

## ~Other Speakers S-Z: David Servant:

According to Paul, the Corinthian believers had previously promised a "bountiful gift" (9:5), which would, of course, be made possible only by bountiful giving. Thus Paul cautioned against covetousness (or better translated "greed") that might affect the Corinthians' giving. Clearly, covetousness and greed are not just attitudes of the heart as so many claim. Rather, they are attitudes that are always revealed by actions. If the Corinthians yielded to greed, they would give less. Their selfish attitude would affect their actions.

Paul continued with a warning to those who might yield to greed and a promise to those who would be generous: "Now this I say, he who sows sparingly shall also reap sparingly; and he who sows bountifully shall also reap bountifully" (9:6).

Paul was not revealing "divine secrets for prosperity," encouraging his readers to "sow a big financial seed and reap abundant riches" so that they could then enjoy a lavish lifestyle, as some prosperity preachers want us to believe. If he was, then he was promoting the very thing he was warning against in 9:5, that is, greed. If people give just so they can grow rich and have many possessions, that is nothing more than selfishness disguised as love.

Thus, the reason one should want to "sow bountifully" and thus "reap bountifully" is so one can "sow even more bountifully," blessing more people. This truth Paul plainly repeats three times in 9:8-11. You may want to read those verses again to see for yourself.

Once a sower reaps, he then must decide what to do with his harvest. If he still has more than he needs, and there are still others with pressing needs, then there is no doubt what he should do. His former self-denial certainly wouldn't give him the right to be greedy then. The whole reason to reap is not so one may lay up earthly treasures in disobedience to Christ, but so that one may sow some more and lay up more treasures in heaven.

What constitutes sowing that is "sparing" or "bountiful?" That, of course, is different for each person. The widow who put her two copper coins into the treasury gave more than all the rich people who put in large gifts, according to Jesus (Mark 12:41-44). She "sowed bountifully" while they "sowed sparingly," even though their gifts were much larger. What impresses God is self-denial. Bountiful and sparing sowing are determined by what one keeps.

Finally, Paul also instructed each of the Corinthians to "do just as he has purposed in his heart; not grudgingly or under compulsion; for God loves a cheerful giver" (9:7). This verse has often been twisted to relieve the consciences of selfish people. They are told, "God wants only what you can give cheerfully, so let that be your gauge. Only give what you can give without grudging." Consequently, greedy people give little or nothing, demonstrating no self-denial or love, and think God approves since He doesn't want what they can't give cheerfully.

Paul, however, was not trying to make greedy people think that God is comfortable with their greed, as the context so clearly reveals. He was trying to help each person consider what is in his heart. If one is giving under compulsion or grudgingly, he is not giving because he loves needy brethren.

By the same token, the reason God "loves a cheerful giver" is because a cheerful giver is motivated by love for God and neighbor. He finds joy in sacrificing on behalf of those with pressing needs because he loves them. The one who gives grudgingly or under compulsion, however, reveals a greedy heart, and thus gives hypocritically, because he is doing what his heart would prefer not to do. Thus, it would be better for him not to give at all. But let him not think that God approves of him in either case. God wants him to repent of his selfishness, be transformed by His grace, and become a cheerful giver who denies himself with joy. God, and only God, can turn greedy people into cheerful givers. They then become imitators of Him, who gave sacrificially from a heart of grace and love (9:15). Praise God!