

Christ Reformation Church

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God's Word to a Hesitating Church

Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God. (7:1)

“Sowing and Reaping”

January 11, 2015

Sermon Text: 2 Cor 9

Scripture Reading: Exodus 36:1-7

Introduction-

Giving is necessarily a part of following Christ. He *gave* Himself to us for our salvation. He *emptied* Himself and took on the form of one of us. He calls us to deny ourselves and follow Him. So inevitably as we study God's Word we are going to find

ourselves hearing about *giving*. Giving ourselves. Giving our resources. Giving is the love of Christ in action. Giving is a fruit of the Spirit in the Christian. Listen to some Scriptures on this subject:

Acts 20:35 In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'

Proverbs 11:25 Whoever brings blessing will be enriched, and one who waters will himself be watered.

Proverbs 22:9 Whoever has a bountiful eye will be blessed, for he shares his bread with the poor.

Psalms 41:1-3 To the choirmaster. A Psalm of David. Blessed is the one who considers the poor! In the day of trouble the LORD delivers him; (2) the LORD protects him and keeps him alive; he is called blessed in the land; you do not give

him up to the will of his enemies.
(3) The LORD sustains him on his sickbed; in his illness you restore him to full health.

Luke 19:16-26 The first came before him, saying, 'Lord, your mina has made ten minas more.' (17) And he said to him, 'Well done, good servant! Because you have been faithful in a very little, you shall have authority over ten cities.' (18) And the second came, saying, 'Lord, your mina has made five minas.' (19) And he said to him, 'And you are to be over five cities.' (20) Then another came, saying, 'Lord, here is your mina, which I kept laid away in a handkerchief; (21) for I was afraid of you, because you are a severe man. You take what you did not deposit, and reap what you did not sow.' (22) He said to him, 'I will condemn you with your own words, you wicked servant! You knew that I was a severe man, taking what I did not deposit and reaping what I did not sow? (23) Why then did you not put my money in the bank, and at my coming I might have collected it with interest?' (24) And he said to those who stood by, 'Take the mina from him, and give it to the one who has the ten minas.' (25) And they said to him, 'Lord, he has ten minas!' (26) 'I tell you that to everyone who has,

more will be given, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.

Luke 6:38 give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you."

Philippians 4:18-19 I have received full payment, and more. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. (19) And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

We have already seen in chapters 8-9 the emphasis upon *voluntary, willful giving*. True giving in Christ is not motivated by external compulsion – the kind of compulsion that we have been so often subjected to. We have seen Paul use these phrases:

- The grace of God
- This act of grace
- A wealth of generosity
- Of their own accord
- Begging us earnestly
- Genuine love
- Readiness

- A willing gift, not an exaction

Now, this does not preclude Paul from exhorting them! But Paul knew that this ministry was indeed the work of Christ, as evidenced by what had happened at Macedonia, and he wants the Corinthians, *for their own benefit* as well as for the needy, to participate in it, yet of their own accord.

So, consider this church. We put what we believe are the Lord's needs before you each year. We believe that they accurately represent the Lord's work. But beyond that, you must be convinced of it in your own hearts by the Spirit of Christ, so that as you give to these needs and ministries, you do so out of a cheerful heart, not grudgingly. Listen to it again –

2 Corinthians 9:6-7 The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. (7) Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

Is it a valid need, approved of by God, for us to have and maintain this facility in which to gather together? I think so, and we are very thankful for it. Is the ministry of the Word of God

something that the Lord calls upon His people to support? Yes, Scripture is clear on that. But as these needs are put before you in this church (and sometimes outside this church), Paul tells us all that we must understand some basic principles that are always true about giving because they reflect the way God Himself works. For instance,

- Sow sparingly = reap sparingly
- Sow bountifully = a bountiful harvest

So here is what has been called “the law of the harvest.” Think of a field. You’ve got the soil all worked and ready for the seed. Now, a seed is an incredible thing – in itself one seed proves that God exists! Think of a wheat seed. If you put that one seed in the ground, the rest is up to the Lord. You have given that one seed away, and you have done so by faith – faith that it is going to germinate and grow, but also that it is going to do what seeds do – multiply itself. How many wheat seeds are produced by one that is planted? I never counted the seeds in a head of wheat, but I googled it! Answer: 40-50. So if even a 50% germination results, you still have a huge multiplication of seed. You get the seed that you planted back, plus many-fold more.

If we are going to reap, then we must first sow.

NOTE: I am not promising you that if you give generously to some program myself or someone else is trying to sell you on, that God is going to just dump 50 times more money in your lap, and our budget is rather short right now, so come on, contribute. No, what we want to learn are the principles that *God* sets out for us here, and follow them.

Look at verses 8-9 once more:

2 Corinthians 9:8-9 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. (9) As it is written, "He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever."

Verse 9 is a quote from Psalm 112 and it is talking about the righteous man. Listen to it –

Psalms 112:1-10 Praise the LORD! Blessed is the man who fears the LORD, who greatly delights in his commandments! (2) His offspring will be mighty in the land; the generation of the upright will be blessed.

(3) Wealth and riches are in his house, and his righteousness endures forever.

(4) Light dawns in the darkness for the upright; **he is gracious, merciful, and righteous.** (5) **It is well with the man who deals generously and lends; who conducts his affairs with justice.** (6) For the righteous will never be moved; he will be remembered forever. (7) He is not afraid of bad news; his heart is firm, trusting in the LORD. (8) His heart is steady; he will not be afraid, until he looks in triumph on his adversaries.

(9) **He has distributed freely; he has given to the poor;** his righteousness endures forever; his horn is exalted in honor. (10) The wicked man sees it and is angry; he gnashes his teeth and melts away; the desire of the wicked will perish!

What is this wealth that the Lord gives such a person? I don't know for certain, but it certainly is not limited to money. Generally, *it is the blessing of the Lord upon him and his family.* It seems that here it is often referred to as "righteousness." It's also called the same in 2 Cor 9:10. Whatever this blessing is, you can be sure of this: *the one who sows sparingly will not reap much of it.*

Now, consider verses 10-11,

2 Corinthians 9:10-11 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. (11) You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God.

We mentioned this before, but here it is in verse 10. When we sow seed, we are trusting that in “throwing away the seed,” the Lord will do two things:

1. Replace the seed we planted so that next season we can plant again, and in fact give us even MORE to sow,
2. Provide enough harvest seed for bread – for our provision.

So it is in this matter of giving when the Lord is at work in us to graciously desire to give to the need He sets before us. He says that if we sow generously, he will give us more generosity – *you will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way* and the whole thing results in God’s glory (thanksgiving).

You see this glory again in the remainder of the chapter-

2 Corinthians 9:12-15 For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God. (13) By their approval of this service, they will glorify God because of your submission flowing from your confession of the gospel of Christ, and the generosity of your contribution for them and for all others, (14) while they long for you and pray for you, because of the surpassing grace of God upon you. (15) Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!

That is to say, this gracious, cheerful giving to the Lord – in this case, giving to the needs of persecuted and hurting Christians, is **WORSHIP** that gives glory to God. In addition, notice that this gracious, cheerful giving *flows from, is a direct result of, the confession of Christ*. **It is a fruit of a heart changed by Christ**, flowing from the realization of what God in Christ has done for us – given us the inexpressible gift of salvation.

We desire to know Christ better. We want His Spirit to work powerfully in us and to energize everything we do here. We want to see Him enliven our

worship of Him, and our service of Him, and our knowledge of Him. We want, in other words, a harvest of His righteousness.

And what the Apostle Paul is telling us here is that the way to that harvest is by sowing cheerfully and generously as the Lord directs us in our own hearts to sow. Letting loose, rather than clinging to, remembering always that the ultimate cause of our giving is God's giving of His Son to us.

Let me end with these thoughts. Notice that Paul is very careful here to *include* the Corinthians in this project of an offering for the needy brothers in Jerusalem. He tells them about the need. He shares with them how he is going to be certain to handle the funds with integrity. He tells them how the Spirit led the Macedonian believers to give cheerfully even beyond their means. But then he tells them *each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a CHEERFUL giver.*

Now, let me suggest to you that the principle for giving in the New Covenant era is *Spirit-led cheerful giving that gives in faith.* It is not a burdensome thing, though it will very often be a very sacrificial thing. This is

in accord with the principle Jesus stated about His yoke:

Matthew 11:28-30 Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. (29) Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. (30) For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

Do you see it? There is probably some tricky name for this kind of saying or literary device. You have something that is HEAVY (a yoke) and is a BURDEN, but it isn't. It's light. It's easy. *When men put a yoke on us, it is burdensome and heavy. When the Spirit of Christ in us leads us, there is a cheerfulness, an easiness, a lightness about it.* Even when in reality it is great sacrifice.

And this leading of the Spirit, this spirit of cheer and lightness is what had happened at Philippi and Thessalonica and Berea you remember:

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, (2) 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. (3) For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, (4) begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints-- (5) and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us.

In any and every area of the Christian's life of giving, this is the kind of thing the Lord will effect in us by His Spirit. Don't quench Him. Go for it!

Furthermore, don't get sucked into joyless giving that is the product of someone pressuring you and you do it, but you do so under compulsion and without cheer. Yes, perhaps your reluctance to give or help or serve stems from your sinful flesh at the moment. But I think there is something else we need to consider as a possible cause. *It may well be that the Spirit of Christ in you is NOT leading you to participate. Maybe the whole enterprise is not of the Lord at all. Or perhaps the Lord leads some of His people to give and serve in a particular area, but not all.* You saw this back in Exodus-

Exodus 25:1-2 The LORD said to Moses, (2) "Speak to the people of

Israel, that they take for me a contribution. From every man whose heart moves him you shall receive the contribution for me.

This issue of giving must not become a thing of Law in a local church. It is not to be something like a tax imposed.

At the same time, each one of us can use this subject of giving to examine ourselves. Because *the Holy Spirit is at work in EVERY Christian, leading them to give cheerfully and generously, giving us faith to believe that God will provide for us and bless us as we do.* This kind of giving is characteristic of a Christian. Where it is absent, something is amiss.

James 2:14-17 What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? (15) If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, (16) and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? (17) So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

The man who is not a giving man is not a Christian. And I would be remiss if I did not warn you of this. It makes me think of the preaching of J.C. Ryle

who would often say things like, “show me a man who does not pray and I will show you a man who is not a Christian.” Similarly we can say “Show me a man who does not give, and give cheerfully, and I will show you a man who is not a Christian.”

So let each one examine themselves in this regard. Giving, like prayer, is an expression of genuine faith.

Let me close with some great insights from John Calvin:

“Now the case is this. Paul now commends alms-giving by a beautiful similitude [ie, an illustration], comparing it to sowing. For in sowing, the seed is cast forth by the hand, is scattered upon the ground on this side and on that, is harrowed, and at length rots; and thus it seems as good as lost. The case is similar as to alms-giving [giving to the poor]. What goes forth from you to some other quarter *seems as if it were a diminishing of what you have, but the season of harvest will come, when the fruit will be gathered. For as the Lord reckons every thing that is laid out upon the poor as given to himself, so he afterwards requites [repays] it with large interest.*

Proverbs 19:17 Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the

LORD, and he will repay him for his deed.

He that sows sparingly will have a poor harvest, corresponding to the sowing: he that sows bountifully and with a full hand, will reap a correspondingly bountiful harvest. *Let this doctrine be deeply rooted in our minds, that, whenever carnal reason keeps us back from doing good through fear of loss, we may immediately defend ourselves with this shield: But the Lord declares that we are SOWING.*

The more beneficent you are to your neighbors, you will find the blessing of God so much the more abundantly poured out upon you. God loves a cheerful giver. When Paul teaches us this, he implies necessarily that, on the other hand, the miserly and reluctant are loathed by Him. For God does not wish to lord it over us, in the manner of a tyrant, but, as He acts towards us as a Father, so he requires from us the cheerful obedience of children.”

Matthew 25:31-40 "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. (32) Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from

the goats. (33) And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. (34) Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. (35) For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, (36) I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.' (37) Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? (38) And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? (39) And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?' (40) And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.'