

The Cheerful Giver

By Daryl Wingerd



“Each one of you must give as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Cor. 9:7). These words from Paul are often misunderstood to imply that one should give only when he feels an inner sense of joy prompting him to give — or that one should only give an amount small enough to avoid causing any sense of pain or loss in parting with it. These

self-serving interpretations are far from what Paul had in mind when he wrote to the believers in Corinth.

Instead, he was reminding them of their previous “readiness” to give money to the believers in Judea who were currently experiencing poverty. The phrase “as he has made up his mind” reminded them of their response when the need had first been presented to them (see 8:10-11). He was reminding them of their previous “readiness” (i.e., desire, eagerness) to contribute as well as the personal decisions they had each made regarding how much they would contribute. The rest of the verse was intended to encourage them to keep their previous commitments regarding how much to give. Most importantly, he wanted them to keep these commitments with an attitude that would please the Lord, “not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”

For the believer with this mindset, God promises to keep providing! As Paul continues, “And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work (9:8). In verse 10 he goes on to promise them that God *will* do it! This is why the cheerful giver is cheerful. He is rejoicing in the God who richly supplies us with every good thing — not for us to hoard for ourselves, but for us to distribute to others on God’s behalf.

As we have seen in Paul’s words, *cheerful giving is compatible with committed giving*. We can also say that cheerful giving is compatible with disciplined or regular giving. Paul had previously instructed these same believers to contribute weekly to this offering (1 Cor. 16:1-2) so that it would already be collected when he arrived to transport it to Jerusalem. There is nothing “uncheerful” about committing to a regular cadence of giving and then keeping that commitment.

Furthermore, *cheerful giving is compatible with accountable giving* — giving or following through on a commitment to give because you know others are expecting you to follow through. Paul even put a bit of godly pressure on the believers in Corinth when he wrote that he had boasted to others about their readiness to give, and that they would be humiliated if they did not follow through on their commitments (2 Cor. 9:1-4).

Cheerful giving is also compatible with sacrificial giving. Paul praised the believers in Macedonia as an example of this. Even though they were experiencing extreme poverty, they begged him for the privilege of participating in the offering — and then they gave *beyond their means* (2 Cor. 8:1-5). In all of this Paul only expected the Corinthians to give cheerfully out of their abundance. He was not asking them to give in such a way that would make others rich while they were left poor (8:13-14).

So how about you? As a follower of Christ, are you pleasing God by being a cheerful giver? Are you managing *his* money in *his* way? If not, what is hindering you? Perhaps it’s covetousness or selfishness, and perhaps these sins have landed you under a pile of consumer debt that hinders your ability to give cheerfully. Or perhaps it’s small faith — fear of being in need yourself, combined with nagging doubts about God’s ability or willingness to make all grace abound to you if you give away what you have.

Or perhaps you don’t believe you have an abundance. There are many in this world who do not, those who need help from those of us who do. But in middle-class America where I live, *everyone* has an abundance. *After* the bills are all paid, and *after* something is set aside for retirement or a rainy day, and *after* we give what we give regularly to the local church, and *after* the pantry is filled with a week’s worth of food and the car with gas, we still have enough money for eating out and designer coffees and entertainment and hobbies and pets and home improvements and vacations and . . . the list could go on, and on, and on, to our shame if we are keeping all of it for ourselves and neglecting the poor.

Will you simply recognize this reality, and then cheerfully redirect some of God’s money away from satisfying these culturally normal but non-essential luxuries and toward meeting the needs of those who, by comparison, have nothing? This is the only truly Christian way of managing your money.