

7 Shaping Virtues – Generosity Part 2 (2 Cor 9:6-15)

A Portrait of the Generous Christian

Caleb Collins

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KingsWay Community Church

This morning, I want to take a minute and discuss the idea of what a virtue is. We have been studying virtues now for four weeks in total and I want to challenge a definition that you might hold of a virtue. What is the difference between a skill and a virtue? What makes a virtue a virtue and not a skill or an action?

In Craig Boyd and Kevin Tempe's book on the virtues, they give us a couple illustrations to answer this question.

If someone follows a cookbook recipe and they follow that recipe to the T, are they a Michelin chef? Or if a student memorizes the formulas in his math textbook and he gets 100 on his math test, does that mean that he is a mathematics scholar?

Do math professors have those formulas memorized? Probably.

Do Michelin chefs reference cookbooks? No doubt.

But the virtue of a Michelin chef or a math genius does not just come down to a skill, a rule book, a mere action at one point in time.

Virtues require skills, but they also require discernment. You got to know when to break away from the recipe book. You need to understand larger theories within mathematics in order to be called a genius. You can't just ace one test or make one cake in order to be virtuous in these respects. You have to have a pattern of skill and discernment.

To be virtuous requires something beyond mere action; it has to go down to the soul, to the desires of our hearts, and the patterns of our lives.

Craig Boyd and **Kevin Timpe** define virtue as this,

“a virtue is an excellent and stable quality of the soul that enables a person to act well regarding some kind of activity...for a virtue to be a virtue it needs to persist over time.”

Craig Boyd and **Kevin Timpe**

“Like the good chef and the good athlete, the good person—the virtuous person—embodies values in ways that transcend merely following the rules.”

So, as we look at humility, joy, gratitude, generosity, and now generosity again, do not go down the broad path of moralism.

Believing that you just need to act humble by never taking a compliment and you'll be humble. That's merely looking at the cookbook and memorizing the math formulas.

Christian virtue is a reality of skill, discernment, and patterns of life that are born out of our happy state of soul found in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Humility does require skill, there is work to be done in humility. There's also discernment for humility.

Joyful people typically smile; there should be a pattern of joyful emotion in your life. But that doesn't mean that you have to smile in your sleep.

Augustine of Hippo went even further with this idea of virtue and those that can actually attain virtue in his work, the City of God. Augustine argues that the most virtuous unbeliever can never truly attain virtue because virtue (what is truly good) requires the grace of God.

Augustine would say that for you to have the virtues of humility, joy, gratitude, and generosity, you would, in fact, need to first have the virtues of hope, faith, and love, all of which are a work of God in the believer when they are saved.

You can have patterns of humility, joy, gratitude, or generosity, and I believe scripture would agree with Augustine that this does not make you a virtuous person.

You could sit through this whole sermon, take perfect notes, apply every skill, develop new patterns in your life, and discern financial generosity, but if you are not born again, you are not able to fulfill what this text requires of you.

So, this leads me to the point of today's sermon:

The generous Christian understands that financial generosity is a response to God's grace and a happy work of God's grace in all seasons.

The text in front of us is a response to Paul's request that the Corinthian church raise funds for the Jerusalem church in need.

But take note: he is not giving a dollar amount, he is not giving a percentage to give, he is calling for something far more difficult: he is envisioning a virtue of generosity, specifically financial generosity.

This morning, we are going to look at a **portrait of the generous Christian**. Rather than rules, I want to show patterns of life that emerge from this text.

1. They See Financial Generosity as in their best Interest (v.6-7)

Our flesh and worldly thinking on money would say that generosity to Christian Mission is money lost.

That is to say, any money that you have, should be invested. Cut expenses and invest as much as you can. Charity work is good for lowering your tax bracket, but as far as investment strategy goes, you need to invest; not give your money away.

That dollar is worth 6-12% more in thirty years, so put it to work.

The church has borrowed this mindset in many ways when it comes to conversations about financial generosity. We see financial generosity as an expense, not as an investment or a calling or a good work empowered by grace.

Scripture (in which we boast of its authority and sufficiency) is clear that financial generosity is not an expense but an investment.

It is in our best interest.

If you farm, do you only farm for one season?

If you are, in fact, a farmer, you farm as a vocation.

Paul in this verse is showing us that life is like the vocation of farming:

- it is our job to sow.
- We feed our family by sowing.
- We find fulfillment by sowing.
- We find blessing in doing this well.
- It is not a side gig like beekeeping, this is your main gig.

If you are a farmer, it is economically a poor decision to be stingy on sowing seeds.

Seeds=crops=money but not only that...

Crops=More seeds=more to harvest=more money

Dumb farmers hold on to their seeds because seeds that are put in the “bank account” don't multiply. You multiply your seed by sowing them and by harvesting crops that have new seed and more seed. You generate more seeds by sowing.

The seed in this analogy is the money that God gives us. It's not our money. It is by grace both for the Christian and for the unbeliever to have seed.

The harvest is the authentically virtuous, Christian work of generosity. Only Christians can truly say they are generous. The harvest is the work of generosity, which is the end goal; not the seed.

The good work that God has for us, as we will dive into more later, is that we be financially generous.

The analogy is not that the harvest is money and that the seed is generosity. It is important for us to understand from the get-go that the harvest is the spiritual work and virtue of generosity.

Prosperity Gospel: The prosperity gospel gets it wrong by thinking that we sow to reap a harvest of money. Paul makes it clear in this passage that the good work and the blessing *are generosity*.

If it is good and wise to be generous, then it begets cheerful giving

So if the Christian agrees with Paul that financial generosity is good and wise, then why would anybody give under compulsion or reluctantly?

If we see generosity as part and parcel of the Christian life and that there is a return on the investment, why wouldn't we be cheerful?

Paul helps us in verse 7 not to follow the textbook but to see this as a matter of the heart. If we see generosity as a response to the grace of God, then we should cheerfully give because God loves a cheerful giver. And if we give reluctantly or under compulsion we shouldn't give because it's not about following the cookbook.

If you merely give, you've missed the virtue. If you give under compulsion or reluctance, you've missed the virtue.

2. They See Financial Generosity as a Reflection of God's Character, Action, and Providence (v.7b, 8, 9b, 10)

Character and Action

Why does God love a cheerful giver? Because God is a cheerful giver. For the Christian, we recognize the only reason why financial generosity is of any benefit to us is because it is not grounded on our wisdom or skill but on the character of God and the grace of God which empowers our actions, our discernment, and patterns of life.

God blesses and cheerfully gives in all sorts of ways, all of them are wonderful and should cause your heart to abound in praise.

But the primary way that God has been a cheerful giver to the created order is by revealing himself and communicating with creation through the work of Jesus Christ.

To understand God's character and what he is like, we need look no further than the person and work of Christ. Jesus is the word of God and the wisdom of God; he is God's image, the exact imprint of his nature.

God had much in and of himself. And he gave richly and sacrificially of himself, not under compulsion or reluctantly, but cheerfully to save his people.

Financial generosity, in a profound and intimate way, models Christ-like behavior. This virtue is not aspiring to just a mere moral shadow in a cave but is following the image of our God. In fact, financial generosity models the character of Christ Jesus.

So, we see that God's character and his action in the work of Jesus Christ are reflected in financial generosity, but we also see God's continuing work in created order through Providence.

Providence

When we talk about God's Providence all we mean by that is God's continuing meticulous, miraculous, and sovereign governance of all created order.

Look at **verse 8**

“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.”

Who controls the bounty and blessedness of our lives? God is. God is able to make all grace abound to you... in all things at all times. This is speaking of God's grace in the details of our lives. That it is God that gives grace in every circumstance regardless of the circumstance.

Look at **verse 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.”*

Who supplies the seed (all of the possessions and money that you have)? It is God.

There is not one thing in time or space that does not belong to God or is not used by God or gifted by God. Our finances, which is the area in which we get the most possessive about, even there that belongs to God was given by God and therefore has purposes by God.

Notice the three things that God does in this passage: **he supplies, he multiplies, and he increases**

It is God who supplies all your possessions,
it is he who multiplies your possessions,
and it is he who increases your harvest, not of more possessions or money, but of righteousness.

Again, note that the harvest is not money, Paul associates generosity with righteousness, *with spiritual wealth, with being closer to redeemed humanity than before*. God gives us money he grows our money but what is most important is the harvest: our righteousness.

I want to challenge you this morning: Do you see your financial generosity as directly tied to your righteousness? What makes you different from the world? Another way of saying this is, do you see your financial generosity as part of the holiness that God has called you to?

Paul says in verse 8 that God gives you all sufficiency in all things and in all times; that is not to say that God is going to give you financial security so that you don't have a care in this world, but that you will be sufficient to be generous and fulfill the work which God has called you to.

Sufficiency for the Christian is rarely self-sufficiency. It is sufficiency upon God and sufficiency for the sake of mission, service, and selflessness. The good life, as opposed to what the world has to say, is found not in hoarding things for yourself but in giving them away.

God was fully content and self-sufficient in and of himself. But God gave the son so that salvation might be won for others.

David Garland writes,

“The righteousness that we become through Christ’s sacrificial death (5:21) works itself out in our sacrificial generosity to others. A lack of generosity calls into question whether or not we have truly received the righteousness of God. Paul’s point is that God makes us righteous through Christ and gives us seed money for a harvest of generosity. The more we sow, the greater the harvest; and the greater the harvest now, the greater the harvest will be in the future.”

Financial generosity is an outwork of grace. It benefits the Christian because it means more Christlikeness, because it reflects God’s activity in the world, our lives, and the church, and, as David Garland helps us, it reflects God’s grace in our lives.

Which brings us to point #3...

3. They See Financial Generosity as a Testament of the Grace of God upon them (v.8, 14)

Look with me at verse 9. Paul quotes a verse from Psalm 112 about the man who is financially generous. The question is: why is he generous?

Turn to **Psalm 112**. Paul is quoting verse 9, but I want you to look at **verse 1**.

“Praise the Lord!

Blessed is the man who fears the Lord,

who greatly delights in his commandments!”

The person who is financially generous in this passage and is considered righteous by God is **(1) the man who fears the Lord and (2) who greatly delights in his commands.**

This is not Speaking of God, but a **disciple of God. A believer.**

This is not speaking of the rich, the middle class, only those that know how to budget, those that have paid off their house, those that don't have a car payment, those that don't take family vacations, those that don't have a savings goal, those that are in a tough season of inflation.

The qualifier of who is financially generous is their love for God. This whole psalm describes someone who fears the Lord and delights to obey his commands.

[The grand takeaway from 2 Corinthians 9 is that financial generosity is grounded in the vibrant relationship we have with God. Financial generosity is not based on income, it’s not based on the urgent needs of others...it is the proper response in all seasons to the grace of God, which never fades and is new every day.]

I just heard a story of someone who is friends with a well to do person, and they do not give because they cannot do so cheerfully. They beat the system. I love God **I’m just not a cheerful giver.**

Or maybe you’ve heard it said with great concern that we want to **stay away from legalism.**

Jesus in the Upper Room in John's Gospel clearly teaches that "if you love me, you will obey my commandments."

The command is not that tithing has ended, it is "Be generous with your money." What we find with Paul and 2nd Corinthians and with Psalm 112, is that our generosity is intimately connected to our relationship with God.

If you are not a cheerful giver, if you have a pattern of reluctance in giving or not giving to the church at all, that speaks more about your relationship with God than anything else.

4. They See Financial Generosity as a Testament of their love for and trust in God (v.9-10)

This psalmist grounds all of the financial generosity we find in that passage in verse 1. This person is so generous because he fears the Lord and delights in obeying God. **Because of his relationship with God, he acts a certain way.**

[We are not generous because we want God to love us. We are generous because God first loved us and because we respond to that love and that grace with love and grace towards others, specifically the people of God.]

This point is specifically made in verse 10. Paul (1) quotes this wonderful psalm and (2) grounds it in the fact that it is God who supplies the seed to the sower and the bread for food.

That to say, we can see evidences of God's grace in our lives through our finances, and we can get a temperature check in some regard for our trust in God in how we handle our finances. When we sow seed (our money), we reap the harvest found in generosity of

- a. Resting in the good Providence of God rather than the love of money and self-sufficiency.
- b. Having fresh opportunity to thank God for being God and provider!
 - i. "Blessings flow from you, O Lord, not me. I am secure in you, O Lord, not my possessions."

5. They see Financial Generosity as a pattern of worship, specifically Thanksgiving (v.7b, 11b, 12, 15)

Christian worship is many things. Primarily seen through singing, praying together, the Lord's supper, and the preaching of the word. Christian worship also involves personal devotion to

God, you worship God through your vocation, you worship God through evangelizing, **and you worship God through your finances.**

Biblical Theology of Tithing

In the Old Testament Israel worshipped God through finances by giving a tithe, 1/10 of what they brought in. In the New Testament, we don't have the tithe reinstated.

In the New Testament, rather than tithing, we are called to be financially generous. *If you've been in church for any number of years, this is typically one of those debated points, do we still give 10%?*

As a pastor, I can only go as far as the text says, and the text does not dictate 10%.

But let me ask you a question: **what Old Testament reality became less in its fulfillment in Christ in the New Testament?**

In the Old Testament, **salvation** was for the Jews. In the New Testament, it was expanded and gloriously broadened to gentiles. It was a better salvation that did not require the blood of bulls and goats. It was a sacrifice once for all. Rather than made by animals, God himself was the sacrifice and it is effective for eternity.

In the Old Testament, **God's presence** was manifested in the temple. In the New Testament it was gloriously fulfilled in Christ tabernacling among us, God was Emmanuel, God with us. And then at Pentecost God's presence expanded and deepened through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the believer. So that God is always with his people wherever they may be.

In the Old Testament, God's people worshipped by **giving** a 10th of what they had.

In the New Testament, *some might say* that tithing disappears...or becomes optional or is reduced by at least 5%. However, when we consider the overview from the scriptures, giving to God in the New Testament, like the other realities fulfilled in the New Covenant, is broadened and deepened.

- Worshipping God through our finances is now based on the generosity of God and the cross, something Old Testament Saints did not have.
- Worshipping God through our finances now is truly a matter of the heart and accurately reflects our affections and trust in God.

I'm not trying to give an apology for giving 12% or 15% or that 10% is still there. But when we hiss at 10% I don't think it is because of a nuanced position on Biblical Theology, but that it is actually saying more about what's going on here (our hearts).

[May we be cheerful givers, grateful to God for what he has done, and eager to participate in serving the church.]

All over this passage is gratitude and thanksgiving and how they are connected specifically to the good work of generosity.

Verse 7 describes A cheerful giver, a cheerful giver is someone who is thankful and grateful to God for this opportunity.

Verse 11

“You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God.”

Verse 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.”

Paul describes financial generosity as begetting and producing thanksgiving. This is part of the harvest that we are bountifully bringing in as we sow bountifully.

If you want to grow in thanksgiving as a Christian, let me encourage you to do the good work that Paul has for us in financial generosity.

6. They see Financial Generosity as a vital means of God’s Work of Sanctification (v.8, 9a, 10b, 11, 12)

In v.8 and v.10, God abundantly provides and gives grace in our lives, possessions, and finances **so that we might abound in every good work, *not meagerly get by but flourish in a good work, which is generosity.***

David Garland helps us understand what Paul means by “good work” when he writes,

“Paul assumes in this verse that the most valuable thing about money is that we can use it for every good work. He avoids the plural “works,” which he tends to connect with “works of law” and the ritual acts of piety, such as circumcision, and observing food laws...Abounding in every good work comes from abounding in God’s grace. Every good work does not earn grace; grace, already received, generates the good work.”

You don’t need Greek to know what good work Paul has in mind for the Christian: Financial Generosity within the context of the local church. You don’t need to fast and pray to gain understanding here.

This grace that generates generosity in us grows us in our gratitude to God and our gratefulness to God for what he has done for us in all of life but specifically what he has done for us in saving us from our sin. This work of generosity increases the harvest of our righteousness as verse 10 describes.

God uses our finances to grow us in Christlikeness to make us a happy people in the Lord.

What if we viewed finances the way Paul does in 2nd Corinthians? Where we see finances as a means of becoming more like Christ, more grateful, less like the world. As a means to love other churches who are on mission, as a means to propel our church in its mission to make disciples of all people?

Verse 12 informs us that God has a ministry of service, he has work for us and that work as it relates to this passage involves our finances.

7. They see Financial Generosity as a Significant Means of God's mission and blessing of his church (v.12-15)

V.12-15 describe four things:

1. The mission of God involves the financial participation of local churches
2. An aspect of Christian ministry is financial participation in a local church
3. The good work of financial generosity is a means of blessing his church through other churches
 - This is why we give to Sovereign Grace Churches and partner with other churches as a local church: we are on mission and we are the hands and feet of Jesus by doing this
4. Most importantly, God is glorified when we are generous with the seed he has provided us.

Conclusion

Virtues are not vices. That might sound like a dumb thing to say. Vices lead to misery, virtues lead to flourishing. Being generous leads to flourishing because it is an evidence of God's grace and a means of diving deeper into the relational bliss we have in the gospel.

KingsWay, we all can grow in sowing, let us do the good work God has for us. Let's be good farmers and joyfully anticipate the harvest before us!