

2 Cor. 9:6-15 - Thanksgiving 4.9.2016

God loves a cheerful giver

⁶ Remember this — a farmer who plants only a few seeds will get a small crop. But the one who plants generously will get a generous crop. ⁷ You must each decide in your heart how much to give. And don't give reluctantly or in response to pressure. "For God loves a person who gives cheerfully."

⁸ And God will generously provide all you need. Then you will always have everything you need and plenty left over to share with others. ⁹ As the Scriptures say,

"They share freely and give generously to the poor. Their good deeds will be remembered forever."

¹⁰ For God is the one who provides seed for the farmer and then bread to eat. In the same way, he will provide and increase your resources and then produce a great harvest of generosity in you.

¹¹ Yes, you will be enriched in every way so that you can always be generous. And when we take your gifts to those who need them, they will thank God. ¹² So two good things will result from this ministry of giving — the needs of the believers in Jerusalem will be met, and they will joyfully express their thanks to God.

¹³ As a result of your ministry, they will give glory to God. For your generosity to them and to all believers will prove that you are obedient to the Good News of Christ. ¹⁴ And they will pray for you with deep affection because of the overflowing grace God has given to you. ¹⁵ Thank God for this gift too wonderful for words! [NLT]

Around this time of year, I receive phone calls from organisations which 'sell' calenders, desk-calenders and diaries to collect money for various charities. If you also get calls like this, you will have heard the line, "I'm sure that we can count on you".

While we may at times be willing to contribute to various charities, it does grate somewhat that those who are tasked with gathering this money do this as a job - and they seem to be professionals at soliciting (a polite way of saying begging) money from us.

Collecting money for various charitable institutions - we have been doing that in our congregation for Kerr House for many years. Hopefully you have not been 'guilt-tripped' into helping out there - or when I have collected money for 'Reach for a Dream', or when we have talked about helping a sister congregation in need.

Even with the best intentions, we may feel that we give money or goods because it would be wrong not to do so - 'Just think of all you have. Surely you don't begrudge those poor people something?'

When we read these lines from Paul it may sound a bit like this soliciting, where we are made to feel guilty if we can't be counted on. But Paul has a different approach when he points out that

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Paul's intention here is not to make us feel guilty or to put undue pressure on us to give for those in need. His approach is to take away the fear from us that we lose something by giving. Paul reminds us again that what we have all comes from God - as we will confess again just now. God really is the one who "provides us with food and clothing, home and family, daily work and all I need from day to day" (1st Article - contemporary translation) as we confess in the explanation to the 1st Article of the Creed.

Sowing what we have received

The passage of Scripture we heard deals with a collection which was carried out in the ancient church for the congregation in Jerusalem. The churches in Macedonia and in Corinth were encouraged to share some of their money with their fellow-Christians in Jerusalem.

That may all sound good and well, but the times we live in are very different. In spite of lower interest rates it is still a struggle for many to make ends meet - surely we need to care for ourselves and our families, and ensure that we have enough for our needs. After all we have bond repayments, instalments on our cars and other things to pay off.

It may surprise you to know that the people Paul was addressing were by no means wealthy - in fact a number of them were slaves. And yet, he encourages them to think of the needs of fellow-Christians - and to not only think of them, but also to share with them some of their hard earned cash.

It is in this context that Paul speaks of our money - and our other goods - as being seed. You can ask any gardener: For seed to have any worth, it can't just

be stored up - it is to be sown out!

At the end of the First Article we confess: for all God has done for me, I “ought to thank and praise, serve and obey” him If these are to be more than just words, that means taking a new look at what we have and own. Are these not all things God has **entrusted** to us - we are called on to be good stewards of what we have received.

We are to realise that everything we have - our money, our time, our talents - these have all been given to us by God! These are things that he has entrusted to our care - and we are never more than that: caretakers of what God has placed into our hands. It is not surprising therefore, that he wants to have a say in the way we deal with these things, in how we spend our money!

For many there is the feeling that giving money to others, or even placing it into the offering is almost like throwing it away. In a sense that may be true - but we are throwing it away like the farmers of old cast out their seed. We may know that for the seed we sow

God grants rich blessings

Giving thanks means acknowledging that we have received everything from the gracious hand of God. No matter how hard we worked to earn what we have - we only have it because of God’s blessing! We only have what we have, because God has given it!

Now God even promises to bless what we spend on his behalf - and this passage probably has more to do with charity than with the offering for the church. But for all our giving God promises us that we will not run short of what we need, if we share our money and our goods with those who are in need. He promises that the money we spend in helping those in need will not make us any poorer!

What we are to understand here is that God has a different way of keeping book. To him we are not wealthy if we just have many things, but we become wealthy by sharing out! We are wealthy, when we sow the seed God has

placed into our hands - we do so by knowing about the needs of the people around us, and doing something for them.

Thanksgiving does not just mean us giving thanks, but seeing that this thanks to God can be multiplied as others join in giving thanks as we let them share in God’s rich grace, and in the abundance we have received. He will see to it that we do not lose, and we will know the rich satisfaction of being used by God for his purposes.

The amazing result when you help someone - that may be a beggar at your gate or at the shopping centre, it may be those who can at last have a wheelchair, or the children who benefit from organisations such as CHOC and Reach for a Dream, is that more people will be brought to

Praise God!

This was brought home to me when our son, Christopher, saw a recovery room for those who have nowhere else to go when they have been subjected to chemotherapy, which had been built with funds collected by Reach for a Dream. In many cases we may not know what our giving has achieved - but that is not important. The fact is that God uses what we give - and he does so much more than we can think.

So, even if we can’t heal all the ills of the world, we are called on to do what we can and to leave the rest to God. So even if the seed we sow seems minute, we are to know that from small beginnings big things can grow, as God in his grace makes it grow!

God has truly blessed us - and we give thanks to him for everything we have. God could provide for all the needs of the world, but the fact is that he wants to involve us in the way in which our world runs. So it is definitely not a case of being ‘guilt-tripped’ so that we give to those in need. Quite the opposite in fact, as God wants to work with us to care for the needs of others.