

CHAPTER 9

GIVING – NEW TESTAMENT TEACHINGS

In Chapter 8, we surveyed the Old Testament on the subject of giving. We learned much about the mind of God, and what He commanded Israel to do. From that study, it seems clear to me that God considers giving to be the most important part of handling money. Some of that teaching is helpful to us in developing our own convictions about giving. But we are not under the commandments of the Old Testament. We are under the commandments of Jesus and the apostles. Jesus told us to obey, and teach others to obey, all He commanded. In this chapter we want to try to define and understand all that is commanded us on the subject of giving.

You might like to review the list of commandments in Chapter 3. Many of them concern giving. Here is a sampling of the giving commandments.

FROM JESUS

MATTHEW

- 5:42 Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you.
- 6:2-4 Do your giving in secret and your heavenly Father will reward you.
- 6:19-24 Do not store up for yourselves treasure on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and thieves break in and steal.
- 6:19-24 Store up for yourselves treasure in heaven, where moth and rust don't destroy, and thieves do not steal.
- 22:17-21 Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's.

LUKE

- 6:38 Give and it will be given to you, for by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you in return.
- 12:32-33 Don't be afraid. Sell your possessions and give to the poor, which will secure you treasure in heaven.

Biblical Economics

FROM THE APOSTLES

ACTS

4:34-35 Those with a surplus share with those in need that the work may go forward.

20:35 Work hard, helping the weak, remembering Jesus' words, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

ROMANS

12:13 Contribute to the needs of the saints.

1 CORINTHIANS

9:1-14 Contribute to the financial support of those who minister the word to you.

16:1-2 As God prospers you, set aside each week your gift toward the offering for the saints in Jerusalem.

2 CORINTHIANS

8:7-8 Just as you abound in all other spiritual gifts, see that you also abound in giving.

8:11-15 Follow through and make good on your giving commitments. Those with a surplus share with those in need.

9:6-11 Give what you purpose in your heart to give, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

9:6-11 Understand those who sow sparingly will so reap, and those who sow abundantly will reap abundantly.

1 TIMOTHY

6:17-19 Instruct those who are rich to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share.

HEBREWS

13:16 Do not neglect doing good and sharing, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.

1 JOHN

3:16-18 Whoever sees his brother in need and closes his heart to him, how does the love of God abide in him?

Did you notice in these commands the recurrence of the word *need*? New Testament giving concentrates on the meeting of specific needs.

Paul instructed the Romans to “contribute to the **needs** of the saints,” and in 2 Corinthians he wrote, “at the present time, your surplus will supply what they **need**,” a reference to the saints in Jerusalem who were suffering financial hardship. To the Ephesians he wrote, “Let him who steals steal no more, but rather let him labor, performing with his own hands what is good, in order that he may have something to share with him who has **need**.” In his first epistle, John wrote, “Whoever has the world’s goods, and beholds his brother in **need** and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?”

There is an interesting occurrence of the word “need” in the book of Acts.

There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had **need** [Acts 4:34-35].

This is a description of what was happening in the Jerusalem church, but not a command. Many members with a surplus of wealth contributed money into the treasury of the church, and the church leaders made distribution to individual members to meet their needs.

In some passages, needs are implied though not specifically stated. Certainly, the commandments to support financially those who minister the word to us imply a need. Those who give full time to teaching and shepherding the local fellowship of believers are to be dependent on the members for their financial support.

And clearly the commandments Paul gives to Timothy concerning assistance for widows imply a financial need. So the New Testament commandments on giving pretty much boil down to giving to meet specific needs of individuals and ministries involved in building the kingdom.

But what are the legitimate needs referred to in these commands? Paul has left little doubt about the answer to this question, as he comments on Jesus' teachings.

And if we have food and covering, with these we shall be content [1 Timothy 6:8 (NASB)].

We've already studied this passage in Chapter 5, but we note here in passing that "needs" are limited to the strict necessities food, clothing and shelter, or as Paul states it, "food and covering." And before we are tempted to ask, what quality and quantity of food, clothing and shelter, let's remember Paul's next statement.

People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction [1 Timothy 6:9].

Here he contrasts the person content with the bare necessities with the person who is not. That person, Paul says, is a person who desires to get rich. Therefore he is defining rich as anyone who has more than the bare necessities. He's not saying it's a sin to be rich, just that it is a sin to **want** to be rich. That's made even clearer in the next verse. Notice how consistent this is with Jesus' command that we not store wealth for ourselves on earth, but in heaven.

But what we want to draw from this passage is the definition of "need" in the giving commandments. Those with a surplus above the bare necessities are to share with those who lack the bare necessities. But there's more than this to the definition of "need."

... if anyone will not work, neither let him eat [2 Thessalonians 3:10b (NASB)].

Food for a person who is able to work but refuses to do so does not fit the definition of "need" in the giving commands. To feed such a person would be a failure to love him with the "agape" kind of love we are commanded to exercise. As we have previously established, this love is unconditional and acts only in what is in the best interest of the one loved. That is the chief attribute of agape.

DESIGNATED GIVING BASED ON NEED

I have thought about the subject of giving for many years, and the best title to describe New Testament giving I have come up with is, “designated giving based on need.” By this I mean giving designated to meet specific, known, legitimate, verifiable needs of individuals and/or ministries.

With that in mind, how then should we proceed to determine the details of our giving? How much should we give? To whom should we give it? What portion should go to our local church? Is the tithe binding on the Christian today? Should it be a guide or starting place for our giving? These are the questions we will seek to answer in this chapter and in Chapter 10, which will deal specifically with the tithe.

The answers to these questions are found in a single passage of Scripture. This passage, combined with only three or four cross references and the list of commands constitute the sum total of New Testament teaching on giving. The passage is 2 Corinthians Chapters 8 and 9. It is the longest passage in the New Testament on giving, 39 verses, and is an almost complete commentary on the list of giving commands of Jesus and the apostles, a fact I had overlooked for many years. To me, it is an amazing passage, and so important that it deserves a close verse by verse study. The following is my attempt to communicate its truth. I believe you would find it profitable to turn to this passage in your Bible and follow along as we study it.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND – THE JERUSALEM RELIEF FUND

The background to this passage is an actual historical event, one which is both interesting and important to understand. The Jerusalem church of the first century was suffering extreme financial hardship, probably for two main reasons; a drought which was occurring, and persecution because of its identification with Jesus Christ. If you were a Jewish person in the first century who converted to Christ and bore witness to that fact, chances are you lost your job. And you were also ostracized in other ways in that society. Things got so bad in that church the members who had assets with value sold them, some even their homes, and brought the money to the apostles, who then distributed it to those in poverty according to their need.

The wording of Acts 4:34-35 suggests a rather extreme degree of financial hardship. Paul apparently became burdened for this financial need, and organized a fund raising effort among many of the other churches he had visited and helped start. The apostle mentioned this project in his first letter to the Corinthians.

Now about the collection for God's people: Do what I told the Galatian churches to do. On the first day of every week, each one of you set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made. Then, when I arrive, I will give letters of introduction to the men you approve and send them with your gift to Jerusalem [1 Corinthians 16:1-3].

Paul did not want this to be an incidental or impulsive offering. He wanted them to give thought, and no doubt prayer, and actually set the money aside in advance, so that he would not have to create the pressure of taking an offering when he got there.

Sometime after the writing of 1 Corinthians and before the writing of 2 Corinthians, Titus apparently went to Corinth and began this fund raising project at Paul's instructions. This seems apparent from 2 Corinthians 8:6.

So we urged Titus, since he had earlier made a beginning, to bring also to completion this act of grace on your part [2 Corinthians 8:6].

But it's also likely that between the writing of the two letters, Titus, having gone to Corinth to begin this project, returned and reported to Paul that the Corinthians had not followed through on their initial commitment. And thus Paul felt compelled to devote this entire section of the second Corinthian letter to this subject. That is the interesting background to this passage. With this background in mind let's read the first 5 verses of the passage.

And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they

were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints. And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will [2 Corinthians 8:1-5].

Macedonia was the northern part of the nation of Greece, and Achaia was the southern part, very much like two states in that nation. The Macedonian churches referred to here are generally believed to be the churches in Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea. Paul begins this part of his letter by citing these churches as examples of the grace of giving even, as we read, sacrificial giving. Here were a group of people over in Macedonia, not just willing to help another group of people in Jerusalem, but actually going to Paul and begging him for the right to have a part in the offering. That's a little unusual, isn't it? As he put it in verse 4, "They urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints." This surely must have delighted Paul. Perhaps he responded with something like, "That's wonderful." But then they surprised Paul and gave beyond what he expected they gave sacrificially.

This is certainly atypical to say the least, and the question came to me, why would a group of people like this, who probably had never even seen the people in Jerusalem, do this? The answer is found in these verses, and from it we learn important principles of the theology of giving. Notice again verse 1. "And now brothers, we want you to know about the **grace** that God has **given** to the Macedonian churches." Scriptural giving is a grace, or we might prefer the term "spiritual gift," which God bestows upon certain members of the body of Christ. And God selects who gets which gift and how much of it. But God gives this kind of a grace to a believer with a willing, dedicated heart. Look again at verse 5. "And they did not do as we expected, but they **gave themselves** first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will. You have to want to be a disciple of Jesus Christ with all your heart before God will give you this kind of a grace or spiritual gift.

In trying to understand this, I think that this is a case of the sovereignty of God cooperating with the responsible choice of man. We must accept and act upon the fact that we have responsible choice in

determining our stewardship, and yet God is sovereign in His bestowal of the graces and gifts among us. That's the best I can do with it.

But why is Paul telling this to the Corinthians? He wants to motivate them to the same kind of commitment that he saw in the Macedonians. He didn't see the grace of giving in evidence in Corinth. And that's interesting, because the Corinthian church was much more affluent than the Macedonian churches. The Corinthians didn't need any more money in the bank. They needed more grace in the heart. I believe that's still the problem today. I am convinced we don't need any more money in the bank accounts of Christians today to do God's perfect will. I think we need more grace in the heart. The message behind Paul's words here seems to be, "You Corinthians need a revival which will lead to a heart commitment concerning your stewardship. You need to respond to the truth the apostles have taught you, and to the promptings of the Holy Spirit in your hearts, and then God will give you the grace of giving."

So we urged Titus, since he had earlier made a beginning, to bring also to completion this act of grace on your part. But just as you excel in everything ... in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness in your love for us ... see that you also excel in this grace of giving [2 Corinthians 8:6-7].

Paul is complimenting the Corinthians on some of the gifts and graces at which they did excel faith, knowledge, love. By highlighting their strong points, he wanted them to realize their weak areas "see that you also excel in this grace of giving."

I am not commanding you, but I do want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others [2 Corinthians 8:8].

Paul wants them to understand that he is not telling them how much to give. He's not setting a quota, or the expectation of a certain minimum amount. I would note in passing that nowhere in the New Testament do I find any instruction to the believer as to how much or what percent to give. As we have previously noted, New Testament stewardship is stewardship of 100%. The believer has complete latitude in determining his giving, and then must give complete accountability for

his decisions at the Judgment Seat of Christ. His reward and station in eternity will be based on how well he executed Jesus' command to store his wealth in heaven rather than on earth. In this we see that in no way does God "need" our gift. Giving is a system God has set up for *our* benefit, not His. It seems easier for us to enjoy the other spiritual gifts, and encourage others to excel in them. Today we miss out on the great blessing from giving, which is really for the giver.

Now look at the first phrase of verse 10.

And here is my advice about what is best for you in this matter ... [2 Corinthians 8:10a].

In verse 8 Paul said, "I'm not telling you how much to give." Then verse 10, "but I do have some counsel some advice." And then do we read something like this, "We need \$100,000 for this offering, and if you folks in Corinth could give \$20,000 as your part, it would be wonderful?" No, we don't read anything like that. He goes right back to the problem a lack of willingness or commitment in the heart.

Last year you were the first not only to give but also to have the desire to do so. Now finish the work, so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it, according to your means [2 Corinthians 8:10b, 11].

Paul's saying to them, "You've lost your willingness." Initially they made a commitment, but then did not follow up on it. I don't know of a better statement of this truth than what we read in verse 12. I think Paul really gets to the bottom line of the burden that is in his heart in verse 12.

For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what he does not have [2 Corinthians 8:12].

That strikes me as a great statement one which should relax us on this matter of giving. God does not expect us to give that which we do not have, or do not have control over. The problem is never a lack of money. The problem is a lack of willingness, or heart commitment ... thinking of ourselves as owners of wealth instead of managers of God's

property. All true scriptural giving begins by dealing with that spiritual problem in the heart.

THE DIVINE SEQUENCE IN GIVING

Let me pause here and insert a summary or analysis of what I believe Paul is teaching in this passage. I have given it the title *The Divine Sequence in Giving*. It presents the giving transaction as a four step process when it is done according to the New Testament.

STEP ONE

The believer makes a decision to become a good manager of God's property. He makes a heart commitment to become a good steward. This is the point at which he turns his assets back over to God. He signs the stewardship agreement. Paul has called that "willingness" in the verses we have just studied. This is the first step in all true scriptural giving. Let me say to all of our hearts, don't wait until you have money to make this decision. Giving starts in the heart, not in the pocketbook.

When God reads willingness in the heart, then He takes over and performs the other three steps. Our only responsibility is to take the first step, then God takes it from there.

STEP TWO

God sovereignly bestows the grace of giving when He reads willingness in the heart. He gives the believer the spiritual gift of giving.

STEP THREE

God supplies the financial means of expressing the grace that He has put in the heart. Wouldn't it be unthinkable for God to give a person the grace of giving and nothing to give? Notice that the sequence is critical. You may not have any money today, but if you take step one, then the money will be there when the time for giving it comes. Or, perhaps when we decide to be a good manager, God removes the

blindness that has prevented our seeing what He has already provided for us to give.

STEP FOUR

God lays a specific need of His kingdom's work on the heart of the willing steward, who then gives to meet that specific need, and that completes the process.

God is in control and has our best interest at heart. He is the sovereign engineer of the circumstances of our life. He will lay a specific need of an individual, or a ministry, on the heart of a willing steward. He has an unlimited number of ways of doing it. It might come from printed material. It might come from a sermon, a Bible study, a missionary report, contact with someone who is poor, or any number of other ways. Here Paul discloses the need in the Jerusalem church by letter, no doubt with the expectation and prayer that some of the Corinthians would make a commitment of heart, and thus go through these four steps.

When I first taught this subject in my church in 1980, our board of elders decided to add a section in our church bulletin entitled "Prayer and Giving Guide." It simply lists legitimate financial needs of our congregation and ministries, so that our members may be aware of them, pray for them, and give as God leads them. They are rarely mentioned verbally, and remain on the list until the need is met. At times this section is blank. It is a disclosure of need, not an appeal for money. After thirty years it's still a part of our bulletin. I have seen it greatly blessed over the years.

Keep this four step process in mind as we continue through this passage. You will note further references to the steps.

Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality [2 Corinthians 8:13].

Here we come to an area of the theology of giving in which it is very important to have the balance of Scripture, that is, all of the truth that bears upon it, else we are in danger of slipping off into error. There are times when God will lead us to give sacrificially to give beyond

our normal ability. There are other times when He will not. There are even times when He will lead us to give everything that we have. He does not usually lead in that way. But if He does He will give us the grace to give in that fashion. Remember the example of the widow who gave all that she had. God gave her the grace to do that. And as I have said, I doubt that she missed a meal following that incident, because God takes care of His good stewards.

I trust you can see from this the importance of holding all of the truth on a given doctrine in balance. Suppose we decided to formulate the theology of giving as found in the Bible, but read just this one verse. Our conclusion would be that God does not ever intend for us to be hard pressed as a result of our giving. Paul has just cited the Macedonian churches who gave to the point of being hard pressed, and he commended them for their sacrifice. Jesus commended the widow when she gave all she had. But here Paul is saying something to the effect of, "It is not my desire that you Corinthians on this occasion be hard pressed." Perhaps Paul did not think they had the grace to give sacrificially. God bestows grace for the occasion when He reads willingness in the heart. That is the principle. That's step two in the process.

I once heard an illustration which has helped me to understand this. We've all heard about dying grace. When a Christian who's in fellowship with God dies, God supplies dying grace. We don't want to die. We resist death with all the strength we have. And yet, when it comes time to die, a believer, walking in fellowship with God, will be supernaturally given the grace needed to step through the veil of death easily. And God bestows that grace when it is needed, not before. Someone once asked the great evangelist, Dwight L. Moody if he had dying grace. Perhaps it had come up in one of his messages. And Mr. Moody said, "No, I don't." The surprised enquirer asked, "Why don't you, Mr. Moody?" And he replied, "Because I'm not dying." You see, God supplies grace when it is needed, and not before.

So also with the grace of giving. If someone asked me today, do you have the grace to give 100% of all you have?, I would answer, "No, I do not, and I really don't think it's God's will for me today." But I think that the day could come when God would lead me, and some of you, to give sacrificially. One reason I think this is that I believe we

could live to experience a world wide economic crisis and find ourselves doing the same thing these first century Christians did. And if so, I take comfort in the fact that the grace we will need will be there, as well as the financial resources needed to express that grace.

Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality. At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. Then there will be equality [2 Corinthians 8:13-14].

We must be careful here with this word “equality,” which Paul uses twice. He is not speaking of equal ownership of property. That’s communism, and I do not see support for communism in the Bible. This equality to which he refers is equal relief from the burden of want. This is not a redistribution of wealth. This is a meeting of needs, which seems to be the clear intent of the giving commands. There is a big difference in the two approaches. One is welfare administered by the state. The other is a meeting of needs administered through the treasury of the local fellowship of believers. And one of the ways that we know this is the illustration with which Paul follows, the giving of the manna in the wilderness. He quotes Exodus 16:18 in verse 15.

As it is written: “He that gathered much did not have too much, and he that gathered little did not have too little” [2 Corinthians 8:15].

Have you ever studied that story of the manna in the wilderness? You remember that God gave only enough for each day’s need. And some people gathered a little bit more than they needed while others didn’t get enough. So they shared. And that’s a perfect illustration of God’s plan. It is essentially a plan of those with a surplus sharing with those with a need. But it is not a wealth redistribution plan.

I thank God, who put it into the heart of Titus the same concern I have for you. For Titus not only welcomed our appeal, but he is coming to you with much enthusiasm and on his own initiative [2 Corinthians 8:16-17].

We see here that Titus is going to go back to Corinth, some scholars think for the third time, to encourage the Corinthians to finally make good on their commitment. And, incidentally, they probably did, because it is mentioned in Romans 15:26-27 that they gave an offering.

And we are sending along with him the brother who is praised by all the churches for his service to the gospel [2 Corinthians 8:18].

We do not know who this brother is. The important thing is not his name but his character “the brother who is praised by all the churches.”

What is more, he was chosen by the churches to accompany us as we carry the offering, which we administer in order to honor the Lord Himself and to show our eagerness to help [2 Corinthians 8:19].

Paul is describing the appointment of some men as trustees to handle the money, describing their character and abilities which qualify them as being worthy of this trust.

We want to avoid any criticism of the way we administer this liberal gift. For we are taking pains to do what is right, not only in the eyes of the Lord but also in the eyes of men [2 Corinthians 8:20-21].

Here we find a very important principle of handling the Lord’s money. The conduct of the Lord’s financial affairs should be handled with scrupulous honesty, integrity, accountability and disclosure. Having said that, I cannot help thinking about some of the television ministries which have been in the news in recent years. If they had been accountable and had fully disclosed what the money was used for, we wouldn’t have had some of the scandals that occurred. So let this be a lesson to all of us in the church today. We must be accountable for the use of God’s money in our ministries.

In addition, we are sending with them our brother who has often proved to us in many ways that he is zealous, and now even more so because of his great confidence in you. As for Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker among you. As for our

brothers, they are representatives of the churches and an honor to Christ. Therefore show these men the proof of your love and the reason for our pride in you, so that the churches can see it [2 Corinthians 8:22-24].

Now we come to Chapter 9, and there is no break in the flow of the passage at all. Even though the King James translation put a break here, in most of the later translations there is no paragraph break at this point, so we go right on reading.

There is no need for me to write to you about this service to the saints [2 Corinthians 9:1].

This is an interesting statement because Paul is writing to them. And I think what Paul is intimating here is something like, “You are the kind of people that don’t really need to be reminded about this. You’re going to do the right thing.” I think he’s using a little psychology.

For I know your eagerness to help, and I have been boasting about it to the Macedonians, telling them that since last year you in Achaia were ready to give, and your enthusiasm has stirred most of them to action [2 Corinthians 9:2].

This is humorous. Apparently Corinth was the first to make a commitment toward this offering, so Paul cited the enthusiasm of the Corinthians to the Macedonians, which motivated them, and they gave that great sacrificial offering. Now Paul comes back and cites the example of the Macedonians to motivate the Corinthians. He’s got a little friendly competition going between the churches. Paul was a great theologian. He was also a great fund raiser. And we can learn from him.

But I am sending the brothers in order that our boasting about you in this matter should not prove hollow, but that you may be ready as I said you would be. For if any Macedonians come with me and find you unprepared, we ... not to say anything about you ... would be ashamed of having been so confident [2 Corinthians 9:3-4].

This is almost a little bit sneaky of Paul. He is saying I've been bragging about you to the Macedonians, and wouldn't it be terrible if one of those Macedonians just happened to come with me to Corinth, and you had fallen down on your offering that would be a terrible embarrassment not only to you but to me.

So I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to visit you in advance and finish the arrangements for the generous gift you had promised. Then it will be ready as a generous gift, not as one grudgingly given [2 Corinthians 9:5].

I think we would all agree that Paul is applying a little bit of psychological pressure here. He used the word "generous" twice. He doesn't want anything other than that in their minds. But he does this without ever violating any of the basic New Testament principles of giving. That will become even clearer as we read the next six verses. And his whole objective is to motivate the Corinthians to a change of heart, because he knows that if they make a heart commitment, God will give them the grace, and lead them to give as they should.

Now we come to the heart of this two-chapter passage. In verses 6-11 Paul repeats and re-expresses the four steps in the giving process. I think these six verses are the greatest expression of the theology of giving to be found in the entire Bible. If you are one who likes to memorize Scripture, I would encourage you to include these verses. Here is the heart of financial stewardship.

Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly shall also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously [2 Corinthians 9:6].

In verse 7, Paul will press the Corinthians for a decision about their part in the offering. But before he does that, he begins with the words "Remember this." It's as if he were saying to these people, "As you Corinthians consider your part in this offering, there is something I want you to remember I want you to bear something in mind. I want you to be aware of the consequences of your decision. There is a cause and effect law that operates in the giving transaction." And Paul uses sowing and reaping, or planting and harvesting, to illustrate this cause and effect law. He is explaining that there are some ways in

which farming and giving are alike. The way that a farmer sows his seeds in the ground the amount of seeds, the amount of labor, the amount of water and fertilizer he puts into a crop will determine to a large extent what he harvests. And unless a farmer keeps back some of the seeds and some of the profit from a crop and invests it in the next crop, then there won't be a next crop. The same law applies to giving. This is divine viewpoint on giving. And like most major issues of life, it is opposite to human viewpoint or logic. Human logic says giving results in a loss to the giver, or a loss of security. Scripture teaches the opposite. Money given to the Lord's work should never be looked at as lost any more than a farmer would look at the seeds and water and labor he puts into a crop as lost. He looks at it as an investment with the expectation of a greater gain. That is Paul's point, "Whoever sows generously will also reap generously." But that is only half of the truth. Did you notice that Paul stated the negative side of the truth first, "Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly." Not only will an ungenerous giver fail to get the blessings that could be his, he will actually suffer loss.

I remind us that the cause and effect axiom Paul is expressing here is what theologians call "The Law of the Harvest." It is also stated in passages like Galatians 6:7, "Do not be deceived, God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows." But a law is not a law unless it is true 100% of the time. The Law of the Harvest is a law only in eternity.

The ungenerous giver may or may not suffer financial loss in this life, but he will suffer loss of reward in eternity 100% of the time. The books will be balanced perfectly in eternity. **It is very important to understand this, because many people believe this axiom is true only in this life.**

STEP ONE RESTATED

Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver [2 Corinthians 9:7].

Here Paul re-expresses step one of the giving process, and presses the Corinthians for a decision, a heart commitment. Stewardship is

individual. Each one of us is responsible to make a decision of the will. One commentary I read translated, “Each person should give as he determines with the consent of his heart.” Giving must be voluntary to be acceptable to God. Then Paul states it negatively after having stated it positively. He says, “not reluctantly or under compulsion.” The word “reluctantly” means literally “out of pain, grief or regret.” The King James translates “not grudgingly.” That means wishing you hadn’t given it.

Then he says, “not under compulsion,” which means not under pressure. Have you ever given under pressure? It’s not acceptable to God. It’s giving motivated by your circumstances rather than your will. Sometimes we give because somebody twisted our arm. Sometimes we give because we want to make an impression on someone. Or we give perhaps with the idea of receiving something in return. Giving under compulsion is not acceptable to God.

So, scriptural giving is voluntary, willing, not painful, not pressured giving. And just to put the capstone on this verse Paul concludes with a phrase very well known to most Christians, “God loves a cheerful giver.” Most of you have probably been taught that cheerful is a translation of the Greek word *hilaros*, from which we get our English word “hilarious.” Scriptural giving is hilarious giving joyous giving. The cheerful giver is one who does not hurt. He does not sorrow. He does not grieve. He does not regret.

He gives joyously, and he gives easily it just flows out. And once he experiences *hilaros* giving, he wants to experience it again. It’s almost intoxicating, if I can use that term in a good sense. As an example, a cheerful giver gets more joy and fun out of buying a car for a missionary than buying a car for himself.

NOTICE THAT VERSE 7 HAS ENTIRELY TO DO WITH ATTITUDE.

And until the heart attitude has been changed to that described by Paul in verse 7, step one has not been taken, and the giving process has not even begun as far as God is concerned. Once step one has been taken, then the other steps follow as he explains in the next verse.

STEPS TWO, THREE AND FOUR RESTATED

And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work [2 Corinthians 9:8].

This is one of the great promises of the Bible, the reassurance that acting contrary to our natural instincts will not result in our harm. The world says that giving is a way of reducing your wealth and your security. The Bible says it's a way of increasing it. Which is right? We must decide. We have a choice between human and divine viewpoint. Either we trust in our natural instincts and logic, or we trust in the eternal sovereign God of this universe and His Word.

Paul says, "God is able." God is able to do what according to verse 8? Answer: Supply two things, the grace of giving, and the material resources necessary to express that grace. Notice Paul's four uses of the word "all." "All grace," meaning the full measure of the spiritual gift of giving which you will need. "In all things," meaning all the circumstances of life. "At all times," meaning it will always be there when needed. And "all that you need," meaning all the money which you will need to exercise the grace. What an incredible promise.

As it is written: "He has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor. His righteousness endures forever" [2 Corinthians 9:9].

Here Paul quotes Psalm 112:9. Psalm 112 is a description of the God-fearing man, and one of the characteristics of the God-fearing man is that he consistently gives to people in need. If you read all of Psalm 112, you read how God keeps supplying the God-fearing man with resources to give, not resources to hoard, or spend selfishly resources to give.

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 [2 Corinthians 9:10].

Here is another interesting way of stating the truth he has just stated in verse 8. God will supply seed to the **sower**. Who is the sower? The one willing to put the seed into the ground. God does not multiply

grain in the granary. He only multiplies it when it is sown into the ground. The message is clear. The sower is the one with the willing heart. The sower is the cheerful giver. That takes us right back to the thesis of the passage. Our job is to be willing and cheerful (that's step one), and God takes it from there and supplies the grace and the necessary resources (steps two and three). Then Paul states it in yet another way in the next verse.

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 [2 Corinthians 9:11].

Here is a verse to let sink in. "Made rich" is passive voice both in the original and in the English translation. And the passive voice means that the subject, *you*, receives the action of the verb, *made rich*. You and I don't have anything to do with it other than a willing heart. God decides to make us rich - and how rich - financially, so that we can be generous on every occasion.

There are many ways a Christian can be made rich besides materially. But this entire context demands that the primary emphasis here is on material wealth. Having said that, we must be careful how we interpret this verse. The verse clearly states God's reason for making us "rich" is so that we can be generous so that we'll have money to give. God does not make us rich for selfish purposes. Some Christians want to play this verse like the stock market. That's a misapplication, and it's always good to look at other verses which give counterbalancing truth.

People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction [1 Timothy 6:9].

The "made rich" of this verse is not a bonus for service. It's not so that we can heap up wealth on this earth. It's for kingdom purposes. It's so that we'll have more in order to keep the giving process going.

I consider 2 Corinthians 9:6-11 to be the greatest statement of the theology of giving to be found in the Bible. They are great verses to memorize and meditate on and pray about.

This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of God's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, men will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else. And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you [2 Corinthians 9:12-14].

In verse 13, notice that obedience accompanies a true confession of the Gospel. I love verse 14, where Paul mentions one of the great benefits and blessings which we receive when we give. Those whom we support will pray for us. They will intercede before God on our behalf. Thus we will receive benefits in this life, then eternal reward in heaven. I cannot imagine a better deal than this.

Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift! [2 Corinthians 9:15].

Paul ends this great two-chapter passage with these familiar words. How appropriate to end a long discourse on giving by citing the greatest gift the world has ever known, Jesus Christ and His redemptive act, the full, final, all sufficient and only payment for our sins.

As we think back over this chapter, I would challenge each of us to ask ourselves some questions. Where am I in the giving process? the four step sequence Paul lays out in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9? Have I taken the first step? Have I signed the stewardship agreement and deeded all my assets back to God? Do I hold them with an open hand as His manager, willing to give as He directs? Until I have taken this step, nothing of eternal value will occur.

Has God given me the grace of giving? Am I cheerful and joyous as I give? Is it easy? Or, am I reluctant? Do I wish I hadn't parted with the money? Do I feel pressured to give? Answering these questions will help confirm in my heart whether I have the spiritual gift of giving. I can have tangible evidence that I have a willing heart for giving.

Has God given me the grace to give sacrificially? That is a special gift He gives to some, as Paul explains in Romans 12:3, where he mentions that God gives us differing measures of faith along with the spiritual gifts. If I have this gift (sacrificial), giving is sometimes going to hurt, else it would not be sacrificial. That is not to say I will be grieved that I gave, but it still could be painful. Has God laid a specific need or needs of His kingdom's work on my heart to the point that I feel a compelling burden to meet that need? Has God given me the material resources to meet that need? The willing steward is constantly looking for opportunities to meet needs, while being dependent on God to provide the resources for those needs.

Can you see how God's control and His best for you (Square One) apply to giving? Do you recognize the importance of constantly defeating autonomy-lust in your life if you are going to be effective in your giving commitments? The first few chapters of this book have more practical application than you thought they did when you first read them. This is the area where you will make your stand in your fight with the world. Will you add to your net worth here or in eternity?