



Pentecost 16

September 24, 2017 – 10:15 a.m.

Rev. Todd Goldschmidt, Pastor

Theme: God Loves A Cheerful Giver!

Sermon Text: 2 Corinthians 9:6-11

Generosity Encouraged

⁶Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. ⁷Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. ⁸And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. ⁹As it is written:

“They have freely scattered their gifts to the poor;
their righteousness endures forever.” ^{Psalm 112:9}

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

Sunday Worship Service: 10:15 A.M. (Sunday School/Adult Bible Study 9 am)

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Scenario #1: You're the parent. It's Saturday morning, and your family's eating breakfast. Before your teenage children head out for the hills, you remind them that they need to make their beds and clean up their rooms first. And then the whining starts. *"But we want to leave right away! Why do we have to? Besides, nobody is coming over to see our room! What difference does it make?"* After listening to their arguing and complaining, you put your foot down, they finally head upstairs, make their beds and clean up their rooms, albeit grudgingly.

Scenario #2: You're the parent. It's Saturday morning, and your family's eating breakfast. Before your teenage children head out the door, you remind them that they need to make their beds and clean up their rooms first. And while busily shoveling down their food the way teenagers do, they say, *"Okay."* After finishing their plates and remembering to put them in the dishwasher, they immediately head upstairs, make their beds and clean up their rooms, head back downstairs, say *"good-bye,"* and head off to do whatever they'd planned for the day.

If you're the parent, which scenario would you prefer? I think the answer is obvious! Both scenarios get the job done, but you'd rather see the job done with a cheerful attitude. In the Bible reading chosen for today's sermon, the apostle Paul is going to talk to us about our financial stewardship. The predominant thought that comes through in our reading doesn't say as much about *what* we give as it says about the attitude with which we give. Parents want children who listen cheerfully, and in a similar way, God wants children who give cheerfully. God loves a cheerful giver! That's what Paul will teach us today in his 2nd letter to the Corinthians, chapter nine.

Whether you work at home or away from home, you probably have daily tasks that need your attention. Some you probably don't mind doing. Others you wish you could ignore or forget about, but you have an obligation to perform them. How do we approach giving our offerings to the Lord? Is this a task we're glad to do, or does this feel more like a necessary evil? Paul doesn't want us to make the latter our way of thinking. He wrote, **"Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion."** The word translated **"reluctantly"** means to feel grief and pain over something. The words for **"under compulsion"** have the idea that a person is forced to endure something they don't want to. Put the thoughts together, and Paul shows us the attitude God **doesn't** want us to take with our offerings. God loves a cheerful giver, and a cheerful giver isn't hindered by grief.

Perhaps you've heard the phrase, *"Give until it hurts"*? It suggests that Christians haven't really given to God until their giving hits their checkbook hard. Sacrificial giving is a tremendous act of faith, but *"Give until it hurts"* is a pretty lousy motto for Christian stewardship. That sounds a lot like giving **"reluctantly or under compulsion"** instead of

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cheerful giving. Church leaders have to be on guard lest they guilt people into stewardship, but Christians also have to be on guard lest they create excuses that get in the way of cheerful giving. Let's face it. It's all too easy to come up with excuses for holding back on our financial stewardship. Anytime our Christian nature wants to commit to a generous and consistent offering, our sinful nature is right there to squeal out its objections. *"But this kind of giving will cut into our money for that tropical vacation!"* Or, *"How can we afford the car we're planning to buy?"* Or, *"How will we be able to maintain the lifestyle we've become so accustomed to?"*

On the one hand, we can't give when we don't have—particularly when times are tough. On the other hand, how many excuses can our sinful nature come up with that are really just sin-produced barriers to cheerful giving? How easily the sin that resides in our hearts shows up in selfish plans for scrawny gifts! How easily we can spend 110% of what we earn, but how hesitantly we are to give our last leftover pennies to the Lord! The fact that stewardship talk can cause us grief says a lot about sin's control over our hearts, it says a lot about misplaced priorities that put our wants before God's work, and it says a lot about the "guilty" verdict that should come down on all of us in God's eternal courtroom.

WELS pastor, Mark Cares, founder and head of **Truth in Love Ministries**, is particularly gifted in outreach to Mormons. In one of his recent posts, he talked about a Mormon who wrote to him. This man was troubled with some of the teachings of the Latter-Day Saints, but he also thought that the guilt his theology gave him was a good thing. *"Guilt is the gift that keeps on giving,"* he wrote. That sentiment doesn't exactly jibe with **"God loves a cheerful giver,"** does it? Today's reading shows us that God doesn't goad us into giving, but His grace and blessings enable us to give cheerfully. Paul says, **"God is able to make all grace about to you."** God's been generous with His grace, giving His all—yes, His only Son—to redeem the world from sin at the cross and to prove that His redemption is certain by His empty tomb. On top of that great spiritual blessing, God gives us what we need day by day. **"In all things at all times, having all you need, you will abound in every good work."** We've been given faith and forgiveness for our soul. We have so many material things in our homes we don't know where to store it all. Paul's right in saying we **"[have] all [we] need"**—and so much more!

With every need for soul and body satisfied, we can **"abound in every good work."** Paul follows that statement with a short quote from **Psalm 112**. The quote sounds like it's talking about God, but if you read the entire psalm, you'll realize that it's talking about the believer when it says, **"He has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor."** God's blessings enable cheerful giving, whether it's giving to help those in need or giving to help the mission of the church.

The 1st century world of Paul was a far more agricultural society than this area is in the 21st century. So to make his point in another way, Paul uses an agricultural illustration that his readers could relate to. **"Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously."** The farmer who foolishly thinks he's going to lose something by planting lots of seed will come out short come harvest time. But the farmer who wants to reap a generous harvest knows that he has to sow seed freely. Paul wants his readers to grasp that Christian giving works the

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same way. If we're worried that our offerings will cause us to lose something we won't have much to show for it. But if we know that God's forgiving grace and daily blessings never run short, we'll give generous offerings with joy, and in the end God's kingdom will have something to show for it. God's blessings enable cheerful giving!

We need to focus first on God's grace before we can really talk about Christian stewardship—especially financial stewardship. If you want to be enabled to give generously to the Lord and His church, then look at how much God's given you.

The Father didn't spare His only Son, but gave Him up for us all. Jesus Christ gave up the riches of heaven so that we could inherit the glories of heaven. Jesus gave His life into death on the cross so that you could be given life through His wounds. He gave His life and shed His blood to make us right with God, and He rose from the dead to prove that He accomplished that amazing feat.

And God took His grace still further. For everything Jesus did for the world 2,000 years ago has been given to you in your baptism. God gave you His pledge to stand by your side, His guarantee that you're His forgiven child, His promise to take you from this world one day and give you heaven. He gave you all these blessings when he adopted you at the baptismal font. And He continues bringing you His forgiveness and commitment when you open the pages of his Word and stand at the foot of his altar for His Supper. With so many spiritual blessings given to you from God, with so many expressions of His loving commitment, is there any doubt that we can be cheerful givers in gratitude for the one who's given us so much?

When Paul first wrote these words in 2nd Corinthians, he was organizing a special offering to support the Christians living in Jerusalem. Christians in and around Jerusalem suffered from abject poverty. A regional famine combined with persecution made it hard to live and work as a Christian in that region. The Christians in Jerusalem faced severe hardships. Paul wanted the Corinthians to look at the spiritual and physical riches they had, and then let the generous grace of God lead them to a generous gift for these needy Christians. In turn, their gifts would result in generous thanksgiving from their fellow Christians. **“Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.”**

Paul had every reason to anticipate that the Jerusalem Christians would be filled with gratitude for the gift they would receive from their brothers and sisters in the faith, many whom they probably would not meet until heaven. And their gratitude would not only extend to the Christians who gave the offering, but their gratitude would especially extend to God who moved the hearts of those Christians to give in the first place. **“God loves a cheerful giver,”** and the gifts of cheerful givers bring thanks and praise to God.

Are you grateful that you can attend a church that doesn't mix human opinion with God's authoritative Word? I know there are many of you who feel that way, because you sought out this congregation for that very reason. Then we have reason to thank God for the gifts of your fellow church members who support this church's ministry! Are you grateful that you

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belong to a church body that sends missionaries to places where you cannot go and to places where the gospel needs to be heard? I know there are many of you who feel that way, because every time a mission appeal is made, there's been tremendous support. Then we have reason to thank God for the gifts of people across our synod who love and support our world mission work at home and abroad. Are you grateful that you've come to rely on a reliable and consistent gospel message preached from this pulpit and the pulpits of our synod?

I know there are many of you who feel that way, because that's why you affiliate with the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. Then we have reason to thank God for the people across our synod whose gifts support the professors at our ministry-training college and seminary! Your cheerful giving and that of your fellow Christians really does bring praise and thanks to God.

It's been said that some people think the first letter in the word stewardship is not an "S," but a dollar sign. Financial stewardship and offerings are our focus this morning, but stewardship is much bigger than money. When we first concentrate on our stewardship of God's Word and our regular connection to His grace, then we can put financial stewardship in its proper perspective. Then we won't give out of grief. Then our gifts will be enabled by God's blessings. Then our gifts will result in thanks to God. Then we'll be the kind of cheerful givers God has made us to be. Amen.

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