

Classic Christian Writings:

In 2 Corinthians 9:6-15, Paul climaxes his treatment of the grace of giving with some weighty words on the enriching ministry of Christian stewardship. He is determined not to leave his readers until he has impressed upon them the all-important fact that the grace of giving is God's supreme method of enriching both those who dispense gifts as well as those who receive gifts. So he speaks in these verses of four important matters.

The Enrichment Of Fruitfulness In Giving

“But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully” (2 Cor. 9:6).

There are laws of harvest that operate not only in the natural, but also in the spiritual realm. Paul is illustrating this fact by drawing attention to the farmer who sows his spring crop. This man knows that what he has sown in the spring he will harvest in the fall. It is just one of those unalterable laws that he will reap what he has sown.

Moreover, the farmer is cognizant of the fact that the proportion of his reaping will be determined by the proportion of his sowing. If he is foolish enough to sow sparingly he will reap sparingly; on the other hand, if he is wise enough to sow bountifully he will also reap bountifully.

This is a profound principle in all areas of Christian experience, and especially in the area of giving. The believer is to understand that giving is not a question of scattering, but of sowing. It is not a contribution; it is an investment. Thus all giving constitutes a challenge to our faith. No farmer sows without exercising simple faith in the law of harvest. Indeed, if he had no faith he would not sow at all.

In his letter to the Galatians Paul speaks specifically of this enrichment of fruitfulness in giving: “Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting. And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not” (Gal. 6:7-9).

In this passage, which is primarily associated with the subject of giving, the apostle points out that there are two kinds of sowing and also two kinds of reaping. There is a sowing which reaps a carnal harvest – “He that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption” (Gal. 6:8). There is no enrichment in this kind of giving. A carnal Christian sows to his flesh by spending his resources to gratify his own personal desires. Such a person must expect nothing less than the reaping of corruption.

In other words, that which might have been rewarded by being invested in the Lord's work will be nothing but “wood, hay and stubble” at the judgment seat of Christ (1 Cor. 3:12-15). Careful thought will reveal that this matter of carnal giving impinges upon motives as well as means, for it is not only what we give but how we give and why we give that matters in the presence of God.

Having dealt with the negative aspect, the apostle then indicates that there is a sowing which reaps a spiritual harvest – “He that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting” (Gal. 6:8). Here is the enrichment of fruitfulness in giving which is possible for all who will venture out in faith in the ministry of Christian stewardship. The text actually means that as we respond to the indwelling Spirit in love, sacrifice and stewardship, we shall be adding interest to the capital of eternal life which we already have in Christ. Nobody can merit the gift of eternal life by personal works of righteousness, “for by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast” (Eph. 2:8-9).

But having made that clear, there is a whole body of Scripture which reveals that we can add to our spiritual capital by a continuing enrichment through the ministry of giving. In fact, there is no area of Christian experience which deepens the capacity for more of the gifts of God than that of sacrificial giving. Introduce me to a stingy Christian and I will show you a person whose Christian life is shriveled up. On the other hand, lead me to a believer who knows the joy of sacrificial giving and I will point out a person whose life is one of fruitful enrichment.

I am convinced that one of the reasons why the devil has caused the subject of giving to stir up resistance and resentment among God's people is that he knows there are few ways of spiritual enrichment like the

exercise of faithful stewardship. Let us never forget that at the very heart of the Gospel is the whole principle of giving. Heaven could never be enriched with the company of the redeemed if Jesus had not given Himself, even to the death of the cross. And by the same token, we can never enrich the church or our personal lives without sacrificial stewardship. There is no fruitfulness without the ministry of giving.

But let us proceed to observe the second principle which Paul lays down in this passage.

The Enrichment Of Joyfulness In Giving

“Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver” (2 Cor. 9:7). Giving not only develops a capacity for fruitfulness but also for joyfulness. Miserableness is always linked with miserliness, whereas merriment is indissolubly involved in magnanimity. To know such joyfulness, however, Paul says that giving must be exercised without casualness – “Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give.”

God has given careful instruction as to how we should develop holy habits of “laying by in store” (1 Cor. 16:2), as we have been prospered, and so give out of a true sense of purposefulness and planning. Casualness implies carelessness and heartlessness and, therefore, joylessness. The very discipline which determines a sense of purposefulness is the discipline which deepens joyfulness in our Christian experience. So we are to give without casualness.

Furthermore, we are to give without complaint – “So let him give; not grudgingly.” This is truly a searching word to all our hearts. Who among us has not to confess that when the challenge of stewardship has come to us, there has risen up within us a spirit of unwillingness and even rebellion? There is no joy in this, and therefore no enrichment. God enables us to bring the unwillingness to give (what God demands and deserves) to the cross, until the joy of giving is born in our souls.

Notice once again in our text that we are to give without compulsion – “There should be no reluctance, no sense of compulsions; God loves a cheerful giver” (NEB). The believer must not have as his main motive the consideration of what others will think of him if he refrains from giving. Sad to say, but nonetheless true, a high percentage of giving is motivated by seeking reputation and the safeguarding of our good name, but such unworthy thoughts rob Christian stewardship of its loveliness and joy.

God’s purpose is rather that we should experience the enrichment of joyfulness in giving, and so He says, “Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver.” As we have been reminded so often, the word “cheerful” here can be rendered “hilarious,” suggesting a spirit of real enjoyment which sweeps away all human restraints.

The Lord Jesus summed up this enrichment of joyfulness in giving when He said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35). Interestingly enough, this astonishing statement is not found in the gospels, and yet Paul uses it in his address to the elders at Ephesus to press home the enrichment which comes through the sacrifice of giving. He says, in effect, that if only these brethren would learn the deep principle of joyfulness through giving their lives would be truly blessed. In every local church of Jesus Christ there are people who would rise to testify to the outworking of this spiritual law in their lives. They never knew what it was to be joyful until they learned how to give without casualness, complaint or compulsion.

There is a lovely story told of the saintly Frances Ridley Havergal who wrote the lines we so often sing without due seriousness and commitment:

Take my silver and my gold,
Not a mite would I withhold.

It is on record that this hymn was both autobiographical and actual. Frances Ridley Havergal did what she sang. In her writings is this personal testimony: “‘Take my silver and my gold’ now means shipping off all my ornaments – including a jewel cabinet which is really fit for a countess – to the Church Missionary Society...I don’t think I need tell you I never packed a box with such pleasure.” This was giving with hilarity!

But now let us move on to the next thought in the apostle’s development:

The Enrichment Of Usefulness In Giving

“And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things,

may abound to every good work...now he that ministereth seed to the sower both minister bread for your food, and multiply your seed sown, and increase the fruits of your righteousness” (2 Cor. 9:8-10).

The miracle of giving is that it produces a ministry of giving. In other words, when God can trust His people with money, He sees to it that they always have plenty for themselves and more for others. So the apostle quotes Psalm 112:9 to support this divine principle: “He that dispersed, he hath given to the poor; his righteousness endureth for ever.”

Simply stated, this law of enrichment of usefulness in giving works as follows. As we give to God He meets our personal requirements – “Now he that ministereth seed to the sower both minister bread for your food.” The God of Elijah is still the same today. When the prophet put himself at God’s total disposal he never lacked anything, even though the land was scourged with famine. And even when the brook Cherith dried up and the ravens ceased to bring his daily meal God provided his daily bread (1 Kings 17).

Later David could testify: “I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread” (Psalm 37:25). In the days of our Lord’s earthly sojourn, He could challenge His disciples with the words, “When I sent you without purse, and scrip, and shoes, lacked ye any thing? And they said, Nothing” (Luke 22:35).

Then the Apostle Paul sums it up when he says, “I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: everywhere and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need” (Phil. 4:11-12). And again: “My God shall supply all your need” (Phil. 4:19).

So we see that God commits Himself to meet our personal requirements. But more than this, He multiplies our actual resources – “Now he that ministereth seed to the sower both minister bread for your food, and multiply your seed sown.” It is obvious from this verse that God alone is responsible for the measure in which these resources are multiplied, for the promise is clear and sure: He multiplies the seed that is sown. So we can safely say that giving is not self-improvement but self-enrichment.

Indeed, the Lord Jesus affirms that giving is an assurance of gaining. He says, “Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again” (Luke 6:38). This, of course, must not be our motive for giving – “lest we vitiate the whole ethical value of the act. But our Lord offers this assurance, that giving is never a one-way street: it is the door to plenty.”

Score of examples could be cited at this point to illustrate how God multiplies the resources of those who give in the right measure and with the right motive.

I think of the late Robert A. Laidlaw, well-known businessman of Auckland, New Zealand, and author of *The Reason Why*. As a young man of eighteen-and-a-half, he made a covenant with God that he would give a tenth of all his earnings. Later, at the age of twenty-five, he decided to change that amount to fifty percent of all his earnings. God continued to multiply his resources until he was giving even more to the work of the Lord. Later, writing at the age of seventy, he could say: “I want to bear testimony that, in spiritual communion and in material things, God has blessed me one hundredfold, and has graciously entrusted to me a stewardship far beyond my expectations when, as a lad of eighteen, I gave God a definite portion of my wages.”

The same could be related of William Colgate who joined a church in the city of New York. As a boy, he gave ten cents to the Lord’s work out of every dollar he earned. As his business prospered he gave two-tenths, rising to five-tenths. Then when his children were educated he gave all his income to God.

Then we could mention God’s prospering hand on men like Heinz, of “57 Varieties” fame; H.P. Crowell of Quaker Oats; Kraft, of Kraft Cheese, and many others. The fact that all Christians do not become famous does not alter the principle that God multiplies our actual resources when we learn how to give sacrificially to God and His work.

The names I have just mentioned are world-famous, but “the history of Christian giving has demonstrated that there is none so poor that he cannot give.” There was a woman with no money and too old to work. She began to pray, “Teach me how to obtain. Give me someone to send out and support as a missionary.” Before her death she was supporting ninety-three missionaries.

Another, a young clerk, gave up his mid-morning coffee and buns, buying tracts with the pennies thus saved and seeking, through these, to lead men to Christ. A husband, scarcely able to make ends meet, determined that not one penny of income would be spent until he and his wife saw to it that twenty-five cents out of every dollar were given to God. By the end of the month their business had so prospered that they increased their giving and gave a joyful testimony to their church concerning the seal that the Lord had set upon their faith and obedience. Others have made a sliding scale of giving, steeply increasing as their incomes rose.

Timing counts, too, so our obedience must be prompt. A businessman went to a missionary society with \$280.00 toward sending a new recruit overseas, but he was told that he was too late as they had just cancelled her passage for lack of money. In tears he then confessed: "God told me to give it some days ago, but I delayed."

We must not expect to be untested in this act of faith. The patriarch Job gave generously to God (Job 1:5), and to the poor; but for a time he was stripped of everything, though later he received it back again in richer measure. Then there are times when God may accept our gifts and lay them up as treasure in heaven, as He promised the rich young ruler. Some give just because they are asked, without thought as to the value of the cause; others give for secondary reasons, while some give from love of God and after careful thought.

So we would say in the words of another: "If you want to be rich, give; if you want to be poor, grasp! If you want abundance, scatter; if you want to be needy, hoard!"

And again:

A man there was, and some did count him mad:
The more he gave away, the more he had.

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The Word of God supports this by saying: "There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth; and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty. The liberal soul shall be made fat: and he that watereth shall be watered also himself" (Prov. 11:24-25).

But the third thing that follows from this enrichment of usefulness in giving is that He motivates our spiritual responsibility— "God is able to...increase the fruits of your righteousness." In other words, He motivates our giving and then uses the gifts with which He has blessed us to become the fruits of righteousness to others. Thus the people and causes to which we give are not only materially blessed, but spiritually blessed because our giving is the fruit of righteousness. This, in the highest sense, is sowing to the Spirit.

It is one thing to dispense a gift; it is quite another to impart a spiritual blessing by the act of giving. We have all had experiences of this sort. There is a kind of giving which may have enriched materially, but left us dead spiritually; whereas there is another quality of stewardship which may not have been enriching materially, but has blessed us spiritually. God teach us the enrichment of usefulness in giving until "our very hearts overflow!"

This brings us to our last consideration:

The Enrichment Of Thankfulness In Giving

"Being enriched in every thing to all bountifulness, which causeth through us thanksgiving to God...Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift" (2 Cor. 9:11, 15).

Thankfulness is the ultimate in all Christian stewardship. When God has so worked in our hearts that giving turns to worship, then we have truly experienced the grace of giving. There is no greater evidence of a Spirit-filled person than a praising Christian. When Paul exhorts the believers at Ephesus to "be filled with the Spirit" (Eph. 5:18) he adds immediately, "Giving thanks always for all things unto God" (Eph. 5:20).

And so the Bible makes it plain that there is no greater enrichment of the total human personality than the spirit of thankfulness. Let us remember that in one of the profoundest statements we find in the New Testament, the apostle tells us that God has "predestinated us...according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace" (Eph. 1:5-6). So our chief occupation in heaven is going to be worship and praise to God.

In this passage the apostle makes it evident that the enrichment of thankfulness comes by way of the ministry of giving. Thus he concludes his great teaching in these two chapters on Christian stewardship with this high concept of thankfulness. He shows that this enrichment of thankfulness in giving satisfies the soul—“Being enriched in every good thing to all bountifulness, which causeth through us thanksgiving to God.”

There is nothing more satisfying in all the world than the God-given thankfulness which comes through our ability to enrich others. It is a level of thankfulness rarely found in Christians today, but it is part of God’s purpose for His children. Just as His own heart was never satisfied until He had given His all to redeem mankind, so the true believer can never be truly satisfied until he reaches the point where living for others fills him with thanksgiving to God.

Paul expresses this gratitude when he says: “I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry; who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious” (1 Tim. 1:12-13). In other words, the supreme cause of his thanksgiving was that God delivered him from bigoted self-centeredness and religious cruelty to serve others to the glory of God.

But this enrichment of thankfulness in giving not only satisfies the soul but also edifies the church—“For the administration of this service not only supplieth the want of the saints, but is abundant also by many thanksgivings unto God; while by the experiment of this ministration they glorify God for your professed subjection unto the gospel of Christ, and for your liberal distribution unto them, and unto all men” (2 Cor. 9:12-13).

These two verses are quite remarkable in that they show how the enrichment of thankfulness in giving teaches the church both to praise and to pray. Paul points out that the saints at Jerusalem would be inspired to praise God because of the evident working of the Gospel is the fact that there is seldom any evidence of practical liberality.

And so thankfulness through giving not only edifies the church in the ministry of praise, but in the ministry of prayer, for Paul goes right on to say, “And by their prayer for you, which long after you for the exceeding grace of God in you.” Nothing develops the capacity for prayer in the life of Christians as does the spirit of thanksgiving. Wherever you find thankful people you will find praying people, and we might well add that praise and prayer are the outstanding marks of an edified church.

In the third place, I want you to observe that the enrichment of thankfulness in giving ultimately magnifies the Lord—“Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift.” This is truly the climax to the whole subject of giving. With depth of insight Paul concludes his treatment of this subject of giving with this glorious doxology. What he is saying is that every time we give with thankfulness we only reflect the unspeakable act of God when He gave His only begotten Son for the salvation of men. Already the apostle has touched upon this profound subject by declaring, “Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich” (2 Cor. 8:9).

Here is divine giving at its highest and deepest. At its highest level we are lifted to the great concept of the unmerited favor of God in sending His Son from heaven’s glory down to earth’s gloom. At its deepest level we are introduced to the unutterable poverty to which our Lord descended. Paul is so careful about this that he uses a Greek word which means “pauperism.” In other words, the Lord Jesus became a pauper on this earth that we might be introduced to all the richness of His grace. Now, says Paul, whenever we give, remember that we are only reflecting the self-giving of God, and this should fill us with unspeakable thanksgiving to our Lord.

So we have seen what we mean by the enrichment of giving. It is hard to understand how any sensitive and reasonable Christian can hold back from all that God demands and deserves in the light of such teaching. Who among us does not long to live a life of fruitfulness, joyfulness, usefulness and thankfulness? But Paul maintains this cannot happen and will not happen until we know how to give, not only of ourselves and our service, but also of our substance.

Indeed, the more we have studied this subject, the more it has become apparent that the true measure of yieldedness to the Lordship of Christ is the measure of our discipline and devotion in Christian stewardship. We can talk until doomsday about being surrendered Christians, but we virtually lie until we give evidence of our surrender through our stewardship.

The Enrichment Of Giving By Stephen F. Olford

And make no mistake about it, when we stand before the judgment seat of Christ to render an account of our stewardship, we will wish that we had given more, since it is inescapably true that “what we spend, we lose; what we keep will be left to others; what we give away will remain forever ours.”