

Week 3 - Cultivate Generosity - 2Corinthians 9:10-15

Scripture Reading: 1Chronicles 29:14-18

Introduction

This morning, we come to our third sermon in our series on Thanksgiving Living

Over the past two weeks we have seen how our thankfulness is tied to both gratitude and joy

We saw how gratitude is the heart attitude from which thanksgiving springs

And, since we know that our thanksgiving is often governed by our feelings, we looked last week at how acknowledging who God is results in joy despite even the harshest of circumstances

This week we are going to take a look at how generosity impacts our thankfulness

And by that I don't mean how generously we receive

After all, it's easy to be thankful when receiving and it's especially easy when receiving abundantly

What I am talking about is how being unselfish and open-handed in giving away what we have results in increased thankfulness and thanksgiving

Just as with gratitude and joy, generosity is an attitude - and, just like with the other two, it's an attitude that results in an action

And, just as it is with gratitude and joy, we can cultivate and grow our generosity - both as an attitude and an action

Also, just like with the other two, the Bible has a good deal to say about generosity and being generous and we will look at several passages from both the Old and New Testaments this morning

But the apostle Paul gives perhaps the best treatise on generosity in chapters 8 and 9 of his second letter to the church in Corinth

And, while I've chosen 2Corinthians 9:10-15 for our focus text this morning, we will be referring back to some of what Paul has to say in chapter 8 as well

So follow along as I read through our focus passage of **2Corinthians 9:10-15** in its entirety

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. You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God. By their approval of this service, they will glorify God because of your submission that comes from your confession of the gospel of Christ, and the generosity of your contribution for them and for all others, while they long for you and pray for you, because of the surpassing grace of God upon you. Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!

But as we are going to see first, biblical generosity is a paradox

I. The paradox of biblical generosity

The very definition of being generous means to give something away

After all, the dictionary definition of generosity is to be open handed and to give freely - it's the opposite of being miserly or stingy

And we have been taught from our earliest days that giving means not having

Think back to your elementary school days when you were given a story problem along the lines of:

Dave had ten apples. Dave gave four apples to Sally and four apples to Sam. How many apples does Dave have left?

We could say that Dave was generous in giving away 80% of his apples but the reality is that Dave started with ten apples and now is left with only two apples so his generosity cost him dearly

And that's typically the way we look at generosity

After all, you can only spend a dollar one time and then it's gone

So when we have an opportunity to give it's only natural for us to consider what else we might do with the money

So, in a sense, our wants and needs are in competition with our generosity and we do a cost/benefit analysis between serving ourselves and serving others with our money

But Paul takes a different approach to giving in our passage as he uses the imagery of a farmer

And Paul says that the farmer isn't giving away - he's planting

What he sows isn't a charitable donation; it's an investment that will reap a harvest

I should probably back up a bit here and explain the context of our passage

The church in Jerusalem had fallen on hard times and Paul was collecting a benevolence offering for the believers there

The church in Corinth, which Paul had originally founded, heard about the need and Paul's efforts to provide relief and asked what part they might have in it

Paul had instructed the Corinthians in his first letter [**1Corinthians 16:1-2**] saying:

Now concerning the collection for the saints: as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do. On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come.

However, at the time of his writing the second letter, those good intentions had not yet been translated into action so Paul asked Titus to look into the matter - we read about that in **2Corinthians 8:6**

We don't know why the church in Corinth faltered in their good intentions because Paul doesn't say

Perhaps they got to thinking about the fact that money given is money gone

Whatever the reason for their hesitation, Paul wrote to encourage them to give generously in chapters 8-9

And Paul tells them that they aren't spending money they are investing in the kingdom

Without a doubt, their dollars would be going to the saints in Jerusalem for their benefit but Paul says the believers in Corinth will also benefit by their gift

First he shows that the benefit they receive will be proportional to their generosity

Look with me at verse 6 [**2Corinthians 9:6**] where he writes:

Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully

And how can this be true?

Because, just as God has given to them what they now have, he has also promised to "increase the harvest of their righteousness" [**2Corinthians 9:10**] as they give

And he assures them of God's ability to do just that in verse 8 [**2Cor 9:8**] saying:

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

So what Paul is saying is that giving generously as God would have you do will not impoverish you

Paradoxically, you will have your needs met and have enough to give even more

Not only that but you will see the kingdom benefit from your generosity as your righteous generosity results in a further harvest of righteousness

I want you to notice one more thing you will gain that we find in verse 14 [**2Cor 9:14**]

Those to whom you are generous will pray for you and thank God for you

From a human perspective, the one who gives should be the one who loses but that isn't the way it is in God's economy where the one who gives is blessed and the one who gives generously is blessed abundantly [**Luke 6:38**]

However, while this is certainly true, it has led many Christ-followers into error because they missed a crucial element to what Paul reveals here

I once knew a woman who had this happen to her

She heard or read this truth and became a very generous giver

Actually, she became overly generous in her giving to the point that she was giving more than she and her family could afford to give

And she ran them into debt through her liberal giving

I hesitate to call her giving "generous" because she wasn't actually giving as she did out of a sense of generosity

She was attempting to buy God's blessing

Eventually, what she had done came to light and I will always remember her tearfully looking at me and exclaiming, "It didn't work"

And when I asked what didn't work, she went on to explain how she thought giving as she did meant that God would enrich her

She's not alone - many people have fallen into the same fallacy and believed that the Bible reveals a nifty get rich quick scheme here and charlatan ministers have gotten rich selling that very idea

Look with me again at verse 10 [**2Cor 9:10**] and pay particular attention to the two things God supplies - "*seed to the sower and bread for food*"

What Paul reveals here is quite important to our understanding of this passage

"Bread" is an analog for our basic needs so Paul is indicating that the generous Christ-follower will be given what he or she needs to live - they will not be impoverished by practicing biblical generosity but will have what they need

And, they will have even more than they need - not to enrich themselves but to allow them more to invest in God's kingdom

Nowhere in this passage do we find the idea that we should look to generosity for our own enrichment

In fact, if you read what Paul says in 1Timothy 6 you will see how he viewed material wealth

He says in verse 6 [**1Tim 6:6**] "*Godliness with contentment is great gain*" and then in verse 8 [**1Tim 6:8**] "*If we have food and clothing, with these we will be content*"

And in Philippians 4 Paul writes about being content in all situations and how he had learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need

Far from teaching a pathway to material riches, Paul says clearly in verse 8 [**2Cor 9:8**] that God is able to give you that which is sufficient to your needs and also enough so that you may abound in good works

Those who give in the hope of being enriched aren't being generous and their goal isn't primarily to invest in the kingdom

They are being mercenary expecting to line their pockets

Motivation matters - so let's look next at what should motivate us to be generous

II. Proper motivation for generosity

First, we should be motivated to be generous because we know that God is generous - God is a giver and he gives abundantly

We've looked at **James 1:17** a number of times during this sermon series because it's there that we see that God gives us every good and perfect gift

And Paul expresses a similar truth in **Philippians 4:19** when he says it's God who supplies our every need according to his riches

Or consider **Ephesians 1:3** where we read that God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing

We've looked at other passages this morning that would fit here as well and there are many others we could look at

But let's look at the ultimate example - **John 3:16** - which tells us how God gave us his Son so that we might have our sins forgiven and be reconciled to God

Another reason for generosity is that God wants us to be generous and we should want to please him

Hebrews 13:16 says - *Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God*

Paul gives three other reasons for why we should be generous in 2Corinthians 8

In verse 8 [**2Cor 8:8**] he says that generosity is a test of a person's love

Jesus did much the same thing when talking about love and money when he said that our heart would be where our treasure was

But notice that Paul also does something that seems to be a bit strange - he compares the giving of the church at Corinth with the giving of the church in Macedonia

What we need to understand is that the people of Macedonia were relatively poor when compared to the Corinthians and Paul's reason for mentioning their earnestness in generosity was to show that generosity isn't an amount

Jesus made that abundantly clear in Luke 21:1-4 where we read the account of the poor widow who gave just two small copper coins and yet was more generous than those who gave much more

Generosity is an attitude and he was encouraging the Corinthians not to outdo the Macedonians by giving more but to match them in their earnestness to give freely

Then Paul encouraged them to be generous as a means of finishing what they set out to do

Look with me at verses 10-11 [**2Cor 8:10-11**]

And in this matter I give my judgment: this benefits you, who a year ago started not only to do this work but also to desire to do it. So now finish doing it as well, so that your readiness in desiring it may be matched by your completing it out of what you have.

It's not the intention that counts when it comes to generosity but the doing and Paul is saying that it would be good for the church to finish what they had started

The third and final reason Paul gives by way of motivation is that of fairness

Fairness is a touchy subject today because the meaning of the word has been perverted and the calls for fairness have been abused

Let's look at verses 13-15 so we see the entirety of Paul's thought here [**2Cor 8:13-15**]

For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened, but that as a matter of fairness your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need, that there may be fairness. As it is written, "Whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack."

The Christ-followers at Corinth weren't being generous so that the Christians in Jerusalem would be enriched but to help them survive - these were special times that called for special measures

God did not intend for the church at Corinth to be burdened or impoverished so that the church in Jerusalem could just sit back and take it easy

Paul was not espousing socialist thought here by encouraging fairness

What he is saying is, just as the Jerusalem believers had blessed the Corinthian believers out of their spiritual abundance, it was only right that they should now bless the Jerusalem believers by sharing their material abundance

This was not pure egalitarianism that says that everyone should have exactly the same and the Jerusalem believers weren't let off the hook and were still expected to work to provide for themselves

Paul makes this clear by his illustration pulled from **Exodus 16:18** and the account of the manna that God provided on a daily basis

Everyone gathered what they could in varying amounts and everyone had exactly what they needed for each day - possibly because they pooled what they gathered - but everyone went out and gathered

Paul also makes the necessity of working to provide for oneself clear in **2Thessalonians 3:10-12** where he says:

*For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: **If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat.** For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies. **Now such persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living.***

Still, Scripture commands us to care for the poor and needy among us so we cannot be indifferent to those in need

1John 3:17-18 says:

If anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not live in word or talk but in deed and in truth.

We should be motivated to be generous because of who God is and because we want to please him in all that we do so as to bring him glory

But there are dangers surrounding generosity that we also need to be aware of

III. Generosity's pitfalls

We err if we think that being generous somehow makes us more worthy of salvation

We obey because we have been saved and we give generously because we recognize how much we have been given

But salvation is by grace alone and we don't ingratiate ourselves to God by being generous

That's one reason I shy away from accepting donations from unbelievers - I don't want them to get the idea that by supporting the ministry of Brick Church that they have bought themselves peace with God

We should not give to try to gain God's favor

We also err if we practice generosity for our own gain

We have seen that God wants to bless us for our generosity

But just like with the servants whose faithfulness in little earned them stewardship over much, God blesses us in order to give us greater responsibility

The blessings we receive by blessing others is so we can be even more of a blessing to still more people

God multiplies the seed of the sower for sowing - not for possessing

And [**2Cor 9:11**] being generous means:

*You will be enriched in every way **to be generous in every way**, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God.*

Another error we fall into is being generous to impress others

All giving is to be done in secret before God and not to please men

Frankly, only you and God know whether or not you have been generous anyway

All anyone else can know is whether your giving is more or less than they have given but the amount of the gift tells one nothing about the generosity of the giver

Again, I point you to the account of the widow and her coins and how Jesus said her small gift was more generous than the larger gifts of the wealthy

When we looked at the passage from 1John a few minutes ago we see John address those who have the world's goods and Paul does likewise in **2Corinthians 8:12** which says:

For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have.

Being generous is according to one's means and everyone has some means so everyone can be generous

Another pitfall is giving out of compulsion

Everyone should be generous but no one should be generous because feel like they have been pushed into it

[2Cor 9:7] *Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.*

Remember, generosity is first and foremost an attitude of the heart that culminates in the action of giving

And giving while grumbling can never be generous even if one were to give all that they have

Conclusion

In his gospel account, Mark tells of a rich young ruler who came to Jesus asking about how he could inherit eternal life. And, looking into his heart, Jesus saw that he was overly attached to his possessions so he told the young man to sell all he had and give the proceeds to the poor and to then come and follow him.

And Mark records in **Mark 10:22** that the young man was disheartened and he went away sorrowful because he had great possessions.

We do get attached to our stuff and we can become quite possessive of what we have and that destroys our generosity. And we do that in part because we begin to believe that we deserve what we have and we forget that everything we have is from God according to his grace.

And we can begin to doubt the supply and to think that we had better hold onto what we have.

The ancient Greek storyteller, Aesop, tells of a miser who had a cache of gold buried in a hole in his yard that he went to look at daily.

Well, it happened that one of his workmen noticed his frequent visits to that spot and soon discovered the treasure which he promptly stole.

When the miser discovered the empty hole on his next visit, he began to tear at his hair and wail.

And a neighbor, upon seeing him in such distress and learning the cause, encouraged him to not be so troubled and told him to find a large stone and place it in the hole and to pretend that it was the gold saying: "It will do you just as much good as the gold ever did seeing as you made not the slightest use of it."

The truth is: misers tend to be miserable but God has shown us how we can find joy in generosity.

And truly thankful people are generous people who share what they have received with cheerfulness.

Let's pray

1Chronicles 29:14-18 (page 357)

But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able thus to offer willingly? For all things come from you, and of your own have we given you. For we are strangers before you and sojourners, as all our fathers were. Our days on the earth are like a shadow, and there is no abiding. O LORD our God, all this abundance that we have provided for building you a house for your holy name comes from your hand and is all your own. I know, my God, that you test the heart and have pleasure in uprightness. In the uprightness of my heart I have freely offered all these things, and now I have seen your people, who are present here, offering freely and joyously to you. O LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, our fathers, keep forever such purposes and thoughts in the hearts of your people, and direct their hearts toward you.