

“The Andrew Challenge: Reaping a Harvest (Part 1)”–2 Corinthians 9:6-11

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February 19, 2017

[What follows is the transcript of a sermon. It was originally intended to be heard, not read, so the tone is more conversational than academic. It has only been loosely edited, so forgive any grammatical, syntactical, or spelling errors. If you have questions please contact Southern Oaks Baptist Church through their official website, www.welovethegospel.com.]

Take a Bible and meet me in 2 Corinthians 9...

It's good to be with you this morning. You may have noticed (perhaps) that I was out last week due to illness. It came on my pretty rapidly toward the end of the prior week. Fortunately, Danny Pickens, the director the Smith Baptist Association, was kind enough to fill in behind the pulpit so I could recover. I'm feeling much better now and I thank you for your prayers. I don't take for granted what a privilege it is to teach God's Word to God's people. It truly is the greatest privilege of God's calling for a pastor. When some sweet or bitter providence keeps me from it, I miss it. So it's good to be back.

Let's review a bit since time apart can fog the memory. We have been looking at what Paul teaches the Corinthians about the nature of Christian generosity. Historically, these teachings are offered in the context of a collection that Paul was taking up to help impoverished Christians in the city of Jerusalem. Initially Paul came to the region called Achaia (southern Greece) and visited the city of Corinth. The Corinthians were very interested in helping raise funds for the church in Jerusalem and offered Paul all of the promises and commitments he could have ever dreamed of.

Paul then traveled to northern Greece and visited cities like Thessalonica, Berea, and Philippi. He told these Macedonians how committed the Corinthians were to the cause and this example stimulated the generosity of the Macedonians. This was shocking even for Paul given the poverty of the Macedonians themselves. The Bible says, *“their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity”* (2 Corinthians 8:2). So God used the example of the Corinthians to encourage the Macedonians to give generously.

Yet while Paul was north, false teachers and dividing personalities got a foothold in Corinth. They badmouthed Paul behind the scenes and the relationship between Paul and the church had soured. One of the negative results was original commitments to help with this offering had gone unfulfilled. The money stopped coming in. The generosity waned. Since Paul initiated the fund and they were now not happy with Paul because of these people Satan was using to stir up disunity, they quit giving. It's a mess. But it's a mess that many churches, unfortunately, have experienced because Satan's tact hasn't changed much.

So Paul is writing to the Corinthians to clear up the confusion and in the process reignite the enthusiasm of the Corinthians' original commitments. Yet, in an interesting twist, he now is using the examples of the poor, yet generous, Macedonians to teach the not poor, yet stingy, Corinthians. Isn't that funny? He used the example of Corinth to stimulate the Macedonians and now he's turning the table, using the example of the Macedonians to stimulate the Corinthians.

In past weeks we have considered what Paul teaches in these chapters about the nature of Christian generosity. We have seen that it flows from grace (not guilt). It is prompted and patterned after the example of Christ Himself. And, because it is Christ-like, it is offered willingly and cheerfully and is characteristically generous and sacrificial. That is what Christian generosity looks like. It's not about

percentages. The goal is not to hit a number. The goal is to give in such a way that our giving becomes a demonstration of the Gospel.

Today we will deal with a new question: What is the result of such giving? That's what we will be dealing with this week and next. Look again at chapter 9, verse 6...

“The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.” (2 Corinthians 9:6)

In short, you reap what you sow. This is “the law of the harvest.” If you plant corn, you don't harvest wheat. Why? You reap *what* you sow. The reaping of a harvest only comes after the act of sowing. You don't reap *without* sowing. Furthermore, the size of the harvest depends, in large part, on how much is sown. If you sow “*sparingly*”, the harvest will be smaller for you than for the one who sowed “*bountifully*”. Yet, in every case, unless something interferes (e.g., drought, pestilence), the harvest is always bigger than the initial investment. That's the hope. You don't sow a sack of grain to harvest a sack of grain. You sow a sack of grain to harvest *many* sacks of grain. The harvest is bigger than the initial investment.

These are some of the ideas that undergird the “law of the harvest.” It is easy to see then how these principles have been attractive to prosperity preachers, who like to claim that God wants you healthy and wealthy in this life and that when you're not both it's because you haven't sown enough faith by giving to the right ministries, namely the one's that help them maintain their wealth. Yet as they fill their coffers on the backs of the poor and vulnerable, they are leading a great throng of people down a path that will end in disappointment and, ultimately, destruction. They push people away from God in the end because they are lying on God. God is not some genie who grants wishes to the faithful. He's not some cosmic vending machine that will give you what you want if you insert the appropriate coin. In health and wealth theology, God is obligated to deliver us the good. In biblical theology, God is under no such obligation. We are His debtors. Never the reverse.

But we have to be careful that we don't throw the baby out with the bathwater, so to speak. The Scriptures do teach that God rewards faithful giving.¹ He doesn't owe it. But He delights to give it because He is a generous God. We will reap, if we sow. The questions are when, what, and why will we reap? These are the questions the prosperity preachers get wrong because they often overlook, as Jesus taught, that part of the harvest may be stored up as “*treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal*” (Matthew 6:20). It was reminders like this that led Martin Luther to say, “I have had many things in my hands that I lost; the things that I placed in the hands of God I still possess.”²

On top of this, prosperity preachers often overlook the purpose of material harvests in this life. They assume they are for their own enriching and their motives pay the price and go the way of their selfish ambition. Worse still, they ignore the context of the biblical writers. The Macedonians were poor, yet they demonstrated “*a wealth of generosity*.” But guess what? They were still poor. Their poverty was still present. Their giving didn't automatically make them wealthy, even though their giving is presented as the model of Christian giving. That doesn't fit well with prosperity preaching and details like that don't find their way into their sermons.

Paul doesn't suffer from these same oversights and he has something different to offer. His teaching was as countercultural to ancient Corinth as it is to modern America, but it's just as true in both settings. Paul wants them (and us) to see that what kind of harvest is in store for those who take seriously the call to Christian generosity. He's pivoting from the principle—you reap what you sow—to a description of the

harvest we will reap. Actually I think there is evidence of three kinds of harvests that we can expect when we “*sow bountifully*”, as Paul puts it (2 Corinthians 9:6). Here’s the first one...

A Harvest of Sufficiency

That means God provides what we truly need.³ Look at chapter 9, verse 8.

“And 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.” (2 Corinthians 9:8)

That verse is quite a reassurance. It reminds us that God will provide...first...

Sufficiency for All Our Needs

When he refers to “*all sufficiency in all things at all times*,” Paul is not saying God’s grace to you will amount to everything you ever dreamed of. But it will amount to “*all sufficiency*.” You will have what you need. He’s saying that we can be generous because God is able take care of meeting our true needs. He is able. Our giving reflects this belief about God. As one preacher put it, “Each opportunity to give is an opportunity for the believer to preach to themselves that God is able.”⁴ He meets our needs, our true needs, so we can trust Him and be obedient to His call to generosity.

But He doesn’t just provide sufficiency for our needs. God also provides...

Sufficiency for Every Good Work

Look at verse 8 again—“*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.*” Clearly, Paul doesn’t mean every conceivable good work. There are always more needs than we can address. Stamping out global starvation is a good work as is addressing the global orphan crisis, but God has not given us the means to feed every hungry mouth and shelter every homeless child. So Paul is not saying God gives us enough for every *conceivable* good work.

The question is what does Paul mean by “*every*”? Ephesians 2:10 gives us a clue. There Paul said, “*For we are [God’s] workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.*” Paul had just finished up saying that works don’t save us from our sin. We are saved through faith as an act of God’s free grace. But when God saves us, Paul is saying, it is for a purpose. There are “*good works*” that God has planned out for you to engage in.

Your life is sovereignly arranged. There is design behind opportunity. So when Paul tells the Corinthians that God provides sufficiency for them to abound in every good work, he’s referring to every good work that God prepared in advance for them to do. There’s no purpose of God in your life that He doesn’t provide the means of fulfilling. We are given sufficiency for every good work He calls us to, “every God-ordained good work.”⁵

So Christian generosity leads to a harvest of sufficiency—sufficiency for our true needs and sufficiency for every work that God has called us to. Ironically, however, generosity is usually restrained because we convince ourselves that being generous people could rob us of these sufficiencies. The opposite is true. We forget what God is able to do. We lack faith. We fail to be generous and conclude it’s because we can’t.

Yet one of the implications of these verses is that God always gives us enough so that we can be generous. What we have will not impede our ability to be generous. If we doubt this, then we doubt God's grace. It's a faith issue. Again, the poor Macedonians are a case in point. They were in "*extreme poverty*," yet their giving was described as "*a wealth of generosity*" (8:2). Their poverty didn't make generosity impossible, did it? No. "There will always be enough to be generous."⁶ Generosity is not measured on calculators. It's measured in sacrifice. And all of us are called to be generous people. It's a characteristic of the righteous.

In fact, that is the point of the quotation in verse 9.

"As it is written, 'He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever.'" (2 Corinthians 9:9)

These words are drawn from Psalm 112, which contrasts the fate of the righteous with the fate of the wicked and goes to some lengths to describe the rewards bestowed on the righteous (112:1-9). But the point that Paul focuses on is that the righteous person (i.e., the "he" in verse 9) trusts God with his future and is generous to those in need as a result. Out of his abundance, he blesses others. That's what the righteous do, according to the Psalmist. They demonstrate their righteousness by caring generously for others. God has made them "*abound in every good work*" (2 Corinthians 9:8).

Lest we think that means that they will become rich for selfish purposes, the principle is restated to the Corinthians in a very interesting way in the first part of verse 11. Look there...

"You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way..." (2 Corinthians 9:11a)

Note the purpose clause. Why will they be enriched in every way? In order "*to be generous in every way...*" So taken together, verses 8 and 11 suggest that God is able to provide all the needs of His children and when He chooses to give exceedingly beyond those needs it is for the sake of others. This verse is not teaching that your generosity will lead to personal riches. It's teaching that Christian generosity is often rewarded in such a way that more generosity is made possible and we can continue to be generous. Or, to borrow the language of David Platt, "God gives enough for us, and He gives abundance for others."⁷ That is as beautiful as it is counterintuitive to worldly thinking!

Enough for Us and the Extra for Others

Let's take that thought for a walk down the street of your mind for a moment, if you dare. Have you ever stopped and asked, "I wonder why God gives me more than I need?" Most of us would probably admit that He has blessed us with far more than we actually need, but have we ever considered why? Maybe Paul is answering that here (what do you think?). God gives us enough for our true needs (9:8) and if He gives us abundance on top of that, perhaps it wasn't intended for us (9:11). Maybe, just maybe, we too were "*enriched...to be generous...*"

Let me give you an example that shows how foreign what Paul is saying is to most people's actual way of thinking. Imagine a person gets a huge raise at work. What's the go-to response 99% of the time? We say, "Honey we got more money! Let's get a bigger house. Let's buy some better clothes. Let's get a new car. Let's get more...more...more..." Now there is nothing intrinsically wrong or sinful about any of those things necessarily. Having nice things is not wrong. We can glorify God through their use. God may intend for you to increase your standard of living in some ways. That may very well be why He provides some resources to you and your family. He could do that to raise you out of a bad situation. Provide more

for your families. Move out of your parents' house. Any number of things. I'm not trying to shame anyone for having nice things. Really.

But it is a curious thing (is it not?) that you hardly ever see a person get an influx of more money and *not* increase their standard of living. Why is that? Because we assume that God gives more so we can have more. But that thinking is worldly. That's thinking doesn't bear any resemblance to what we see here in 2 Corinthians. What if the raise that God gives you at work has less to do with Him trying to increase your standard of living and more with Him trying to increase your standard of giving?

So what if Christians started living out verse 11? What if our go-to response to more resources wasn't "Hooray, what can I get for myself now?" and instead was "Thank you God! I can now say 'yes' to more people in need! I can be a blessing to people around me more than ever. I can give more to the purposes of God. God's given me enough and given me an abundance, He's given me extra, for the sake others! Thank you, God, for entrusting me with that"? In other words, what if Christians started acting *Christianly* instead of like everyone else in the world?

Let me give you a real world example. There was a guy in history named John Wesley, who lived in the 1700s and wrote many of the hymns you love, famously said, "Earn all you can, save all you can, and give all you can."⁸ Given his writing and his ministry, he could have been very wealthy in his day. But one day Wesley was thinking about these principles in 2 Corinthians 9—that God gives enough for us and extra for others—and he realized that he needed to spend some time thinking through what "enough" was for him. How much did he need to live? Not necessarily as a poor beggar. But a reasonable amount that he could live on, where his needs were being met, his family was being cared for, and he was enjoying the kindness of God without fueling greed and stinginess. So he crunched the numbers and decided that "enough" for him in that time was 28 pounds. That was his enough in 1731.

That same year he made 30 pounds. So he lived on his 28 and gave away 2. The next year his income doubled to 60 pounds. So what did he do? He gave away 32 pounds and lived on 28. The next year his income increased to 90 pounds. This pattern continued for many years. One year Wesley made 1400 pounds, which is equivalent to a \$160,000 salary today. That year he lived on 28 pounds and gave the rest away. When he died in 1791, 60 years later, the money in his will consisted on the miscellaneous coins in his dresser and pant pockets. Most of the 30,000 pounds he had earned in his lifetime, he had given away.⁹

Now there are lots of biblical principles at work in that example (e.g., he proved faithful with little so God entrusted him with more), but I want to focus on his approach to his "enough" and his "extra." Friends, perhaps it's time for us to think about what is "enough" in our lives so that we can be generous with any abundance God entrusts to us, especially if, as this text suggests, He intended that extra for others. I'm not going to define what "enough" is because that's not my place and it will vary for each of us. My "enough" is not going to be the same as yours and ours will likely differ from John Wesley's. By this I don't mean to suggest that it is subjective and that we get to decide these things independent from God. No...God must guide these considerations and He will as we seek Him in prayer and in His Word.

And I know none of us wants to think about such questions for very long. I stand here as uncomfortable as you before God's Word this morning. But I would fail you as a pastor, if I didn't encourage you to ask such questions. We too often bow-up and think, "Well I earned this" to justify our greed and selfishness. But, as Christians, we must not forget that all that we have belongs to God. It's not ours. It's a stewardship. We can choose to not think about these questions in our lifetime, but we cannot refuse to answer them on the day that God calls us to account. And He will. (Go read the Parable of the Talents some time; Matthew 25:14-30).

So if this text is teaching the Corinthians that God will enrich them so that they can be generous to others, then it stands to reason that when He enriches us it may well be for others as well. This is how God fuels Christian generosity. He provides the seed. We sow it generously. He provides more seed so we can sow more generously. As John Bunyan wrote, “A man there was and they called him mad; the more he gave, the more he had.” That’s how God often operates and it’s nonsense to the world.¹⁰

But if all we ever do with God’s abundant gifts is use them to build bigger barns for ourselves, then perhaps we have totally missed the point for which He gave the extra in the first place. Perhaps we have misused His stuff and our limitations in generosity are self-imposed. Perhaps it’s time to hear God’s Word as applicable to our situation and not just live like we are the exception. What would happen if we decide that a \$60,000 income doesn’t require a \$60,000 standard of living that robs us of the joy of generosity? Or a \$75,000 income? Or \$100,000...?

It’s telling how far our worldview has gone amiss on these matters that when we read 2 Corinthians 8 and 9, we get discouraged. These truths were meant to be an encouragement! We should rejoice. God’s call to generosity will not be the end of us. God gives what we need. He gives us more than we need so we can be generous. And giving away His abundance is a joy that perhaps you’ve kept yourself from experiencing for far too long. On the other hand, some of you know the joy of generosity well. It’s fun. And this cheerful giving is a way that our giving can display the Gospel and the difference it has made in our lives.

You may be thinking, “Oh, I don’t know about all this pastor. I just don’t know.” Well maybe that is why Jesus said, “*It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God*” (Matthew 19:24). Why is it easier? Because what Jesus taught on money and resources seems counterintuitive to worldly thinking, so people are inclined to ignore it and miss the kingdom. As Galatians 6:7 and 8 makes clear: “*Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap.*”⁸ *For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.*” And, as Jesus taught, “*where your treasure is, there your heart will be also*” (Matthew 6:21). This is why the late Richard Halverson, a chaplain to the U. S. Senate, once stated,

“Jesus Christ said more about money than any other single thing because when it comes to a man’s real nature, money is of first importance. Money is an exact index to a man’s true character. All through Scripture there is an intimate correlation between the development of a man’s character and how he handles his money.”¹¹

Again, “*where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*” This what your wallet goes after is a picture of what your heart goes after. And Jesus cares a great deal about what your heart is going after. As John Piper writes,

“What our hands do with our money shows what our hearts are doing with God. Or to get right at the heart of the matter: what we do with our money shows what we believe God is doing with us. What money is to us shows what God is to us. Jesus said, ‘A man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions’ (Luke 12:15). No, it consists in his relationship to God. ‘This is eternal life—true life —’ Jesus said to his Father in heaven, ‘that they might know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent’ (John 17:3). What we do with our money shows where we believe life—and joy and love and hope and security and meaning and freedom—is found.”¹²

But, again, generosity leads to joy. It leads to a harvest of sufficiency. Needs met. Our own true needs being supplied. Future generosity being fueled. Enough for us. Extra for others. Abounding in every good

work. And it gets even better! There is more in it for you when you are generous than even the harvest of sufficiency. There are two other harvests that Paul deals with that we haven't even mentioned yet! They're both amazing and will keep us rejoicing and we will look at both next week, Lord willing.

The next one he mentions in verse 10—“*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.*” The harvest of your righteousness. What does that mean? Perhaps not what you might expect at first glance. We will consider that next week (along with a third harvest that we get to reap from too!) when we wrap up our consideration of how God blesses us when we engage in Christian generosity.

So join us next Sunday. Bring a friend. It will deepen your joy. It will help some of you to turn the corner and find cheer in generosity.

Let's pray...

¹ See Mike Andrus, “Giving: What’s In It For Me?”, a sermon preached to First Evangelical Free Church in Wichita, KS, on February 5, 2006.

² Quoted in David E. Garland, *2 Corinthians* (NAC; Downers Grove: B&H Publishing, 1999), 412.

³ The sufficiency language is drawn from Kent Hughes, *2 Corinthians: Power in Weakness* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2006), 174f.

⁴ Dick High, “The Grace of Giving,” a sermon preached on June 21, 2015, at the aforementioned church.

⁵ The language drawn from John Piper, “Treasuring Christ Together: The North Campus Expansion, Part 2”, a sermon preached April 25, 2004, to Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, MN.

⁶ Hughes, 175.

⁷ This language is drawn from David Platt, “Generosity in Community,” in *David Platt Sermon Archive* (Logos Bible Software, 2008), 2090-2091. I later discovered that the language was possibly drawn from John Piper, “Treasuring Christ Together: The North Campus Expansion, Part 2.”

⁸ Craig L. Blomberg, *Christians in an Age of Wealth: A Biblical Theology of Stewardship* (Downers Grove: Zondervan, 2013), 142.

⁹ Platt, 2091-2092.

¹⁰ Linda L. Belleville, *2 Corinthians* (IVPNTCS; Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1996), accessed through Logos Bible Software, 9:6.

¹¹ Quoted in John Piper’s sermon titled, “Enough for Us: Abundance for Every Good Work,” preached to Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, MN, on January 19, 1992.

¹² *Ibid.*