

“The Andrew Challenge: Reaping a Harvest (Part 2)”–2 Corinthians 9:10-14

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[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 your Bible and let's meet up in 2 Corinthians 9...

We have been studying what Paul says about Christian generosity in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9. Last week we began to see what happens when we take the call to generosity seriously. Paul describes the results in harvest language—we reap what we sow. But he also gives examples of what we reap and I suggested last week that our text gives evidence of at least three kinds of harvests. The first harvest is what we called last week...

A Harvest of Sufficiency

We explored how God gives us what we need to be generous and when we are generous He makes future generosity possible as well. He supplies what we need in life, what we talked about last week as our “enough.” And He even blesses us beyond that with some measure of abundance. But Paul labors to show that the abundance is not for our personal self-interest, but is often meant for the sake of others. God gives us our enough and when He gives abundance it's often for others.

Today we are going to explore one more of the harvests that we reap when we practice Christian generosity (there are three). We don't just have sufficiency for our need and every good work God intends us to engage in, but there are other results as well. Take a look at 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.” (2 Corinthians 9:10)

This verse speaks of a new harvest...

A Harvest of Righteousness

It's worth pointing out that the “He” in verse 10 is not the same “he” in verse 9. In verse 10 the “He” refers to God Himself. God provides the seed that the farmer can sow. God causes that seed to grow and through that growth He supplies what we need for bread. In the harvest He is providing more seed for generous sowing and so on and so forth.¹

This is a good reminder for us. Without God we would not have any of these things. We would not have what we need in the first place to be generous. We would not have anything to produce more with. Every step of the process reveals that we are dependent on Him for everything, even if thus far we have failed to acknowledge it. How arrogant it is for us to act like we are self-sufficient and self-made men and women. The world may regard you as “successful” in its eyes and that “success” may indeed have flowed out of your hard work and tenacity, but don't let it go to your head. God “*supplies the seed to the sower.*”

You don't get to where you are now without God grace. All it would have taken for you to have been at the bottom of the rung and on the curb of some street is for this or that door of opportunity to have closed, or

some injury to leave you disabled, or for you to have been born in another part of the world, or God's withholding of countless other providences without which you would never have "succeeded" to the degree that you have. God supplies the seed for sowing. We must sow, but no one sows apart from His provision and nothing multiplies without His permission. So the God that verse 10 speaks of is a God who is the Giver, not the taker. He is both generous and a God who makes possible our generosity and the results of that generosity. He deserves the glory and He deserves our thanks.

But, notice, in verse 9, you might remember, Paul was quoting from an Old Testament psalm that described the character of the righteous. The Psalmist represents the righteous person as characteristically generous, as seen in his or her efforts to give freely to the poor. And, interestingly, the Psalmist also said that the righteousness of such a person would endure forever. Scholars debate what that could mean. Some understand it as referring to how God will not forget the godly acts of the righteous (in this case, their generosity), but will remember them forever and in that sense they endure forever. That's probably part of what the Psalmist had in mind, but it may not be the sum total.

Paul, in any case, seems to have more in mind, if verses 10 and following are any indication. In verse 10, Paul tells us that God provides what we need to sow generously and through that sowing He provides an increase. But part of that increase includes "*the harvest of your righteousness.*" That's an odd expression, isn't it? What does Paul mean?

Let's start with what he doesn't mean. He's not advocating for a works-based righteousness. In other words, he is not saying that if people would just act right and be generous, then God would see that and consider them righteous on the basis of those acts. That's a works-based salvation. That's every other religion. You get right and God lets you in. So you work hard to try to curry God's favor. But that's not Christianity.

Biblical Christianity teaches that you and I were broken because of sin and we can't fix ourselves up. Everyone else around is broken too because of their sin, so they won't be able to fix us either. For things to be right, God's going to have to make them right and He does by sending His Son, Jesus. Jesus wasn't broken like us. He was without sin and He lived a perfectly righteous life before His Father. He's the only unbroken person who didn't deserve to die, but He offered His perfect life up to be broken on a cross in the worst death imaginable so that sinful and broken people like us could be forgiven our sin and made new.

How? Because He became our Substitute. He bled and died in the way we deserved for the mess of sin we have become. Our sin was laid on Jesus on the cross and God's full wrath was poured out on Him, our Savior and Substitute, so that people like us could be spared that wrath and have poured out on us salvation instead. Through faith in Christ—turning from our sins and trusting in Christ alone to save—we receive that salvation freely from God. We are counted righteous before God because Jesus was perfectly righteous in every way and He is our Substitute. His righteousness is now our righteousness, because He is our Substitute. His inheritance is now our hope, because He is our Substitute. His place our place, because He is our Substitute. The Father looks at us with the same affection that He looks upon His Son because His Son has made us sons and daughters of God through the cross and resurrection. He is our Substitute! That is the Gospel.

Coming to church and doing nice things doesn't make you a Christian. Seeing the horror of your sin, the desperate state of your condition before God, confessing your need for Jesus alone to save you, and trusting Him to do that through His work on the cross and resurrection is what makes you a Christian. That's what makes you right with God. Not what you do, but trusting in what He has done. If you don't grasp that, you are not a Christian and if your life expired today hell would await you. I don't care how long you have been in church. You may have been a leader in church. But if you don't understand and embrace this Gospel, your record of church and churchy things will be the evidence of God's just judgment upon you when

Christ says, “*I never knew you; depart from me*” (Matthew 7:23). So I plead with you, as I do often, to believe in Jesus. He will save you. He saves all those whose faith rests on Him. Stop trusting in your efforts and trust in His! [Response cards]

Now then, if our good works don't *make* us righteous in God's eyes, then that can't be what Paul means when he says, in verse 10, then our good and righteous acts (like giving generously) “*increase the harvest of your righteousness.*” A Christian cannot be made more righteous in God's sight than he or she already is because Christ's perfect righteousness has been counted as their own, credited to their account. So what then is Paul referring to when he speak of an increase of righteousness?

Well, it's easy to miss, but verse 10 is borrowing language from Isaiah 55:10 and Hosea 10:12. When you study these passages you discover that they deal with God's provisions for the redemption of His people. I wish we had time to look at those passages in detail, but you'll have to do that on your own. Taken together, Scott Hafemann offers a good summary of hope that these OT texts offer: “God's promise is that he will use his people and their resources as instruments of his grace for the salvation of others.”² Paul, it seems to me, is making the same point in 2 Corinthians. The idea is that when God's people sow acts of righteousness, those acts will endure (cf. 10:9) because they will result in more acts of righteousness. Indeed the results will multiply so much that Paul saw best to describe it as a “*harvest*” of righteousness. Your righteous deeds produce more righteous deeds down the line.³ It multiplies righteousness, in that sense.

In this context, the acts of righteousness Paul has in mind relate to Christian generosity. So he is assuring us that when we act generously to others we are going to see many righteous acts grow up out of that generosity! It's an incredible picture really, but it raises the question—what does that harvest of righteousness look like? What kind of righteous acts will result from our generosity? That's what the rest of the chapter unfolds.

In English, verses 10 to 14 are usually broken up as four different sentences. In Greek they are actually one long and complicated sentence.⁴ Verse 10 is the main thought grammatically. Verses 11 to 14 provide an explanation of verse 10. Verse 10 speaks of a harvest of righteousness; verses 11 to 14 describes what that harvest looks like by offering examples of righteous acts and activities that result.⁵

If you're a nerd like me who likes to diagram sentences on a whiteboard, these verses are a dream come true. But you're probably not, so we'll skip all the confusing syntax and hit the highlights. Basically, Paul gives three examples of righteousness that results from Christian generosity. Each example is aimed in a different direction, offered to a different person. You will see what I mean as we go along, but let's start by reading the next verses, starting with verse 11...

“You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God.¹² For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God.¹³ 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,¹⁴ while they long for you and pray for you, because of the surpassing grace of God upon you.” (2 Corinthians 10:11-14)

So what does this harvest of righteousness look like? Here's the first example...

Righteousness Expressed to the Needy: The Offering of Provisions

This is what we discussed last week, so we won't spend a lot of time here. Remember, God gives enough for us and often abundance for others, extra for others. Verse 11 supports this. “*You will be enriched in*

every way [note the purpose clause] *to be generous in every way*". So we considered last week the amazing truth that when we faithfully steward what God has entrusted to us and use it to be generous to others, that God will often give even more abundance to us, not to enrich us, but to equip us to be even more generous in the future. So we have to ask the question, what is "enough" for me and realize that the abundance He showers on us may very well be meant for the needs of others. That's the point of verse 11. When we are generous, God gives us additional opportunities and a greater ability to be generous. It's not just the initial act of generosity, in other words. There's a harvest of more acts of generosity.

The goal of that generosity (or at least a goal), of course, is to meet the needs of others. That's what he refers to in verse 12, when he talks about "*supplying the needs of the saints.*" But look closely at what he says in that verse. "*For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints, but is also*" doing other things. This is important. The goal of our generosity and the results of our generosity are not merely to meet the needs of others. And meeting the material needs should never be the sole basis of our giving. Why? Because the needs are always too great for you to meet. As Jesus said, the poor will always be among us (John 12:8). We can't meet every need we see so if the only reason we give is to meet needs, then we eventually get discouraged and that can actually lead us to stop being generous all together because it doesn't feel we are making any real difference.

So let me throw in an extra word of advice at this point. This one's free. We can't meet every need, but we can choose to focus on individual needs, one at a time. There's an illustration that you've probably heard before, but let me throw it out there any way. Once there was a man who was lying on the beach enjoying the sunset. Out of the corner of his eye, he spotted an old man who was picking up starfish that had been washed up on the beach. The old man leaned down, picked up one starfish, and threw it back in the ocean. He's walked a few more steps, pick up another, and cast it back into the water. This confused the first man, so, when his curiosity got the best of him, he went out to the old man and asked him why he was doing such a thing. The old man replied. "It's low tide and all these starfish have been washed up on the shore. If I don't throw them back they will die of lack of oxygen."

Not satisfied with the explanation, the first man said, "But there must be thousands of starfish on this beach. You can't possibly get to all of them. And don't you realize this is probably happening on hundreds of beaches all up and down this coast and thousands more around the world. Can't you see that you can't possibly make a difference?" The old man bent down, grabbed hold of another starfish, and threw it at the waves. With a smile he relied, "Sure made a difference to that one!"⁶

You'll look in the world and think that you can't make a dent in the AIDS crisis, but you may be given a chance to make a difference in the life of one AIDS victim. When you look at the orphan crisis in our country and around the world and feel overwhelmed and discouraged by a need that seem insurmountable, but maybe you can change the life of one orphan or foster child by opening your home, maybe you could support a family who has the heart to do so but needs help to make it happen, maybe you could partner with a ministry like Compassion International sponsor a child to ensure they hear the Gospel and have a chance by downgrading your Starbucks order from "Grande" to "Tall." You can't fix the education crisis and make education accessible for every child, but maybe you can partner with Africa Anchor of Hope (as our church does) to make that dream come true for a child for a whole year for less than what some of you will pay to take your family to lunch today. You get the idea.

We can't do it all. But maybe we can make a difference for one. We can't let Satan leverage the scope of the need to squelch our generosity. And, again, what we will find is that generosity actually will lead to more needs being met than we currently have the means to meet. That's how God works. He gives to us to give to others. He supplies for others by supplying for us. And He multiplies our efforts in time when we trust Him enough to be generous.

What else results from Christian generosity? We will see, second...

Righteousness Expressed to God: The Offering of Praise

When we are generous to others, we will discover that it produces an offering of praise for God. Look at verse 11 again. *“You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God.”* Generosity results in people giving thanks to God. He reiterates this in the next verse—*“For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God.”* They will give God thanks for the provisions that He provides through our generosity.

Again, the sole basis of our generosity should not be merely to meet people’s material needs. It should include the hope that those needs would be met in such a way that people who turn to God in thanksgiving. God wants our thanksgiving. It’s an aspect of our worship, our praise. When we offer it, He receives glory. God receiving the glory is the outcome described in verse 13. Look there. *“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”.*

This verse reminds me of a couple things. First, it calls to mind the words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus said, *“You are the light of the earth...let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven”* (Matthew 5:13, 16). In other words, sometimes people will notice the good things that we do. But our hope should not be to receive the glory for those acts or activities. The hope is that people would see them and give glory to God. He deserves it. We don’t. Remember, it was Him, after all, who *“supplies the seed to the sower”* (2 Corinthians 9:10). God is the real Giver. We’re just the delivery boy or girl. So our good deeds, as much as possible, should *not* aim to draw attention to us but to direct attention to the Savior. This is why (think back) we should aim for our generosity to be an expression the Gospel. We should aim to give in such a way that even when people see us, they see Him.

The second thing verse 13 reminds me of is our mission statement, which begins, *“We exist to glorify God through Gospel-transformed lives.”* In previous weeks we have seen how Paul shows that Christian generosity is prompted by and patterned on the Gospel. As the Gospel impacts us we become generous people because in the Gospel we see a generous Savior. Echoing chapter 8, verse 9, you might say that in the Gospel we come to know *“the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.”*

So what happens when the grace of this Jesus, at the center of the Gospel, actually transforms us? God is glorified. So, for instance, when the Gospel turns us into generous people, Paul says in 9:13, the people we help out *“will glorify God”*. But notice why he says they glorify God. It’s not just because we were generous. It’s also *“because of your submission that comes from your confession of the gospel of Christ”*. In other words, God is glorified when people see our submission that flows out of our Gospel confession. Friends, that’s practically our mission statement right there. We exist to glorify God through Gospel-transformed lives. Paul says, the Gospel has transformed your lives and because of that God is receiving glory. That’s the goal. And this verse is further evidence that our mission statement is built upon a firm biblical foundation. It’s not innovative. It reflects the teaching of God’s Word. It’s not something I came up with. It’s something that God speaks to in various ways in the Scriptures and I will keep pointing that out as long as God allows me to serve at this church.

But there is even more to the harvest of righteousness than just the offering of provisions for others and the offering up praises to God. There’s also the offering of prayers and this is one that we are the recipients of...

Righteousness Expressed to the Generous: The Offering of Prayers

We are the recipients of these prayers. It's not that people are praying *to* us. It's that they are praying *for* us. We often assume that when we have some to spare and we see someone in need that the person in need has nothing to offer us. That's not true. They can offer up prayers for us! When they receive your generosity, their affection for you are stirred, and it should not surprise us that these affections would express themselves through passionate prayers offered up on your behalf. It's often the people who you help the most that intercede for you the most. Paul knew this well and that's why he tells the Corinthians what to expect in verse 14—*“they long for you and pray for you, because of the surpassing grace of God upon you.”* Isn't that beautiful?

We have all been on both sides of this equation. Sometimes we are the ones who offer help and sometimes we are the ones in need of it. When you have the opportunity to supply the needs of others, don't think of yourself as the only one that has something to offer. The people you help can become your greatest intercessors (apart from Christ and His Spirit, of course).⁷ When are on the receiving end of generosity and you wish you had something to offer in return, don't forget—you do! Commit to pray for your benefactor. Lift him or her up daily in prayer and you will have offered them a ministry every bit as potent and valuable as the one they offered you.

In summary, when Christian generosity happens righteous deeds multiply. It's not just the initial offering of help. That one act can produce more offerings of provision, the offering up of praise to the glory of God, and the offering up of prayers that will make a difference in your life in more way than you could ever know this side of heaven. In short, Christian generosity leads to a harvest of righteousness.

But guess what? It gets better. Christian generosity also leads, finally, to...

A Harvest of Unity

This point is so important we are going to spend a sermon on it. It's going to challenge us (fair warning). But it is really important, so I hope you will be here. We are going to be considering one of the most beautiful results of the Gospel and yet one of the most absent in our American church culture. It has to do with diversity in churches. So we need to hear what God's Word has to say. I think it will challenge us but at the same time fill us with great hope and anticipation.

Let's pray...

¹ The first half of 2 Corinthians 10:10 borrows language from Isaiah 55:10-11—“*For as the rain and the*

² Scott Hafemann, “2 Corinthians” in *The ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008), 2235 n. 9:10.

³ Colin G. Kruse talks about it increasing “the effect of that righteous deed.” Colin G. Kruse, *2 Corinthians* (TNTC; Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2007), 166.

⁴ The standard Greek volumes like Nestle-Aland²⁸ likewise break down the passage into different sentences, but one should remember that those punctuation marks are not original to the author and notice that the series of participles that occur in verses 11ff are grammatically subordinate to the statement in verse 10.

⁵ Hafemann, *2 Corinthians* (NIVAC; Downers Grove: Zondervan, 2000), 369.

⁶ Illustration drawn from a sermon preached by Mike Andrus called, “Giving: What’s In It For Me?”. The sermon was preached to First Evangelical Free Church in Wichita, KS, on February 5, 2006.

⁷ Cf., Romans 8:26-27, 34; Hebrews 7:25.