

## Giving – 2 Corinthians 9

Okay, here's the scenario. You are the much younger you, unmarried, no boyfriend / girlfriend and you are at a party...or a friend's house...or you are at church...the grocery store, whatever. You see an attractive member of the opposite sex and you shoot your shot. You approach them and give them your best line, whatever that is. *"Come here often?" "What's your sign?" "Do you believe in love at first sight, or should I walk by again?"*

I was horrible at this. Kids today call it having rizz. I had no rizz. I would panic and say, *"So...do you like...weather?"* That never worked, believe it or not. But after that first line, what are the two questions that probably come next? *"What is your name?"* And *"What do you do for a living?"* Right? That's the base level of friendship. For some people it stops right there and for others they seem to make some sort of connection and it goes further. And if it continues to go from level to deeper level, gradually you learn who that person really is.

You learn what makes them laugh and what makes them cry. You learn what they believe and what they believe in. You learn what hills they will die on. You learn what they truly love and what they dislike and what they can't tolerate. You learn who that person truly is. You get to the deepest level of that person, that inner level of who they really are, not just who they portray themselves to be or who they want to be.

And it is that level of you that God is most interested in. It's that level that God starts working on when you become a Christian. It's that deepest level of who you are that God starts to sanctify and to make more like Him. His goal for your life is not for you to be comfortable or famous or even happy, although He wants you to be happy but that's not the main goal. His main goal is to make you more like Jesus. So, sometimes He takes some fine sandpaper and shaves and molds and shapes you...and sometimes He uses an axe to do the job like only God can.

That's called sanctification. It means to make you holy, separate, different and more like Jesus. It's the word from which we get "sanctions" which means to put a barrier around and we also get "saint" from that word which means holy one. That's what we have been talking about the last few weeks and we will continue to see what sanctification is and what it looks like in our lives.

We have seen that when we first become Christians we are baptized to proclaim to the world that we are now Jesus followers. We are told in scripture of the importance of going to church and being around those who will support us and hold us accountable. We tell others and remind ourselves of the sacrifice that Jesus made for us when we celebrate the Lord's Supper and those are all part of the sanctification process. God uses those things as tools to help us grow and mature. But at some point God gives us a test of that growth and maturity and that test is called "giving."

And I know that when I say the word "giving" that there are some people in this world who will say, *"Oh, there he goes again. Just like every other preacher. Talking about money again. Money, money, money. That's all the church cares about."* I doubt if anybody here thinks that because it is very rare that I preach on money because I don't want to be that preacher and, honestly, I don't worry much about the finances of the church but at some point I have to do what Paul said to do (Acts 20) and that is to preach the whole council of God, the whole Bible. And giving is a big part of what is taught in scripture.

Jesus talked a lot about money. Most of the parables are about money. And one of the most famous places in scripture where Jesus talks about money is from the Sermon on the Mount where He says in **Matthew 6:21**, *"where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."* He is saying that where and how you spend your money is who you are at your deepest level. It's the real you. So, it's important to know what God wants for us in the terms of money but also where you give your time and effort as well.

Let's look at what Paul had to say to the church in Corinthians about money in **2 Corinthians chapter 9**. Now, you need to know that this is technically the same church that Paul wrote to in 1 Corinthians but they have come a long way. The 1 Corinthian church was a mess. They were doing almost everything wrong and Paul was very stern with them and in almost every chapter you can see the disappointment Paul has in them.

But the 2 Corinthian church had read the letter, understood and repented. In fact, In **2 Corinthians chapter 7, verse 11** Paul says, *"See what this godly sorrow has produced in you: what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what concern, what readiness to see justice done. At every point you have proved yourselves to be innocent in this matter."* In other words, Paul is saying they have repented and he is so glad.

Then chapters 8 and 9 are both about money. Paul tells them in chapter 7 that he sees they have repented then in chapters 8 and 9 he gives them a test. And money is the test. Let's read **chapter 9, just verses 6-8.**

*“Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. <sup>7</sup> Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. <sup>8</sup> And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.”*

So, the first thing we have to do with this passage is see what it does not mean. Unlike the pretty hair preachers on TV who say that God wants you to be wealthy and all you have to do is give money to the church and God will give it back to you, I want you to know the truth. And that is...that could possibly be true. Sort of. But not really.

What I mean is that God loves you like a father and wants you to be happy and could possibly bless you with wealth but that is absolutely not His goal for your life. I will say again that God wants more than anything for you to be like Jesus. And never make the mistake of thinking that if you give money to the church or any other good charity that God promises to give you back that money. I have seen that happen but it is not promised nor should it be expected and this passage has everything to do with your heart not your bank account.

This analogy about sowing and reaping is a good one but it's not perfect. If a farmer is going to sow wheat seed, he expects to reap wheat, right? And so we read this and think well, if I sow money I will reap money. That's the wrong way to read this. Now, the context of this passage and this whole chapter is money. But it does include where and how you sow your time and your efforts. But it's talking about specifically sowing money.

But God owns everything. And when we sow money, He gives back to us what He knows we need. And that may be money but maybe He gives you peace instead. I've told you before about talking with the drug addicted lady who I told that God could give her peace and she looked at me like I was crazy. She said, *“Peace?! Why I'd give anything for peace.”* She didn't want money. She didn't want drugs. She wanted peace.

Or maybe if you sow money, God could give you health. But is that really what you need in this life that is but a vapor (James 4), a breath? Maybe God gives you wisdom instead

because He knows that's what you really need. Maybe if you sow money God will give you stuff but what if he gave you contentment instead? Wouldn't that be better?

That word that Paul uses for "generously" there in **verse 6** is the word from which we get "blessing". God wants to bless you. But He knows what blessings you need. It's just up to you the amount. If you want a lot of God's blessings. You will sow generously. That's just biblical and spiritual truth. The question is – the test is – do you believe it? "*Oh, yes, pastor, I believe it.*" Do you? Well, the test is to prove it. But let's move on to the next issue.

The question some of you have at this point is, "*Okay, I believe. So, how much do I have to give to prove that I believe? How much do I give to pass the test?*" And that is a logical question. But let me ask another question. How do you know what to pray for? Do you think about it? Do you just pray for what you need and for the prayer requests people bring at church? Paul tells us in **Ephesians 6** and in other places to "*pray in the Spirit.*"

So, what does it mean to pray in the Spirit? Some people want to make that verse about speaking in tongues but that's not the context and doesn't fit what Paul is saying at all. Paul is saying that we should actually ask God for what we need to pray about. Let the Holy Spirit guide you in your prayers. And it's the same with giving. We should simply ask God to let us know how much we should give.

Look at **verse 7** again. "*Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give...*" Paul said it like this because it was common thought back then that the heart was the seat of all decision-making. Just like we say the brain or the mind is where we decide, they considered it the heart. And how do you decide in your heart or in your mind how much to give? Well, the good news is that we are no longer under the Old Testament Law that said they were to give 10% or a tithe. We are not under that law. We are under grace. The bad news is that we are no longer under the Old Testament Law that tells us how much to give. We have to decide that based on what the Holy Spirit says to us.

And what did Jesus do with the Law? Think about it. Jesus said several times, "*You have heard it said...*" meaning the Mosaic Law said such and such. But then every time Jesus added to it. When the Law said an eye for an eye, Jesus said turn the other cheek. When the Law said to go one mile, Jesus said to go two miles. Again in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said, "*You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'*"<sup>44</sup> "*But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.*" "*You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.'*"<sup>28</sup> "*But I say to you*

*that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”*

Do you see what I mean? We are no longer under the Law because the Law is just rules and religion. We are under grace and because we are under grace you should probably go further than the Law. I’m not telling you how much to give. I’m just telling you to ask God and to expect that it is probably more than 10%.

I know some of you have probably never heard that before and it might make you wince to hear that. But go back to what Paul said in **verse 7**. *“Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”* Not reluctantly. Not under compulsion. It’s not mandatory to get into Heaven. But it is for those who can do it cheerfully. You have probably heard that the word “cheerful” is the word from which we get the word “hilarious.” Happy, joyous givers are the special objects of God’s love. In John MacArthur’s commentary on this, he says that God loves the world in a general sense, like He says in John 3:16. And He has a deeper, more wonderful love for His own children (John 13:1). But He has a special love for each one of His who give cheerfully.

I don’t know about you, but I want that! I need that! This world is messed up. I’m finding that out more and more. I need for God, the Creator of the universe and the Great I AM and the Redeemer, the one who is all-powerful, all-knowing, all-seeing, all-creative one to say, *“That little Todd-guy down there – I love him special. I’m going to protect that one. I’m gonna give him a little extra wisdom.”* I would love for Him to say, *“I love him so much I’m bringing him home to be with me today.”* But until He does, I want His special love.

W.A. Criswell used to tell of an ambitious young man who told his pastor he'd promised God a tithe of his income. They prayed for God to bless his career. At that time he was making \$40.00 per week and tithing \$4.00. In a few years his income increased and he was tithing \$500.00 per week. He called on the pastor to see if he could be released from his tithing promise, it was too costly now. The pastor replied, "I don't see how you can be released from your promise, but we can ask God to reduce your income to \$40.00 a week, then you'd have no problem tithing \$4.00." (W. A. Criswell, *A Guidebook for Pastors*, p. 156.)

**J. Hudson Taylor** was a missionary to China years ago and he once said, *“When God’s work is done in God’s way for God’s glory, it will never lack God’s supply.”* What that means is that when you are fully relying on God and listening to Him speak and counting on Him

to do what He said He would do, you will always have everything you need. You will always have the blessings of a special-loving all-powerful God. That's what **verse 8** is saying. Do you see that?

*“And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.”* Do you believe that? Then prove it and pass the test. Look, I hate to preach on giving money because so many preachers have made it a sore subject. But what kind of pastor would I be if I left out talking about how to get special love and blessings from God? And if you think I'm just wanting the church to get more money then prove this passage is true by giving to some other church or some other ministry. Seriously. Prove me wrong by giving generously somewhere else with a good attitude. It's your blessing to lose if you don't and God is going to protect His church, I know that.

You do need to know that our church tithes 10% of our gross income to three other ministries. We give to Unchained Prison Ministry, Jody Kennedy International and to Samaritan's Purse. And we do that with a grin on our face because we know that those ministries are bringing people to Jesus and we want to be part of that. We want those treasures in Heaven. And your gift to our church is part of that every month.

Also know that I have no idea who gives or how much. I don't want to know and so I make it clear that I have no part in the money stuff. Yes, we have two people who count it and one person who deposits it but you are not going to impress me or make me mad by how much you give or don't give. That is between you and God like it should be.

You know, every morning my dogs and I have the same routine. First thing we do and most importantly is I feed them. Then when they are ready, we all three sit down in the recliner where eventually I will have my quiet time. But almost every morning, LilBit is the first to jump up in my lap and she looks up at me lovingly with those big brown beautiful eyes and almost every morning she goes, “Brrp” right in my face. And ever day I look at her and say, *“Thanks for sharing.”*

When I get to Heaven, when I open my eyes and see my Jesus for the first time in the flesh, I don't want Him to look at me like I look at LilBit and say, *“Thanks for sharing.”* I want Him to say, *“Holy Moly kiddo, come on! You are not going to believe the blessings I have for you.”* I want Him to say, *“I saw what you gave and because of it I protected you and gave you wisdom and peace when you were down there but now come and look at all your treasures I have awaiting you! I can't wait to show you.”*

## \*Music\*

How about you? Do you even know for sure that when you die you will go to Heaven. Scripture says we can know for sure. And all you have to do is believe in Jesus. But that belief will change your life. If you have never publicly made that commitment, let's do that right now. It will be the best thing you have ever done. Do it right now as the music plays.