

## 2 Corinthians 9:1-15

“The Ultimate Incentive”

This morning we find ourselves right in the middle of what I would consider to be probably the most informative area of scripture that sheds light on what the outlook on giving for the NT believer is to be; regarding both *what* we're to give and *how* we're to give it. 2 Cor Ch's 8 and 9 are some of the most powerful portions of scripture with respect to this topic in the entire bible. and As I mentioned to you last week it's a little bit awkward for me to stand here and teach through portions of scripture like this (especially with regard to perhaps those who may be visiting us for the 1<sup>st</sup> time, and you don't really know what we're about, well we're about the word of God Vs by Vs, Ch by Ch, book by book). and When it comes to God's word we don't want to be guilty of shying away from any part of it because of a minority of people who have twisted it for their own gain, making merchandise of the people of God. That's between them and the Lord and they'll answer to Him for that. But as for you and me, we *want/need* the whole counsel of the Word of God. and As a pastor part of my commission is to not stand guilty of *not* giving you the whole counsel, therefore when we come across a portion of scripture that's perhaps a bit difficult for us to palate, we take it in just like any other portion of scripture understanding that its God breathed. and If God saw fit to include it in the counsel of His word then we can rest assured that it's something we need instructed in.

and Last week we discovered that even as the Love of God gives, and the grace of God gives (having sighted several scriptures of which you can grab the Cd for reference) we came to the conclusion that if the love and grace of God is at work in me, a portion of the evidence of that will be that *I will be one who gives as well*. That's just one aspect of the fingerprints of God upon my life. and Of course there's the giving of sacrifice, the giving of service, but there's a very real aspect of the giving of our resources that we can't escape that we find as a legitimate aspect of our worship of the Lord in the giving of ourselves *to* the Lord. We'd like to think that we can love apart from giving but the Word of God takes a definite issue with that. If you or I love something, perhaps a hobby, or a personal interest, we have no problem paying for it, we're happy to pay for something we love to do, or be apart of. Well, if we love the Lord, if we love being apart of the things of God, that will be reflected in part by our giving. Remember back in Vs 8 of Ch 8? The Holy Spirit there through the apostle Paul sharing with us that a test of the sincerity of our love is found in whether or not we give in those areas that pertain to the kingdom. To help the body of Christ, to expand the kingdom through outreach and things of that nature; remember this Vs, “*My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.*” 1 John 3:18 God's love isn't expressed in “intentions” but rather in “actions.” Our faith is made manifest not by what we say but by what we do. James said, “*Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.*” James 2:18 I've decided that James must've been a Missourian at heart, he was a “Show Me” kinda guy when it came to a life set apart to Jesus Christ He didn't want to hear about it, he wanted to see it in action. (I like that).

But you recall that Paul had it on his heart to remember the poor in Jerusalem, and so throughout his 3<sup>rd</sup> missionary journey he extended the opportunity to the Gentile churches to give to the church in Jerusalem so that the needs of the saints might be met.

Not only that but that it might be effective in bringing down the barrier between Jew and Gentile that the Jews might be willing to accept the Gentiles more openly as brothers and sisters in Christ. The church in Corinth was excited about the opportunity and a yr earlier had committed to kick down as unto the Lord. and Now Paul is exhorting them that they've committed to it, now it's time to complete it.

and There's a principle there that we could take the time to develop (though we won't) but suffice it to say that it's entirely scriptural for me to be a person of my word. I don't have to give my word, but once I do I need to follow through. Even as God keeps His Word we're to keep ours to the absolute best of our ability. Sometimes sickness or unforeseen circumstance prevents us in certain situations, but we're not to be looking for excuses to get out of keeping our commitments, if we commit to it we need to complete it. The Corinthians had committed, Paul is saying now it's time to complete it.

### Vs1-2

Now in keeping with the context the, "ministering to the saints" that he's in reference to is this financial gift that he's going to administer in Jerusalem on their behalf. and He says, "I know that it's superfluous (that is unnecessary, sort of over the top) for me to even bring this up because I know your willingness, I've been bragging about you to the Macedonians." Now, I'm not certain if Paul is being sarcastic here, or sincere. Because it's true that they were at least one time (a yr ago) willing and excited about the opportunity, and it's true that Paul was glorifying God for that before the Macedonians with respect to the grace God had poured out on the Corinthians in that way. However it's been a yr since they've committed and Paul still hasn't seen anything, so initially they were willing, however there's been some rough waters between them since that time and perhaps they've recoiled in that a bit. Because if it takes you over a yr to follow through on something you committed to, I'm not sure you're really that willing. But there's been restoration between Paul and the Corinthians and so now he's picking back up on this point. and He says, "I've been telling the Macedonians (those up north from Corinth; Philippi, Berea, Thessalonica) that you in Achaia (down south, Corinth) have been ready to and go and stirred up about this all yr, and I want you to know that your zeal has caught on, it's fired these guys up."

and That's the primary point that I want to draw your attention to in these 1<sup>st</sup> couple of Vs. "Your zeal has stirred up the majority." Being on fire for Jesus Christ is contagious, your setting a standard of good works as unto Jesus Christ will encourage and inspire others to do the same. Don't wait for someone else to set the bar, you set the bar (with all your heart). I want to be able to look at your life and be inspired to serve like you serve, to be a person of prayer like you are, the way you work, or witness, or give of yourself. and I'm not talking about fleshly imitation, but spiritual emulation, imitating you as you imitate Christ. You see as believers its not about *competition*, but it is about *consideration*. We read in Heb 10:24, "And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works," There should be something about my life that stirs you to a greater ambition for godliness in your life. We're to consider one another that we might stir up in one another love and good works. Paul told Titus, "This is a faithful saying, and these things I want you to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable to men." Titus 3:8

You see he was to constantly encourage the believers that they should *be careful* to maintain good works. and One way that I'm encouraged unto good works is to see them in your life, when I see your zeal, your ambition for the things of God, man I want in on some of that. That's what was happening here, Paul was bragging on the zeal of the Corinthians and it was contagious to the surrounding regions, they wanted in on that.

Now, having said that let me tell you that the opposite is true as well. Not only is zeal contagious, so is apathy, spiritual lethargy. If everyone I hang around with is a spiritual couch potato, there won't be much motivation for me to get out there and get busy as unto Jesus Christ. If the people you place around you don't stir you, or provoke you unto love and good works, then place other people around you and cut the spiritual couch potatoes loose.

Tell them you can't sit around and sulk in the mire Christ has set you free and you are not your own therefore you're going to glorify God in your body and in your spirit which are His. and Who knows, perhaps your zeal will stir them to action, it's contagious.

#### Vs3-4

Paul told them just a few Vs back there in Vs 19 of Ch 8 that he desired them to be ready when they came, that the gift would show their ready mind. and So he's saying here that he's letting them know in advance of the brothers coming so that should there be some Macedonians among them that they wouldn't be embarrassed about not having anything prepared since he's been bragging on them this whole time.

#### Vs5

Now we're starting to get into the core of the context. When it comes to giving to the work of the Lord, or a particular ministry, or whatever; it needs to be done as a matter of generosity and not as a *grudging obligation*. You see Paul wanted all the money matters taken care of before he ever rolled into town. That way when he got there, there wouldn't be a collection taken up. **He didn't want it to appear that he was in anyway manipulating them, or giving a sad story to them so that they might reach deep into their pocket book. So that they felt somehow obligated to give (you know they didn't really want to but they felt somehow obligated in Paul's presence or something). Paul didn't want that, why? Because God doesn't want that; and we'll get into it a bit more in just a minute but God doesn't want you to give to Him out of grudging obligation, He'd rather you just keep it.** Think about it, have you ever had someone give you something that they were acting like it was just going to kill them to let go of it? and You say, "Hey man, just keep it. If this is the way you feel about it, I don't want it!" Well, God's the same way; He doesn't want our giving to Him to be a drag, a burden, but rather a blessing, not an obligation, but an opportunity.

**and Getting back to the idea of grace at work in our lives, how often has God given "grudgingly" to you? Never, He gives willingly, generously to you and me, not with a regretful hesitancy, but rather He gives openly, joyously, out of gracious generosity. and That's to be our heart in giving as well.** and When I speak of giving "generously" I'm not referencing a particular *amount*, but rather a particular *attitude*. Generous giving has way more to do with the attitude of our giving than it does the *amount* of our giving.

## Vs6

Ok, this is one of those Vs that contains within it a wonderful truth, yet has been twisted by many to manipulate the believer to give beyond their means and make merchandise of them. But put quite simply this is a spiritual law that God has enacted, or ordained that though I don't know *how* it works God has set it into motion so that it does. and There are all sorts of laws in place that though I know they work, there's proof that they work, I don't know *how* they work. The law of gravity, if you jump off a building you're guaranteed to hit the ground, it's a law, gravity will make it so. How? I don't know, but it will. Why when I hold something with a negative charge, and a positive charge beside each other they attract one another, I don't know. There's a magnetic law there, 2 positives or negatives repel one another, but a positive and a negative will attract one another. and There are certain things we know about *how* it works, but *why* it works is a mystery. and Even as there are certain physical laws in place, there are also various spiritual laws in place, this is one of them; the law of sowing and reaping. and Paul has given us an illustration here to get a bit of a grip as to *how* it works, but as for why it works I don't know.

But investing financially into the ministry is like the farmer who scatters seed in his field. Let's say he says to himself, "I don't know, I kinda want to hang on to all the seed I have to make flower, or bread or whatever so I'm not going to sow much and just hope for the best." We'd say he was a dummy right? Because you can't sow a little seed and expect to reap a giant harvest, if you want a good harvest you've got to sow see liberally, then what you've sown will return to you abundantly. Maybe he felt wasteful casting it out, didn't see an immediate return so he wasn't sure if it was really profitable. Yet in time he would see that by sowing bountifully, or generously, it was in reality the wisest move he could make because it would pay off so enormously. This principle is found in the OT like this, "*There is one who scatters, yet increases more; And there is one who withholds more than is right, But it leads to poverty. The generous soul will be made rich, And he who waters will also be watered himself.*" Prov 11:24-25 But there's a bit of a catch in that once again our motives come in to play. If you give *because it pays*, it won't pay. What I mean by that is that God isn't offering a "get rich quick" scheme. What He's saying is that if you'll trust Him, invest into the eternal matters of His kingdom, He'll bless your life in a radical way.

How? How with what do we reap once we've sown? The bible teaches both material and spiritual benefits. Remember when Jesus said, "...do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you." Matt 6:31-33 You place your priority on the kingdom of God, and God promises that He'll meet the needs that you have physically. Occasionally we'll hear Phil 4:19 quoted, "My God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus." But not too many people know the context that surrounds that Vs. The context is that of the Philippians giving to support Paul's ministry, and Paul is saying that as you give to the work of God, God will give back to you according to His riches in glory. and We say this from time to time but the idea is that you can't out give God.

He refuses to be in debt to the likes of me. Jesus put it like this, “Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you.” Luke 6:38 Or as the Holy Spirit puts it here, “Sow sparingly, reap sparingly, sow bountifully, reap bountifully.”

and Remember as we discovered last week it’s not the portion that determines whether or not we’re sowing bountifully, it’s the *proportion*. It’s not as I give out of my abundance, but out of my very substance. So that giving 25,000, though it’s a large *portion*, if I make \$250,000 it’s not that big of a deal to me, however if I make \$10,000 and give \$1000 to the Lord, it meant a lot for me to do that. Remember the widow’s mite? She didn’t give near as much with regard to the portion, but proportionately she out gave them all, and the Lord noted that. Because it wasn’t *what* they gave, it was *how* they gave it that He paid attention to, the motive of their heart in giving, did it come *from the heart*, or was more of a ritualistic/legalistic maneuver that made them look good in the eyes of men?

Vs7

So we have who, how, and why right here as it pertains to our giving unto the Lord. #1 Who; as believers who is it who is to participate in giving to the Lord? “Each one.” “Let each one give.” There is no Christian who is exempt from giving, we may not all be able to give the same, but we should all give nonetheless because who among us hasn’t received freely from the Lord? So each one is to give, *how* is each one to give? “...as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity.” My giving, your giving has to do with the *purpose* of your own heart, not the purpose of someone else’s heart, your giving shouldn’t be coerced or manipulated.

In other words I should give because I *want* to give, not because I feel guilty to give but because God has laid it upon my heart to give. Now we mentioned the tithe last week, the 10%. and I told you that if one can I think that’s a great place to start. Some say that the tithe is simply a matter of law. I disagree, it was seen in the life of Ab *before* the law, God instituted it *in* the law, and Jesus mentions it favorably if it’s done with a right heart. So I personally am presently persuaded that it’s something that is simply in the heart of God, not a law thing, but a God thing. But I also realize that we’re not bound legalistically, and the NT doesn’t teach it dogmatically so I’ve always taught that if you can’t give even 2% with out doing it begrudgingly or of necessity (feeling guilty into it, and therefore griping about it) than don’t give at all. Because as we mentioned earlier God would rather you just keep it, and He won’t honor it. But I’m of the persuasion that the tithe is God’s. You don’t have to agree with me just make sure you stand on ground you can support biblically. But I’m of the persuasion that the tithe comes to the storehouse (church) and then if I want to give to Samaritan’s purse, or Gospel for Asia, perhaps an outreach of the church or whatever I don’t believe I’m to take that from my tithe, I’ll do that beyond my tithe. If you think that’s legalistic you’re free to do that just make sure you don’t subscribe to that mentality to justify your desire to with hold more than what is right from the Lord. But that’s what’s purposed on my heart and I believe I can support it with scripture.

So “each one” is to give, they’re to give as they’ve “purposed in their heart,” not grudgingly or of necessity, *why*? Because God loves a *cheerful* (that is a hilarious) giver, Jesus said it’s more blessed to give than to receive. and The idea isn’t that of rolling on the floor laughing as the offering bag passes by, but that there’s to be an inner joy that comes from the opportunity to be apart of what God’s doing on this earth knowing that I’m laying up for myself eternal rewards in heaven. God loves it when it blesses our heart to be apart of what He’s doing. **When you give here, and we take a portion of God’s provision and give to a mission, or score the playground, or whatever it may be. and People are blessed by it, saved through it, the gospel goes out because of it, that will be a reward for you in eternity, you share in that. We can’t even fathom how God will accredit those things to our account but He does. and It should bless you to be apart of what God’s doing. If it doesn’t pray that God would make it so, God loves a cheerful giver, one who’s glad to be apart of His work on the earth.**

### **Vs8**

In other words there’s no lack in God’s supply. This takes us back to the mention of Phil 4:19 how that God will supply all your need according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus. Did you catch all the “Universals” in this Vs? **I was overwhelmed at the abundance of abundance in this Vs, “all” grace, “abound” toward you, that you “always” having “all sufficiency” in “all” things may have an “abundance” for “every” good work. What’s this saying? It’s saying that as you give, God will give to you, that He wants to use you not as a *container* of His blessings, but as a *conduit* through whom His blessing flows into the lives of others. He makes “all grace” abound toward you so that you might have an “abundance for every” good work. and The word “Sufficiency” here is the same word translated elsewhere as “Contentment” so that you might have all contentment in all things. Free from the need of externals for happiness. **The cure for covetousness is contentment, godliness with contentment is great gain. But God wants to use our lives to be a blessing to others, so He pours into us (materially and spiritually) so that He might flow forth from us into the lives of others.****

### **Vs9**

Now if you go back and look at Ps 112 you’ll see that the “He” in this Vs isn’t God it’s the righteous man. and It’s not that giving *makes* us righteous, but that it’s a demonstration of the righteousness of Christ in us. We spoke of giving as a test of the sincerity of our love, here we see it as an outward demonstration, or manifestation of Christ’s righteousness in us, because He was the ultimate Giver. **Didn’t come to receive but to give (in every sense of the word) didn’t come to be served but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many. and So one way that the eternal righteousness of Christ is seen in us is in our not neglecting the needs of others, being a blessing to the body of Christ. Notice.**

### **Vs10-11**

So Paul is here underscoring what we’ve mentioned above. The reason you and I are enriched in the ways we are (be it spiritually, materially or perhaps both compared to most of the planet we’re all radically wealthy) is not simply to cater to our own lavish lifestyles. But so that we might be liberal, that is generous with our distribution of God’s supply which causes thanksgiving to be given to God.

We note it Vs 10 that it's God who is the source of our supply, and He's the One who is able to multiply the seed we sow so that it increases the harvest (the fruits of our righteousness). Of course I can't help but think of the 5 loaves and 2 fish. Supplied (through the little boy) and multiplied by God. You may feel you don't have much, but you'll be amazed at how far it can go once you've placed it in the hands of Jesus.

### Vs12-14

Now real quick, here we see 4 benefits of generous (again not in amount but in attitude) giving (1 of which we've already noted). #1 It supplies the needs of the saints. This is obvious on the brass tax bottom level of one of the practical benefits of our giving. It meets the needs of other believers. and The bible tells us, "*And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.*" Gal 6:9-10 **As we give we help meet the needs of the household of faith. But not only that, not only do we supply the needs of the saints but also #2 Cause many thanksgivings to God. When you give to the work of the Lord, not only are you supplying for basic needs in people's lives, but you give people a reason to thank God. I tell you when I see the way God moves on the hearts of His people to provide for His work here, it causes me to thank God.** Not only because the needs of my family are provided for by the ministry, but I thank God that so many lives are blessed by what He's doing through you. When we give to missions, or benevolence, or outreaches to the community, those people thank God for those things. Your giving causes thanksgiving, *many* thanksgivings to God. and Not only do people *thank* God, they #3, *Glorify* God for the obedience of your confession to the gospel of Christ. **Now that's heavy (we don't have time to expound on it) but this is saying that in some measure if we're not givers as believers that we're not being obedient to our very confession to the gospel of Christ. If you call yourself a Christian and you're not a giver, there are dots that aren't connecting in your walk. Because Christ was a giver, and He's the same yesterday, today and forever, which translates He'll be a giver in your life as well, in my life the same.** God grant us obedience to our confession of the gospel of Christ. But when you give, you meet needs, you cause thanksgiving *to* God and the glorifying *of* God. and Finally #4 It inspires people (Vs 14) to pray for you. and It's not paying for prayer, it's that when you give people are prompted to pray for you. **When we send support to Nigeria, be it for the radio broadcast, or the fellowship that Bernard pastors' you can believe they're praying for us. They want to see that good work continue, so they're praying that God will bless you, continue to pour into you that He might pour through you even in to their lives. They long for you because of the exceeding grace of God in you.**

So your giving results in needs being met, in thanksgiving *to* God, the glorifying *of* God (testifies of your obedience to the confession of the gospel of Christ) and people praying for you. Those are just fringe benefits not to mention the eternal rewards God is laying up in Heaven for you nor the harvest of those things He's prepared for you on this earth.

and It's not always in money, but at times it can be. Perhaps He healed you of a brain aneurism and you never even knew you had it, how much is that worth to you? It's sorta silly and perhaps it's common but it hadn't been for me, but I've got some cheap recess can lights in my kitchen, they've been there nearly 7yrs, about 3 weeks ago the 1<sup>st</sup> one burned out.

To me that was a blessing, the Lord just taking care of me, we've still not had a light burn out in the kid's bathroom. Even in the little things God can bless us. But if those things aren't incentive enough, Paul concludes with the ultimate incentive, notice.

### Vs15

God is the ultimate giver, His gift? The person of Jesus Christ and salvation provided through Him, it's nothing you can earn, or somehow merit, it's a gift. An indescribable gift, so indescribable that until Paul used this word to describe it, the word didn't exist. Paul made up a particular word never seen before this in Greek literature to describe the gift of God, and the way it translates into English? "Indescribable." There are no words on this earth that can adequately describe all that's bound up for you and me in the gift of Jesus Christ to the world. Charles Spurgeon said, "If you preach Christ, you will never run short. If you have preached ten thousand sermons about Christ, you have not left the shore; you are not out in the deep sea yet. Dive, my brother! With splendor of thought, plunge into the great mystery of free grace and dying love; and when you have dived the farthest, you will perceive that you are as far off the bottom as when you first touched the surface." Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift. How our hearts should be saturated with gratitude and thanksgiving. Adam Clarke said, "Our affliction we scarcely ever forget; our mercies we scarcely ever remember! Our hearts are alive to *complaint*, but dead to *gratitude*. We have had ten thousand mercies for one judgment, and yet our complaints to our thanksgivings have been ten thousand to one! How is it that God endures this, and bears with us?" Our hearts should be alive to thanksgiving for the indescribable gift of God in the person and work of Jesus Christ His gift is the ultimate incentive for all giving, it's His giving 1<sup>st</sup> to us, that motivates us to give back to Him. We love Him because He 1<sup>st</sup> loved us, and we give to Him out of the overflow, understanding that He's 1<sup>st</sup> given to us.

### Prayer Points:

and God we thank You and praise you for the indescribable gift You've given us in Jesus Christ salvation by grace through faith, you've blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, done exceedingly abundantly beyond all we could ask or even think, in Him. and Our hearts are overwhelmed, and over joyed, our cup runs over. and Father may we respond to You, in the giving of ourselves to You, in whatever capacity You've purposed on our hearts. We thank You for Your Word, may we take heed to Your glory.

If you've never received the gift of Jesus Christ in your heart, God's indescribable gift is waiting for you, all you have to do is call upon the name of the Lord and you'll be saved. Repent of your sin, give your heart to Christ and He will wash you whiter than snow, casting your sin as far as the east is from the west. He's waiting for you, the question is simply will you call upon Him?