

Enriched in Every Way
2 Corinthians 9:10-15

Take your Bibles and turn to 2 Corinthians 9. Today we are going to conclude our series “Giving Ourselves First to the Lord.” Paul has been appealing in chapters 8 and 9 to the Corinthian Christians to finish what they started a year ago. They had committed to giving a gift to the poor and persecuted Jewish Christians in Jerusalem. The church in Corinth was likely one of the wealthier churches. We know for certain that they had much more than their brothers and sisters in Macedonia. Corinth was a city known for its affluence.



It was located on the isthmus just under 4 miles wide, separating Peloponnese from mainland Greece. You can see in this modern-day aerial image just how narrow this isthmus is, with the Saronic Gulf to the east and the Gulf of Corinth to the west. Because of its location, it was a thoroughfare for all kinds of commerce and travelers. Corinth was likely one of the busiest cities in the Greco-Roman world. In addition to its affluence, it was a city steeped in the polytheism of Greece, with a temple to the Greek god Apollo, the god of the sun and light, standing domineeringly in the center of the city. Corinthians prided themselves as being an enlightened, sophisticated people, and were known for their art, poetry, and philosophy. There was also a temple to Aphrodite, the goddess of love, perched atop a mountain called the Acrocorinth just outside the city. This made Corinth a center for sensuality, as it was a hub for cult prostitution.



Here is an image of what remains of the Temple of Apollo today, and you can see the Acrocorinth in the background. It was in the midst of this affluent, sophisticated, sensuous pagan city that Paul labored for a year-and-a-half founding a Christian church.

As we've seen during our time in 1 and 2 Corinthians, this was a church with many problems. Paul has poured out his heart to the Corinthians, pleading with them to make room in their hearts for him. Remember back to verse 1 of chapter 7, *"Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God."* Paul wanted the Corinthians to remember that the culture around them was perverse. We often think of the culture around us as being neutral or harmless, but it is not. What Paul said to the Romans is always applicable, *"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect."* (Romans 12:2)

Because of the culture in which they found themselves, the Corinthians obviously needed some gentle prodding from their shepherd in order to view their money the way God wanted them to view it. It is those who have the most, who are most prone to fall in love with what they have. The same danger confronts us as Americans today. We are one of the most affluent cultures in the world, and we tend to forget that we need to beware of the love of money.

This is what Jesus made clear in Matthew 6, during His Sermon on the Mount. We all remember his words, *¹⁹ "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, ²⁰ but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (Matthew 6:19-21)* Less familiar are the words he spoke immediately thereafter,

²² "The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, ²³ but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness! (Matthew 6:22-23) At first glance, this statement almost appears to be a non-sequitur—it doesn't seem to logically follow His previous statement in verses 19-21. But if you pause to consider the connection, it becomes clear. The connection is what advertisers have figured out, which is that we look at the things we treasure. The eye is the gateway to the heart. Which is why marketers glam up their products to appeal to the eye. They know that if they can catch your eye, you will be much more likely to buy their product. In our consumer-driven society, we are surrounded by images designed to catch our attention, to lure us in. Marketing experts estimate that the average American is exposed to 4,000-10,000 advertisements each day.

When Jesus says, "if your eye is healthy," the Greek word for healthy is *"haplous,"* which translates literally as without folds, or undivided. The idea is that there should be only one thing that we look at as our treasure. What, might I ask, do you think is the one thing Jesus wants to be our focus, and thus our treasure? Perhaps David had the answer in Psalm 27, *"One thing have I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the*

days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in his temple.” (Psalm 27:4)
That is the healthy eye that Jesus is talking about. The one who has an undivided focus on the beauty of the Lord is the one whose body will be full of light.

But it is those who are surrounded by the luxuries of this world, who are bombarded with advertisements designed to catch our eye, who are in the greatest danger of having a bad eye, an eye that is distracted from His beauty. This leads to having a whole body full of darkness. What is worse, the darkness blinds us to the problem. Greed is blinding. You’ve likely never met someone who thought of themselves as greedy. In over ten years of ministry, I’ve had people come to me for advice on all kinds of problems, but I’ve never had someone come to me asking for help with their greed. Greed, perhaps more than any other sin, has a blinding influence upon the soul. Nobody actually thinks they are greedy. This is why Jesus said,

“Truly, I say to you, only with difficulty will a rich person enter the kingdom of heaven. ²⁴ Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.” ²⁵ When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished, saying, “Who then can be saved?” ²⁶ But Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.” (Matthew 19:23-26)

The church in Corinth is proof that with God all things are possible. Many wealthy Corinthians entered the kingdom of God, because the gospel has the power even to humble the wealthy, and to teach them not to look to the things that are seen, but to the things that are unseen.

But just because God had done the impossible and saved the Corinthians doesn’t mean that they didn’t need to be reminded of how God wanted them to view their money. Don’t be conformed to the patterns of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. As Christians, we no longer treasure money. When we are crucified with Christ, our greed is crucified along with us. Now, the only value money has is the way in which it can be used to advance God’s Kingdom. Which brings us to our passage for today, where we will find the answer to the questions, Why does God give? And Why do we give?

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. 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. ¹⁵ Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!

This is Paul’s closing argument for this lengthy passage that takes up two chapters. Like a good lawyer, Paul ends with a powerful appeal to the heart, showing us what the motivation for our giving should be. The general, fundamental reason why we give is that God has first given to us. Paul is harkening back to Isaiah 55 in verse 10, “He who supplies seed to the sower and bread

for food.” I want to show you that passage because I think it helps us understand what is in Paul’s mind as he writes this.

¹⁰ *“For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven
and do not return there but water the earth,
making it bring forth and sprout,
giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,
¹¹ so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth;
it shall not return to me empty,
but it shall accomplish that which I purpose,
and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.
¹² “For you shall go out in joy
and be led forth in peace;
the mountains and the hills before you
shall break forth into singing,
and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.
¹³ Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress;
instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle;
and it shall make a name for the Lord,
an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.”
(Isaiah 55:10-13)*

God’s physical provision for His world is a picture of His spiritual provision. It reminds me of Jesus’ words to the devil when he was being tempted in the wilderness, quoted from Deuteronomy 8:3, *“Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes out of the mouth of God.”* God provides physical food, but He also provides spiritual food. Which of the two should we value more? Now, look at verse 11 again, and see how it parallels the message of Isaiah. ¹¹ *You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God.* How are we enriched in every way? By God’s physical and spiritual provision! The same one who waters the earth and causes it to bring forth and sprout giving seed to the sower and bread for food is the one who gives us His Word, which succeeds in the thing for which He sent it.

What does God’s Word succeed in doing? In Isaiah’s words, “For you shall go out in joy and be led forth in peace.” Ultimately, the Word of God gives us spiritual life, new birth. “Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress; instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle.” Peter says, *“You have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God.”* (1 Peter 1:23) This is what it means to be enriched in every way. Has God enriched you in every way? Do you have His Word living and abiding in you?

Think about this for a moment. Why does God enrich us in every way? Who does God provide seed for? The sower! What does the sower do? Spreads around that which God has provided! This leads to the central point, and closing argument, of Paul’s appeal to the Corinthians. Why does God give? God gives in order for us to be generous—so that we would be sowers.

Essentially, God gives so that we will become like Him. This means if we are not being generous with what we have, then we are not using it according to the will of God. This really raises the bar, doesn't it?

This is such a foreign concept today. We tend to think of money as ours because, after all, we've earned it, right? We think of that which we have as that which we deserve. Paul wants to revolutionize our thinking about our possessions, just like Jesus did. We may have worked for our money (today, that's becoming more and more rare, but that's another sermon for another day), but just because we earned it does not give us the right to think of it as ours and to use it selfishly. As Christians, we must begin to think of our wealth as having come from God, and belonging to God. Everything we have; everything we are comes from Him. *"In Him we live and move and have our being"* says Paul to the Athenians.

So God gives to us so that we would be generous. The next question is, why should we give? First of all, it's important to look at this negatively. What are the wrong motivations for giving? Did you know that we can give for the wrong reasons? Oh, there are so many wrong reasons for giving. Let's consider some of them together. First, it's wrong to give in order to be seen by others. Jesus talked about this in the Sermon on the Mount.

"Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.

² "Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. ³ But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴ so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

Second, it's wrong to give in order to get something in return. This is a very common mindset. We give in order to get. No, it should be the inverse. We get in order to give. Some of the most philanthropic people in the world are incredibly self-centered. They give in order to be famous. They give to build their own legacy and empire. It's selfishness in disguise, and that's called hypocrisy. The Lord detests it. Jesus said this to the hypocritical Pharisees,

²⁷ "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness. ²⁸ So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

There is no reward in heaven for those who merely give to get something on earth. Jesus said they have received their reward in full.

Thirdly, it's also wrong to give in order to win favor from God. Here, we see a subtle way in which the enemy can tempt us. We don't give to God in order to get something from God. We

already have everything we need from God. He's already given it all! He's paid it all on the cross. There is a kind of religious bargaining with God that is wrong. You cannot pay God off. He doesn't need your money. It's not your money anyway; it's His already.

Those are some wrong motives, but what are the right motives for being generous? First, we give to supply the needs of others. Look at verse 12:

¹² For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints

This is connected with the second greatest commandment, "Love your neighbor as yourself," and with the new commandment Jesus gave His disciples, *³⁴ A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.*" (John 13:34) We give because we love one another! Is there any more practical way to show that we actually love one another than to give sacrificially for one another. When we see a brother or sister in need, we joyfully give to them to meet the need.

Sadly, in our day, I think a word of warning must be added to this, because that word "needs" is very important, and easily misunderstood. We should not give where there is no need. This requires discernment in our culture because if we are not careful, we might give to supply ungodly wants rather than needs. God does not want us to be haphazard with our money, and to just give without thinking or with no knowledge of the person to whom we are giving. We should know the specific need our giving is supplying.

That's the first reason we give, but there's a second as well. Remember the "not only," that means there's more. *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.* This is the central reason we give. We give so that God will be thanked! That is the ultimate aim of our life! Paul is essentially testing these Corinthian Christians. How so? Because if we are truly Christians, our greatest desire becomes the glory of God. I can imagine Paul saying something like this as he is writing this, "If this doesn't convince them to give, nothing will." This is the summum bonum—the highest good—of the Christian life. There is nothing better than seeing God praised!

I see this as the closing of the circle of God's generosity. The circle is not complete until the thanksgiving returns to God. Watch this. At the top of the circle is God. His provision comes down to us—He enriches us in every way. Then we are the sowers. We take what God has given us and we sow it—to be generous in every way. Then over here we have the harvest that comes from our sowing—the supplying of needs. But it doesn't stop there because as we sow needs are supplied, which results in thanksgiving returning back to God who gave in the first place. If we don't sow the riches God has given us, then the circle is broken. If we squander it on self it goes to waste. But if we sow it, it ends up leading to God's praise.

The word Paul uses for service here is the Greek word *leitourgias*, which is the same word that would have been used of the priest's ministry. It means an official, sacred ministering. It is a

service specially ordained by God for the service of others. Generosity is a priestly service. It leads others to God. It leads to worship.

Paul further explains this in verse 13, 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.* Notice the connection between doctrine—what we believe—and practice—what we do—in that statement. It is our confession of the gospel of Christ, which produces our submission to God, which leads to sacred service, which leads others to glorify God as they approve of such service and benefit from it. What a beautiful circle that goes on and on forever!

Then in verse 14, Paul provides us with one more benefit that comes from being generous, which is another motive for giving. Look at verse 14, ¹⁴ *while they long for you and pray for you, because of the surpassing grace of God upon you.* There is a deeper bond established with one another when we share our possessions with one another. Those who receive the gift will long for and pray for those who gave the gift. We see this happen in Acts 2. ⁴⁴ *And all who believed were together and had all things in common. ⁴⁵ And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. ⁴⁶ And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.* (Acts 2:44-47)

Paul closes this whole section by doing, putting into practice, the very thing which should be the ultimate aim of our whole lives: giving thanks to God. ¹⁵ *Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!* The word inexpressible means that words fail to describe this gift. The gift is so great that there aren't words beautiful or extravagant or superlative enough to describe it. What is this gift? It is Jesus Christ Himself. It is what God in Christ has done for us! As Paul wrote to the Romans,

⁶ *For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— ⁸ but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. ⁹ Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. ¹⁰ For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. ¹¹ More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.* (Romans 5:6-11)

That is the gift of God. So undeserved; so exceedingly abundant; so freely received. We can never out-give God! The more we consider this, the more generous we will become.

Turn your eyes upon Jesus
Look full in His wonderful face
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim

In the light of His glory and grace

This goes back to what I said at the beginning. Jesus wants us to treasure one thing above all else—namely, Himself. If our eye is not healthy—undividedly focused—on Him and His glory, then our whole body will be full of darkness. But if we treasure Jesus, we will be full of light, and we will begin to look like Him. If looking at Him does not make you generous, nothing will. Let's close by standing and singing the doxology together.

Praise God from whom all blessings flow
Praise Him all creatures here below
Praise Him above ye heavenly hosts
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost
Amen.