encouraging the Corinthians to excel in giving as much as they desired to excel in the other gifts, Paul reminds them that Jesus was the ultimate giver of vast wealth. Jesus didn't give out of his poverty (like the Macedonian Church did), but instead, gave out of his wealth to the point of his own destruction. The Son of God became poor by becoming a man, and emptied himself of life so that we as sinners might receive the richness of new life and reconciliation with God through eternity. And in fact, Paul expects the

reader to understand that Jesus' death provided believers the very grace to give in such a sacrificial way. Verse 9 reads,

*<sup>9</sup>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.*

So for Paul, Christ is the very center and cause of our ability to give. Without Christ's becoming poor we would never be rich, but Christ turned our poverty into vast richness. This richness of grace is the very cause of our joy and generosity. So Paul continues,

### **Complete Your Commitment with Eagerness (2 Corinthians 8:10-15)**

*<sup>10</sup>And in this matter I give my judgment: this benefits you, who a year ago started not only to do this work but also to desire to do it. <sup>11</sup>So now finish doing it as well, so that your readiness in desiring it may be matched by your completing it out of what you have. <sup>12</sup>For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have. <sup>13</sup>For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened, but that as a matter of fairness <sup>14</sup>your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need, that there may be fairness. <sup>15</sup>As it is written, "Whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack."*

The Corinthians apparently followed Paul's instructions in his first letter and then began to get "cold feet" and not complete their earlier commitment to give to the Church at Jerusalem. Paul reminds them that eagerness should be matched to the abundance that the Lord has provided for each of us. Paul expected not only a basic readiness and desire to give but an eagerness to give as well. Paul is not asking the church to give more than they can, but each person is to give to the point of fairness. Paul quotes Exodus 16:18 to further illustrate his thinking on giving, and expects the listener to connect his command back to the full story of the children of Israel in the wilderness. Look again at verse 15, <sup>15</sup>As it is written, "Whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack. Now turn to Exodus 16:16,

*This is what the Lord has commanded: 'Gather of it, each one of you, as much as he can eat. You shall each take an omer, according to the number of the persons that each of you has in his tent.' " <sup>17</sup>And the people of Israel did so. They gathered some more, some less. <sup>18</sup>But when they measured it with an omer, whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack. Each of them gathered as much as he could eat.*

Verses 16-18 summarize the basic principle that God commanded through Moses regarding the daily food that God miraculously provided each and every day for the Israelites in the wilderness. The response of the Israelites to God's provision was grumbling and complaining, even though the Lord graciously met their needs every day. But the Lord used food to test the hearts of His people, and he expected them to provide for one another where there were needs and not selfishly hoard food for themselves. He wanted his people to depend on his daily provision and to support and provide for one other in the community.

### **Sowing and Reaping in God's Economy (2 Corinthians 9:6-8)**

In our context, money and provision is what the Lord provides and allows in our lives. All that we have comes from the Lord, whether a lot or a little. But the Lord desires that we be good stewards of our resources and generous givers. Paul helps us in summarizing his “main” point when it comes to giving. Now look in God’s word at Chapter 9:6;

*<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.*

Whoever gives sparingly will receive blessings sparingly, and whoever gives generously will receive God’s blessing generously. God loves a cheerful giver. We are not to give back to the Lord begrudgingly or reluctantly, or under compulsion, whether it is a little or a lot. We are each to decide how much is enough, but the attitude is at least as important as the amount we decide to give. Each of us is dependent on God’s grace in the area of giving, because on our own strength we cannot and will not give sufficiently. But God’s grace enables us to give far beyond what we will believe we can. God’s grace enables us to excel in the grace of generous giving.

God’s ability to provide all things for our sufficiency and the grace we need to abound in every good work, is further illustrated in Paul’s reference to Psalm 112. 2 Corinthians 9 reads, <sup>9</sup>*As it is written, “He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever.”*

This is a quote from Psalm 112, and reflects on the attributes of a righteous man. It is interesting to note that how a man handles his money is a reflection of his righteousness in this Psalm; a righteous man handling his money in a righteous, Godly way. The righteous man deals generously with others and is able to lend his resources fairly to others. He conducts his (implied), financial and business affairs justly. He is not afraid of bad news, implying that he has planned well, has set aside money and trusts the Lord to provide though thorough planning. The righteous man gives freely of his resources and gives generously to the poor and those in need, especially (implied) giving to the household of the Lord. So where does our supply of resources come from? Verse 10,

### **God Supplies and Multiplies Our Resources (2 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!*

God is the supplier and multiplier of all that we have. The purpose of what we are given is to increase the harvest of our righteousness and to be generous in every way. If this is our purpose, then we will be enriched and empowered to be generous in every way and thus produce thanksgiving to God by all. As Paul writes in verse 12, the ministry of this service (of giving), is not *just* to meet needs, but to produce many thanksgivings to God. By other's seeing and approving of needs being met in Christ's body (the church), everyone will ultimately glorify God because of our willingness to be submissive to scripture's command to give generously.

#### **In Conclusion:**

1. *We are called give to the church on a planned, regular and consistent basis*
2. *Our primary focus for giving should go to our local church and it's ministries*
3. *Each person should decide in his/her own heart how much to give based upon what the Lord has provided in resources*
4. *God will provide for each of us what he desires; but how we use that money and resources exposes our hearts, whether we are blessed with a little or a lot*

*"I do not believe one can settle how much we ought to give. I am afraid the only safe rule is to give more than we can spare. In other words, if our expenditure on comforts, luxuries, amusement, etc., is up to the standard common among those with the same income as our own, we are probably giving away too little. If our giving does not at all pinch or hamper us, I should say it is too small. There ought to be things we should like to do and cannot because our commitment to giving excludes them."*

C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity

By God's grace we are called to pursue and excel in the grace of giving so that in all things God is glorified and we all increase our harvest of righteousness.

Let's pray.