

Christian Generosity

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Date: 02 March 2025

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[0 : 0 0] Thanks very much, Heather. It'd be worth keeping that passage open in front of you. Just to say there's nothing wrong with the bit in the middle. There's no reason we kind of skipped over those verses.

There's great stuff in there. There's just a limit to what we're able to cover in one morning. But do keep those verses in front of you as we work through them. We're talking about Christian generosity, about Christian giving this morning.

Let me make three promises as we start of what we're not going to do. Number one, as I've said, we're not going to be passing around a plate or a bag at the end of the service. This is not an appeal. Number two, we are not going to try and guilt people or make you feel bad to squeeze money out of you.

That's not what the Bible does. That's not what we want to do either. Number three, I'm not going to tell you a number or a magic formula to work out what our giving, what our generosity should be.

Again, I don't think the New Testament does that. And so we're not going to do that either. But what we do want to do and what the New Testament does do is enable us to think biblically about giving and to be shaped by the gospel when it comes to money so that we are better equipped to make those decisions for ourselves.

[1 : 1 9] And here's the big thing, which will sound hard to believe at the start, but I hope will make slightly more sense by the end. And it's a big part of this passage that actually we'd be excited about the idea of giving and of generosity and what that involves.

So we're looking to be excited by this rather than just kind of grit our teeth and bear it. We're going to see that in these verses in 2 Corinthians, three headings, the foundation for Christian generosity, the attitude of Christian generosity, and the results of Christian generosity.

Let's start with the foundation for Christian generosity because obviously this is where everything flows from. This is what everything is built upon. Nothing else is going to make sense unless we first have this in place.

We want to get this foundation that underpins everything else. And very simply, the headline is this, that the foundation for Christian generosity is the gospel.

The foundation for Christian generosity is the gospel. It is the generosity that God has shown us that enables us to show generosity in every other aspect of life, not least with our finances.

[2 : 4 1] The situation in these verses we're looking at begins with Paul holding up the churches in Macedonia as an example of Christian generosity, as he encourages the church in Corinth that he's writing to, to share in this generosity.

He's speaking in both cases, specifically about financial giving. And yet you might have noticed all the way through he speaks of their giving and their willingness to give as an act of grace.

So you see it right there in verse 1. We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia. And that grace given is that they have been eager to give.

And then that's what Paul encourages from the Corinthians, verse 6. He speaks about this act of grace. Verse 7, excel in this act of grace. Again, both talking, always talking about this financial giving in this section.

This giving is founded on grace. And the root, the ultimate source, the foundation of that grace then is spelt out in verse 9.

[3 : 52] For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.

It is the gospel which is the foundation for Christian generosity. Paul's logic is this. Look to Jesus. Look to the gospel. Jesus gave everything.

He says Jesus was rich. The richness he's speaking about there is how Jesus, before the incarnation, before he came to earth, was in heaven. God the Son enjoying perfect relationship with God the Father.

Imperfection. Lacking absolutely nothing. And yet he became poor. He gave everything. He came to our world full of hurt and sorrow.

He experienced poverty firsthand. He went through suffering. The greatest suffering of all, his crucifixion in our place, his death on the cross.

[4 : 55] Jesus became poor in the fullest, most unimaginable almost sense of the word. That through him we might become rich.

Obviously that is not saying Jesus died for the sake of our bank balance. It's saying that we can enjoy the same richness that Jesus had of eternal relationship with God the Father.

In perfection. Through what Jesus suffered for us. Through the poorness, the poverty, the sacrifice he went through. That is the foundation for Christian generosity.

How does that enable generosity then? How does that actually work? Well, first and foremost, it means that our security is in Jesus. Our hope is in Jesus.

Our future is in Jesus. That we have a far greater richness through the gospel than anything that the world can offer.

[5 : 53] And so we are free to be generous in our finances. As that is not the source anymore of our hope and security. I imagine almost everyone here will have suffered with financial worries at some point, to some extent or another.

That can be times of real anxiety and stress. That can be times of sleepless nights. That can be times of real difficulty. And we are really, really keen not to play that down.

And it is worth saying, if you are struggling in those ways, please do speak to us. We can connect you to people who can help. Christians Against Poverty is one great organization who help with that.

Martin Lewis recommends them. I am money-saving expert. So, you know, they must be good. But we are 100% not saying that these issues are not real. But actually, for all of us, whatever our financial situation, our natural response is to hold tight to what we have.

Our natural response is to make sure that we are financially sorted for any eventuality. Because we depend on that. We find our security in that.

[7 : 07] And yet the gospel means that ultimately our security is not defined by our finances. But it is defined, it is given to us by a God who held nothing back in order that we could have everything we need in Him.

We said earlier, if you're not a Christian, it would be really easy to think, oh dear, this was the wrong week to turn off at church. Don't worry, a lot of Christians here are thinking the same as well. But actually, this is a passage that is for everyone.

This is a topic that is for everyone. As in a world where we are constantly told that we need more. That actually we should be worried about our finances.

That there are countless investment opportunities that we are missing the boat on. That our pensions are not going to stretch far enough. That the economy is broken. Into that world, into our world, in the gospel, Jesus offers rest.

And Jesus offers security. Brad Pitt has a great line in the film Fight Club. He says, Advertising has us chasing cars and clothes, working jobs we hate so we can buy things we don't need, and the things you own end up owning you.

[8 : 23] A great kind of analysis of a problem there. A society obsessed by money, materialism, stuff, and that stuff ending up controlling people.

And yet that film never really gives much of a solution to that problem. It's a pretty nihilistic view, a hopeless view of life that's betrayed. And yet in Jesus, in the gospel, the Bible does offer a solution.

That the richness of Christ frees us from the rat race of the world where we are defined by and dependent on what we earn and what we own. And instead, we're able to give everything to him in joyful gratitude.

And that's chapter 9, verse 12. It says there, For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints, but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God.

Paul is saying, Yes, this generosity is providing stuff. But beyond that, it's demonstrating gratitude to God because through the gospel, he has given us that which money could never buy.

[9 : 35] In all these sections, we're talking about Christian generosity. That's not because people who aren't Christians can't be generous. Plenty of people are very philanthropic, very kind.

But Christian generosity will always be something distinct because it has that different foundation. The foundation for Christian generosity is the gospel and what Jesus has done for us.

Okay, let's see that in action then. Next, we're going to look at the outworking of Christian generosity. How does this gospel foundation work itself out in practice?

What do we build on that? Particularly in this area of giving. Three outworkings that we see in these verses. The first one here that we see is that it's proportional.

And what I mean by that, what Paul shows here, is that there's not a kind of a blanket amount. As we said earlier, there's not a simple formula that we can just give out. But there are circumstances affect our giving.

[10 : 37] Verse three, Paul writes about the churches in Macedonia who he's commending, remember. And he says, they gave according to their means. Or down in verse 14, your abundance at the present time should supply their need so that their abundance may supply your need, that there may be fairness.

Now the point is that some have financially more than others and so are able to give financially more than others. While others have less and so at that stage you're able to give less.

And yet that doesn't mean that that gift is worth less to God. But that we all have something we're able to give. There was actually a gentleman here a couple of weeks ago who wouldn't want me to say who.

But he was an incredibly successful businessman. He's used those skills in various ways to help people in the church. And he's also alongside that given a great deal of money to Christian causes over the years.

He's been remarkably generous financially. But again, he wouldn't ever want to claim that as something special, as him doing something amazing or going above and beyond. He would simply say that is an outworking of what God has given him, that it's proportional.

[11 : 55] For us as a congregation, as a church, in our time since being planted as a new church, we have received financial help from other congregations at more advanced and financially stable situations than we were.

We have benefited from this proportional generosity and outworking. And in the same way, as we as a congregation grow and hopefully our finances grow with that, so we want to be able to support other churches who have less as well.

In the Old Testament, where giving was more prescribed, it was a tithe. It was a tenth of everything which would be given to God's work. I don't think that is prescribed in the same way in the New Testament church, although it's not a bad place to start.

But that principle of proportional giving remains the same. So there's the first outworking. Christian generosity is proportional. Perhaps naturally, that is what we would expect.

Well, the second thing that we see here in these verses is perhaps a bit more challenging then to build on that. And it's this, that Christian generosity is sacrificial. And of course, in some ways, all giving is sacrificial.

[13 : 10] We could just choose not to. But Paul makes the point here that this is a giving which is felt rather than simply a giving which is spare, which is from an excess.

Have a look at verse 2. Again, describing this gospel-shaped giving from the churches in Macedonia that Paul is so encouraged by and holds up as a model.

It says, for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part.

For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means of their own accord. That phrase at the end there, of their own accord, is so important here.

This is not Paul or this is not about a church or leadership in a church pressurizing people to give more than they can. That is not what Paul did. That is not what we're about this morning.

[14 : 14] That is not what we should ever do as a church. If you ever feel that that's happening, do come and speak to me or someone else because that means something is going wrong. The gospel foundation we've spoken about means this is a bottom-up.

This is an internal, a heart, a personal decision, not something mandated or imposed on people. But Paul's point is that the outworking of the gospel in our lives, as it changes our hearts, in terms of money, is this sacrificial attitude.

It is this giving that we feel. It's a giving that might mean adjustments in every area of life. It's not just a bit of what's spare or what is excess because the Macedonian church, we're told, were in extreme poverty and yet so deeply had the gospel taken root in their lives that they had overflowed in a wealth of generosity.

I think for us as a church, certainly for me personally, I think it's always easy to not talk about money. It's always easy to think there'll be a better time to do that sometime in the future.

It's especially tempting and easy to think at the moment in our current financial climate where money is tight and we hear so much about that. We're not naive to that. But that is the situation here and more so that Paul is speaking about and speaking into.

[15 : 44] The reality is very few of us, I imagine, will get to the stage where we just have money to spare, money that we don't know what to do with. There is always that next thing.

Money always feels tight. I would imagine even if you were to get a huge pay rise tomorrow, you wouldn't suddenly find all of that extra money going into your savings.

But naturally, we find new things that we think we need, don't we? New things that we're able to do, new financial commitments that we're able to make and suddenly all that money is tied up and things feel tight again.

This sacrificial generosity is not about not paying the bills, but it's about having giving as something we factor in and prioritize rather than assuming it's something that we'll find a way to do at some other time or that comes at the end of the line after we've ticked all the boxes of other things we would be keen to do.

And again, we can only have this attitude if the gospel is our foundation, that our security is in what Jesus has done for us and in every aspect of our lives, including our finances, we are living in grateful response to him.

[17 : 09] And this is a great kind of word, a great message for us as a whole church, collectively as well. Christian generosity shouldn't just mean building up our Haddington Community Church finances, it's also what we as a church then do with those finances, that our church accounts would demonstrate this sacrificial generosity collectively as well.

Our money isn't just for us as a church to get the stuff that we think we need, it's to share with the wider church, to be generous. Again, as we think about funding for a church building, something we'll speak in more detail about, but as we said, that's a big financial commitment.

So humanly speaking, this would be a great time for us to say, well, we have this funding that we need for our church, so let's try and cut down any money that is leaving the church so we can focus on our needs.

We can focus on this particular financial kind of stretch we need to make. But as a congregation, we too need this sacrificial gospel outworking in our giving.

That actually, we too need to continue to rejoice that money leaves our own congregation to support people like the Pathisons in Vietnam, to support the church plant in Winchborough that we help to finance, that we continue supporting places, camps, as we've been speaking about, that we do that sacrificially, that we give in a way that we feel and that our goal will be to do that more and more rather than just building up our own situation and making sure we get everything that we need here in Harrington as good and as positive and helpful as those things might be.

[18 : 53] Again, as a church, we'll only keep that sacrificial generosity as we keep the gospel as our foundation and trust that God is the one who will continue to provide.

So the outworking of Christian generosity is proportional. It's sacrificial. Lastly, in this section, perhaps most surprisingly of all, it's joyful.

I took out all the jokes here I added about Scottish people so we'll just rattle through. We've already seen in verse 2 the abundance of joy. If we turn over to chapter 9, we'll see in verse 7, each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion for God loves a cheerful giver.

And we read that, we think, how is that possible? A cheerful giver. And again, it's possible because the gospel is the foundation. It's only because the gospel can change our hearts in every aspect of life including our financial situation.

Here's a question. Would it not have been easier if God had given us a kind of a spreadsheet at the back of our Bibles that we could just fold out, we could fill in a few numbers here and there, our current situation, and it would give us a result at the bottom.

[20 : 12] This is your giving. Would that have not made things simpler and we could just kind of shrug and hand it over? Why is that not the case? Why has God not sort of prescribed an amount in a book of the Bible somewhere for us?

I think it's because God wants this to be something that is done from the heart. God wants this to be something that is done from the heart shaped by the gospel.

The heart overflowing with gratitude to God. And so the heart that rejoices to return back to God some proportion of what he has generously given to us even though that's sacrificial.

Ultimately, knowing that all that we have is a gift from him. Remembering that gospel is the only way to joyful giving as the outworking of that gospel foundation.

And that joyful attitude is particularly seen as we move on to look at our final point this morning which is this, the harvest of Christian generosity. The harvest of Christian generosity.

[21 : 24] What does God promise that the generosity of his people will bring about? And this is mainly in chapter 9 from verse 6 onwards.

Let me read a few verses from that section. Verses 10 and 11 say this, 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.

You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. On to verse 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.

There's so much that we could look at in these verses but really what is the harvest, what is the result of this Christian generosity, the harvest of their righteousness.

Again, good to underscore just one more time here, it is not a financial reward and this is not saying that our giving to God guarantees a monetary wealth in response but as we've just read, this harvest is that it will produce thanksgiving to God, verse 11.

[22 : 48] It's that they will glorify God, verse 13. It's the incredible promise that God will take our generosity with what is temporary, with what is fleeting and he will use it for an eternal harvest as people turn to give thanks and glory to God.

As incredibly, we get to be part of God's work as he builds his kingdom through our efforts and that is not because God is short of money, it's not because God can't do this without us, this is the God to whom everything belongs, this is the God who can create from nothing and yet what is incredible is that he chooses to use us in his purposes, he uses our gifts and abilities however meager we think they are, he uses our generosity however little we might think we have to give because he seeks to draw us in, he enfolds us into his eternal plan, he gives us a place in his perfect purposes and that is why as we said earlier we're able to be joyful, to be cheerful givers, that's why I said at the beginning we can even be excited, we can be enthusiastic about Christian generosity because it allows us to share in, to give our lives to something that is of eternal value and infinite worth as people turn to give God the glory that he deserves, that is our motivation, that is what God promises as people are brought from spiritual death to life, as people build his church and his kingdom comes, the harvest of Christian generosity is something bigger than we can ever comprehend, it brings us into a greater purpose than any other lives that are given over to the glory of God, it is that focus that enables us to give proportionally, sacrificially, joyful, because it comes from that same foundation where God in the person of Jesus Christ gave everything for us, held nothing back, went to the cross in our place that we could have everything and most importantly of all, eternal life with him and so we give everything in response, praying that God would receive the thanks and the glory that he deserves, grateful and enthused that he promises to use us in his purposes and for his glory.

Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, we thank you for the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that though he was rich, yet for our sake he became poor, that we by his poverty might become rich.

Lord, we thank you for that eternal and perfectly secure richness of a restored relationship with you and knowing you as our Heavenly Father that has been earned for us in the Gospel and is freely given to us through your grace.

Lord, we pray that that good news would reach deep into our hearts and transform us as we seek you first in all things, that our lives may be lived in grateful response to all that you have done, seeking to give you the glory that you alone deserve and desiring that others too would come to know you through your Son, Jesus Christ.

[26 : 28] Lord, as we have thought this morning about money, about generosity, about finances, we pray that the Gospel would be at work in our hearts as we consider that subject.

Lord, we pray that you would reveal to us where we are depending upon earthly security above your promises. We pray that you'd show us where we are putting earthly desires above your glory.

Please help us to think wisely about what this means for each one of us. And we pray first and foremost that you would use us in all that we are and all that we have and that we would bring about a harvest of righteousness that your church might grow as people turn to you in thanks and give you the glory that you and you alone deserve.

We pray all these things in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen. I want to make