

A Generous God Creates Generous People

- I. Why Christians Give
- II. How Christians Give

*2 Corinthians 9:6-11*

*6Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. 7Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. 8And 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. 9As it is written:*

*“They have freely scattered their gifts to the poor;  
their righteousness endures forever.”*

*10Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. 11You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.*

It's a question that every Christian asks himself or herself dozens of times each day, often without even realizing it. The question is, “What does God want me to do?” Isn't that right? I mean, from the minute the alarm goes off, I have to decide, “Am I going to get up or am I going to lay in bed a little longer? Am I going to go to work, or am I going to call in sick, am I going to greet my spouse with a smile or am I going to just kind of grunt and head to the bathroom?” And for every one of those decisions, there is a little voice in my head saying, this is what you should do. That voice is of course, my conscience, which bears witness to God's law written in my heart. But because my sinful nature sometimes blurs that law written in my heart, and because our conscience can be dulled or distorted by sin, God has chosen to put his moral law in writing, first on two tone tablets, and then in the pages of Scripture. That law is summarized by the ten commandments and perfectly embodied in the person of Jesus Christ.

So now, if we want to know what God wants us to do, we need only look to his Word, or more specifically, look to Jesus. He is the guide for our lives as Christians. How did he treat other people? How did he manage his time? What did he value in life? When we are faced with all these everyday choices in life, it's entirely appropriate to ask, WWJD, that is, What Would Jesus Do?

But you see, just knowing what Jesus would do doesn't give us the ability or even the desire to actually do it. No, to be able to do what Jesus would do, we need to focus not on WWJD, but rather, but rather WHJD, namely, What Has Jesus Done. It's the sacrifice that Jesus made for us, and the love that God has for us in Christ, which in turn empowers us to live our lives for him. What does Scripture say? “*Christ's love compels us.*” (2 Cor 5:14). Or, to put it another way, the more we know about what in God's heart, the more it impacts our lives. The more we understand the love that a gracious God has for sinners like us, the more we appreciate the values that God holds dear, well then, the better equipped we are to reflect those values in our lives. In fact, that's the thought behind our sermon series this month. Today we begin a series we're calling, “From God's Heart to Our Lives.” Over the next 4 weeks, we're going to look at

four things that are true about our God, four qualities which God possesses, four core values that God holds dear—all of which God works in the hearts of believers by the power of the gospel. And those four qualities are: Faithfulness, Selfless Service, Love for the Lost, and today's godly quality: Generosity. You might say that these are God's values for God's people. Our theme for today is simply this: A Generous God Creates Generous People

Our text for today is a portion of a letter that St. Paul is writing to the Christians in Corinth about an offering that was being taken to support the people in Jerusalem who were suffering from a severe famine. And this gives Paul a chance to teach his readers, both then and now, two things about Christian giving:

I. Why Christians give.

II. How Christians give.

Now, if I were to ask you, why do you think Christians give? What would you say? Maybe you would say Christians give because they see a need. There is a cause they want to support. And certainly, that's true. When the people in Paul's day saw that their fellow believers were suffering economically, they took up an offering to address that need. We might do the same thing today, whether it's the need to find a cure for cancer, or the need to feed the hungry in our community, or the need to take the gospel to unreached people groups or the need to provide adequate facilities for the Christian education of our children. In each case, we're giving to a need. But really that's not why we're giving. Needs help us determine what to give to. But needs are not what motivate Christian giving. Think of the gifts that God's people gave in the Old Testament. God had them throw their bushel of grain or their prize steer into a burning fire. What need did that meet? The need to create a lot of smelly smoke? No, what motivated their gifts was not what they were giving to, but rather Who they were giving to (namely, the true God), but also, what they were giving from. All their offerings were given from what God had already given them.

Isn't the same thing true for you and me today? Why do Christians give? Because God has so generously given to us first. How did Saint Paul say it here in our text? *Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. (2 Cor. 9:10)* Here Paul is making a promise about what God will do in the future based on what God has already done in the past. God has superabundantly provided for all our needs. When you realize that the median income per person across the globe is about \$8 a day. When you think about all the luxuries that we often take for granted here in the United States—all the electronics, all the forms of recreation that people around the world can only dream about, you realize how incredibly rich we are—and how truly generous God has been to us.

And if someone says, “Wait a minute. God didn't just give me everything I have. I've been busting my hump my whole life to get these things,” God might respond, “Wait a minute. Who gave you your hump to bust? And who gave you your life during which to bust it? And who put you in a country where busting your hump actually can earn you a living? Who did all those things for you, even if you never acknowledged it, never believed it, and never thanked God for it? God did. God did it because he's not only a generous God. He's also a gracious God.

In fact, when I think about how often I've not been appropriately grateful for the gifts I've been given, I'm reminded of the little boy in the checkout lane begging his mom to buy him some candy. Finally, mom gives in and buys him a bag of M&M's. And Johnny is so happy. But when they get to the car, and Johnny's got chocolate all over his face, his Mom says, “Johnny, can I have a couple of your M&M's?,” Johnny says, “No! They're mine! You can't have any.”

Wait a minute. Johnny wouldn't have any candy if his mom hadn't given it to him. And now he can't spare even two of them? What a brat!

Tell me, is there a little Johnny in you and me? Everything we have is a gift from God. And yet when God asks if he can have a little bit of his gifts back, say 2 of our 20 M&M's (what is that 10%?), we say, "No, God, too much. You can't have it."

And yet, here's the thing. Even when we act like little Johnny, even if it's just in our hearts, what does God do? He takes all of our ingratitude, all of our selfishness, and he lays it all on Jesus. And then sends Jesus to the cross to pay for it all. And in so doing, he washes us clean. He's like a parent who washes that chocolate mess off our face, and tells us that he loves us, and promises that even though we don't deserve it, he's going to give us some more M&M's. Why? Because our God is both a generous and gracious God.

My friends, that's why Christians give. We give in response to the grace and generosity that God showed to us first. From there, here in our text, Paul goes on to talk about not only I. Why Christians Give. But also, II. How Christians Give.

Now don't misunderstand. Paul is not talking about the methods Christians use to give, whether it's by walking the casserole over to your sick friend across the street or by putting a check in the offering plate or by charging that charitable donation on your credit card. Nor is Paul talking about the various guidelines that God gives for giving like he does in 1 Corinthians 16 when he writes, *On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside some of money in keeping with your income, saving it up.* With those words, Paul is saying that God wants our giving to be something we do regularly. And he wants our giving to be "in keeping with our income." In other words, God wants it to be proportionate, a percentage of our income or net worth.

No, what Paul is talking about here is not what's coming out of our hands; he's talking about what's in our hearts. He's talking about the attitude with which we give. How does Paul put it in verse 7? He writes, *Each one of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves the cheerful giver.* Isn't that interesting? Notice that God doesn't say that he loves the one who gives big gifts. Nor does he say he abhors the one who gives little gifts. No, he says he loves the cheerful giver. Hmm. It's like God is way more concerned about the heart of the giver than he is the size of the gift.

So, does that mean that a person could be guilty of giving a good gift from a bad heart? Absolutely. Paul says it happens when we give "reluctantly." In other words when you say, "Man, I love to have that offering back. I could have bought a new fishing rod with that, or made a car payment or another installment on my kid's braces." Or maybe we give, as Paul puts it, "under compulsion." You know, we give because our spouse or our parents say we have to. "Okay, I will." That's not exactly being a cheerful giver, is it?

But notice what Paul says about how a cheerful giver does give. He writes, *Each one of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give.* That's an interesting phrase, isn't it? "What you have decided in your heart." Wait a minute. Aren't decisions made in our brain? Yes, typically they are—except when it comes to decisions about giving generously. Generosity is not a function of the brain, it's a function of the heart. Granted, we may need our brain to figure out what we're going to cut out of our budget in order to be more generous. And we may even need a calculator to figure out what percentage of our income our gifts will represent. But in the end, truly generous giving is not a logical decision. Rather, it's an expression of our faith in God. Faith that God will provide for our needs. Faith that trusts that even if we give God's gifts away, he'll still give us more gifts down the line. How did Paul put it? *Remember this: Whoever sows*

*sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously.* Or to put it another way, Christians can never outgive the Giver.

In fact, you know what that reminds me of? It reminds me of when you go to your grandmother's house and after the big meal, it's time for dessert. And so, Grandma asks you to help her pass out the pieces of pie. And you're looking at each piece and you're thinking, "Oh man, that looks good." But you have to give it away. Ope, there's another one. "I have to give that one away too?" Pass it down the line. "Oh man, is it going to be enough for me?" And you get to that last piece, and there's still a person who doesn't have a piece. So you kind of reluctantly hand it over, hoping against all hope that somehow, someway, it'll all still work out. And that's when your grandma says, "Robby, do you think I forgot you? I've got a whole 'nother pie, fresh from the oven, it's just for you and anybody else you want to share it with."

My friends, that's the kind of God we have. A God who just keeps on giving. A God who we can trust will meet all of our needs. A God who has poured out on us richly and daily so many blessings, both physical, like food and clothing, salaries and retirement plans. But also spiritual like his love, his forgiveness, life as a child of God and eternity in heaven. And why has he been so generous? So that we can be generous to others. And so that our generosity can lead other people to give thanks to God. Isn't that what Paul says here in our text? *You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us, your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.* My friends, that's how God makes generous people. God has been generous to us so that we can be generous to others, which will result in praise and thanksgiving to God. Or to put it another way, the generosity that's in God's heart, is ultimately displayed in the lives of God's people. To God be the glory. Amen.