

## 2 Corinthians 9:6-8

### Introduction

We're thinking today about our giving as members of the church. And this passage should be helpful to us as we think that through.

The context of this letter, from the apostle Paul to the Christians in Corinth, is a specific one: it concerns a specific need of particular people at a certain point in time. The Christians in Jerusalem were experiencing hardship. And the Christians in Corinth were able to help. And they had wanted to help. Paul's missionary colleague Titus had visited them the previous year and they had pledged their support. But now the time was approaching for Paul to come and visit to collect their gift. So Paul sends Titus ahead of him, with this letter, to make sure that his visit doesn't catch the Corinthians by surprise. He doesn't want to embarrass them when he comes by finding them unprepared. So he sends Titus ahead of him to see that their collection is complete and ready by the time he arrives.

So this letter relates to a particular need at a certain time in history. However, the principles that Paul lays out here apply more generally to all Christian giving, which is why we're going to look at them now. We normally only talk about giving once a year. So I'm going to talk about it now without embarrassment, because it's an important part of Christian discipleship. And, fairly quickly, I'm going to run through three principles of Christian giving that we find in these few verses before we go on to review our church finances together.

Here's the first thing Paul says: Christian giving produces a harvest.

### Christian giving produces a harvest (verse 6)

Paul begins with a maxim, or a saying. Verse 6: **Remember this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously.**

It's a saying based on the basic principles of farming. If a farmer wants to reap a plentiful harvest, then he needs to sow plenty of seed. If he doesn't sow anything, then he won't reap anything. Likewise, if he sows sparingly, he'll reap sparingly. The size of the harvest will correspond to the quantity of seed he sows. The more seed he sows the greater the harvest he'll reap. In agriculture at least, it's common sense. And Paul's saying that Christian giving is the same. For a Christian, giving is as sensible as sowing is for a farmer.

That should encourage us. Paul's saying that we can use our money for good. We can use it to bring about a spiritual harvest. In the context of our giving review today, the money we give enables gospel ministry to be done. And if gospel ministry is being done, people of all ages are learning about Jesus. And if people of all ages are learning about Jesus, then a

spiritual harvest will follow. And it stands to sense, that the more we give, the more gospel ministry can be done, and the greater the harvest will be.

That should really encourage us.

We might think that our giving to the church is money that we'll never see again. We might be tempted to think that it's money down the drain. And we'll hardly get enthusiastic about giving if that's how we see it. But Paul's encouraging us to see it differently. Our giving is money well invested for the growth of Christ's kingdom. And the more we sow the greater the harvest. Of course, the PCC has a responsibility to make sure that the money given to the church is used well. And those who teach the Bible have a responsibility to make sure that they teach it faithfully. And we all have a responsibility to pray for the ministry that's going on here. But Paul's encouraging us to have an enthusiastic and generous attitude towards our giving, knowing that it will produce a harvest for Christ's kingdom.

So secondly, Paul says, Christian giving should be planned and cheerful.

### **Christian giving should be planned and cheerful (verse 7)**

Verse 7.

**Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.**

As Paul prepares the Corinthians to make their gift to the church in Jerusalem, he doesn't tell them just to throw a few spare coins in a collection bag: he tells them to give what they have decided in their hearts to give. In other words, he's telling them to think about what they give in advance - to consider it carefully and pray about it - and to give what they have decided is appropriate. We all have responsibility to use what we have wisely. And that means being thoughtful and prayerful about what we decide to give.

Of course, there is a place for spontaneous, impromptu giving in the Christian life. It's good to dig deep into our pockets and give spontaneously to meet a need before us, perhaps to an individual in need or in response to an appeal. But normal Christian giving is the result of a deliberate, prayerful decision.

People decide what they will give in different ways. Following principles laid down in the Old Testament, some people tithe; in other words, they give away 10% of all they receive. Others view 10% as a minimum for their giving. Others give less. The New Testament doesn't tell us how much we should give. But it does tell us to give deliberately, what we have prayerfully decided beforehand to give. And that way we can give cheerfully and generously rather than begrudgingly or reluctantly. Whatever decisions we make, they should be happy ones.

If you go to a house with children in it, it's lovely when one of the children offers you one of their sweets with a big smile on their face. But if the child only offers you a sweet begrudgingly, because they've been told to by one of their parents, that takes the pleasure out of it.

Our heavenly Father delights in *what* we give but even more in *how* we give. He loves a cheerful giver because he himself is a cheerful giver. He has gladly and graciously given us all things in Christ.

So I need to ask myself, why do I give? Is it just because I think I ought to? Am I feeling pressured into it? Or is it a willing and glad response to God's grace?

As we think of our own giving, we should ask ourselves, 'Do I put in the collection bag just what happens to be lying around at home in the morning when I leave? Or do I prayerfully set aside a certain amount each week to bring along with me?'

If we give by standing order, we should ask ourselves, "Do I review on a regular basis the amount I give, or do I let my giving just tick over from month to month?"

That decision, about how much you give, how often, and to whom, is between you and God. It's what you have decided in your heart to give, Paul says. It's a private and personal matter. It's no-one else's business...unless you're married, of course.

If you give to support the ministry here at Emmanuel, the people who know about it are our Treasurer and the person who deals with our Gift Aid. And they only know because they need to, for the sake of good book-keeping, and to claim tax relief.

When I speak to people about their giving, I only want to know three things. "Are you giving, as the Bible encourages you to?" "Are you doing so prayerfully?" And "Are you doing so in a tax efficient way?"

I don't want to know how much any one of us is giving or to whom - it's between you and God. But I do want to encourage each one of us to give deliberately and prayerfully in support of gospel ministry, as the Bible urges us to do.

So then, Paul says that Christian giving produces a harvest. Christian giving should be planned and cheerful. And finally, Christian giving brings blessing not hardship.

### **Christian giving brings blessing not hardship (verse 8)**

Look at verse 8.

**And 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.**

This isn't the prosperity gospel! This isn't saying that if you give generously, then God will make you rich. But he is saying that God will provide for you.

Not only does God want us to give *generously*, he provides the means to do so. Giving generously may appear to be reckless, especially when we don't possess very much in the first place. We may fear that we'll be worse off as a result. But, Paul says, when we give generously, we discover that, somehow, God is more than able to supply all our needs. When we're generous, he will see to it that we can *continue* to be generous. When we give gladly, he'll equip us to go on doing so.

Christian giving isn't dangerous or reckless. You and I can give *generously* knowing that our giving will produce a harvest. We can give *cheerfully* because we've prayerfully decided what to give, free from any pressure. And we can give *confidently* knowing that God will always supply our needs.

Well, in a moment we'll think a bit more about what that looks like for us here at Emmanuel. But before that, let's pray.

Loving Father, as we consider our giving this morning, please help to take to heart the things that we have just read in your word and to act on them, as we are each able. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.