



**Jonesboro Heights Baptist Church**  
Sanford, North Carolina

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***Christian Giving***  
**2 Corinthians 8:1-15; 9:6-15**

I don't know how it is at your house, but there aren't many weeks that we don't get one or more appeals in the mail or by e-mail or on the phone to *give* to some worthy cause.

And when you do give to one of them, it seems like the appeals multiply—like they have some kind of network they tap into to say, “Hey, these folks will give! You need to ask them!”

Charitable giving is an important part of life, and in our society, it's been an integral part of our culture. Both individuals and corporations give to charitable and philanthropic causes of all kinds. Non-profit social service organizations, colleges and universities, para-church organizations, and a host of other entities depend on these gifts to be able to carry out their missions. Sometimes people or corporations give gifts for the love of the cause. Sometimes they give for the love of the tax deduction. And sometimes they give with both motives in mind.

We hear about the huge gifts of hundreds of thousands, sometimes even millions of dollars to some of these organizations. We hear about the foundations and the gifts that the Bill Gates of the world make to a variety of causes, and sometimes it astounds us.

And when people or corporations give to worthy and honorable causes, that's a good thing.

But for us as Christians, it also raises a question. What's the difference between giving and *Christian* giving? Or to put it another way, what is it that makes giving *Christian*?

***Help from Paul***

Paul's words to the Corinthians in our text today can help us with this question. As he wrote to them, he turned the subject to the offering that he was gathering from the predominantly Gentile churches in Asia Minor and Greece for the church in Jerusalem that was still made up mostly of Jews who had come to believe in Jesus as Messiah and Lord.

These Jewish Christians in Jerusalem were experiencing extreme poverty. Paul hoped to accomplish two things by gathering this offering for them. First, he truly wanted to provide help to these Christians in Jerusalem who were in such genuine dire need. Second, he hoped that this sincere gesture would develop and strengthen the unity of Jewish and Gentile Christians.

Paul had talked with the Corinthians a year earlier about this effort, and they had enthusiastically backed it, promising generous support for it. In the meantime, there had been problems in the church that led to a severe conflict with Paul. Now the conflict had been resolved, and Paul was calling on them to complete what they had started. In his appeal, *Paul encouraged the Corinthian Christians to give sacrificially as a matter of generosity, growth, and gratitude.*

Paul's appeal shows us what's distinctive about *Christian* giving.

### ***Sacrificial generosity (8:1-9)***

First he shows us that *Christian giving is a matter of sacrificial generosity*.

You may have heard me tell this true story that Paul Harvey shared back around Thanksgiving 1995 about a woman and her frozen Thanksgiving turkey.

The Butterball Turkey Company had set up a hotline that consumers could call with any questions about preparing their holiday turkeys. One particular woman called to inquire about cooking a turkey that had been in the bottom of her freezer for twenty-three years. That's right—*twenty-three* years!

The Butterball representative told her the turkey would probably be safe to eat if the freezer had been kept below zero for the entire twenty-three years, but also warned her that even if it were safe, the flavor would probably have deteriorated to the point that she wouldn't recommend eating it. To which the caller replied, "That's what I thought. We'll give the turkey to our church."<sup>1</sup>

That's how we often give, isn't it? We're willing to give what we have left over, but we're often not very willing to make gifts that will be a *sacrifice* for us.

Through the years I've heard Christians debate whether they should tithe off their gross income or their net income, or if what they gave to other charities should count as part of their tithe.

If you have to ask those kinds of questions, you're giving out of a sense of *legalistic duty* rather than *Christian generosity*.

Paul was talking about something greater than tithing here. Tithing is biblical, and it's important. It's the standard for Christian giving. But Paul is talking about going beyond the standard. He's talking about being sacrificial.

In 8:1-7, he points the Corinthians who were living in the southern part of Greece in a fairly affluent setting to the Macedonians (he's probably referring specifically to the Philippians) who were living in extreme poverty in the northern part of Greece.

He told the Corinthians that these Macedonians had demonstrated the grace that God had given them by their sacrificial generosity. Though they were in severe trial and extreme poverty, they gave not just as much as they were able to give, but *beyond* their ability. They urgently pleaded with Paul and his missionary companions to allow them to participate in this "privilege of sharing in this service to the saints" (8:4b).<sup>2</sup>

When was the last time any of us did that?

Paul told the Corinthians about the Macedonians to prod them gently to go ahead and get their gift together. But he didn't just point to the Macedonians.

In one of the most beautiful expressions of what Christ has done for us, Paul gave the greatest possible motive for sacrificial generosity in 8:9—

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.

You can't be more sacrificially generous than that!

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Harvey's daily radio broadcast, November 22, 1995.

<sup>2</sup> Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*.

What would it mean for you to practice sacrificial generosity? For some, because of their circumstances, a tithe is indeed sacrificial. But for others whom God has blessed with the stewardship of a measure of wealth and possessions, a tithe may be no sacrifice at all.

You see, it's not so much the *amount* you give as the amount you have *left over*. Isn't that what Jesus meant in our Gospel reading this morning when he said that the poor widow who put in the two tiny coins that amounted to less than a penny had given more than those who had put in large gifts—because it was all she had?

So what would it mean *for you*? At what level would your giving be truly sacrificial? What would you have to give up? Some soft drinks and snacks? Some movies? Gourmet coffee? A new set of clothes—or buying regular clothes rather than designer labels?

We sacrifice for those things that are really important to us, don't we? When we look at what Christ has done for us, *how can we not sacrifice for him*?

Is God dealing with you this morning about becoming sacrificially generous in your giving?

### ***Kingdom growth (9:6-14)***

A second distinguishing characteristic that Paul shows us is that *Christian giving is a matter of kingdom growth*. He uses the image of the investment that the farmer makes in his sowing in the expectation of a bountiful harvest.

“Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously” (9:6). The sowing should be out of a willing heart, not reluctantly, not because of external pressure. “God loves a cheerful giver” (9:7). It strikes me as very interesting that the Greek word Paul uses that we translate “cheerful” is *hilaròn*—the word we also get *hilarious* from.

So often we're more like the little girl whose mother gave her a one-dollar bill and a quarter as they were leaving for church. The mother told her, “Sweetheart, you can place either one in the offering plate. It's entirely up to you.”

On their way home after church, the mother asked the daughter which she had decided to give. The girl said, “Well, at first I was going to give the dollar. But the man behind the pulpit said God loves a cheerful giver, so I felt like I'd be much more cheerful if I gave the quarter instead.”<sup>3</sup>

Paul says it pleases God when we sow our giving bountifully with a smile on our face and joy in our heart. That's the kind of giving God blesses. When you get to this point, you're not worried about figuring your exact tithing obligation, and whether it's off of gross or net income. You just want to give all you can because you love the Lord and want to invest in his kingdom!

This kind of giving actually leads to two kinds of growth. Really, they're like the two sides of a coin.

On the one side, it's *God's way of providing for the work of his kingdom*: mission, ministry, caring for the poor and needy, supporting those who are called to lead the church as its ministers. Through the sacrificial generosity of his people, the work of God's kingdom grows. You see, we don't give *to meet a budget*; we give *to share in the work of God's kingdom*, to support the ministries God entrusts to us and our mission of embodying Christ's presence to Sanford and the world!

But on the other side, Christian giving is *an opportunity to grow in grace*, an opportunity for us to develop and deepen our Christian character, to become more like Jesus, who gave up his riches so that we through his poverty might become truly rich for eternity.

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<sup>3</sup> [http://preachingtoday.com/illustrations/article\\_print.html?id=46587](http://preachingtoday.com/illustrations/article_print.html?id=46587).

Christian giving is in a real sense a mark of Christian maturity. If Christ sacrificed himself for us and now lives his life out through us by his Spirit dwelling in us, then his generosity and grace will become a part of who we are as our character is conformed to his.

And the amazing thing is that the more generous we are in this grace, the more generous he'll enable us to be!

Are you participating in the growth of God's kingdom through this grace of giving? Are you growing in grace in this area of your life?

### ***Overwhelming gratitude (9:11-15)***

There's one other thing that Paul points to as a distinguishing characteristic of *Christian giving*. *Christian giving is a matter of overwhelming gratitude.*

That's a theme Paul stresses throughout this text. And it works two ways.

Our generosity *results* in gratitude, in thanksgiving to God for it by those who benefit from it. They praise God for how he works through the generosity he has placed in our hearts. It's evidence of God's work in us and through us, and they give thanks to God for it.

Perhaps more importantly, our generosity should be *motivated* by this overwhelming gratitude for what God has done for us in Jesus Christ—how though he was rich, he became poor for our sakes so we through his poverty might become rich (8:9)!

Has your generosity ever been spurned? Maybe you gave a gift that you put a lot of thought into it or scrimped and saved to be able to buy it. Maybe you even made it with your own hands, only to have the person you were giving it to be ungrateful. Not a good feeling, is it?

Well, God the Son left the glories of heaven to take on human flesh and the form of a servant, and humbled himself to the point of death on a cross (Philippians 2:6-8) so that you and I and anyone who would put their trust in him might be saved from our sin, rescued from its eternal punishment, and have eternal life, enjoying a right relationship with God through Christ both now and for eternity!

How can we *not* be grateful to him? And since he has shown us such grace and generosity, how can we not out of an overwhelming sense of gratitude be generous with all the goods of this world that he entrusts to us?

So what makes giving Christian? According to Paul, *Christian giving is a matter of sacrificial generosity, kingdom growth, and overwhelming gratitude.*

Now you might be saying, "Well, if the economy weren't so bad or I had more money or I made a lot more, I could be generous in my giving."

Some of you will remember the name of Dr. Charles Howard. He taught at Campbell College as a Bible professor for many years and preached all over the place.

Years ago, Dr. Howard and his wife Alma established and managed the Howard Memorial Christian Education Fund, named for his parents, not in place of their giving to their church, but in addition to it. The fund provided aid to students, faculty, churches, and other Christians who found themselves to be in need. It all began in 1926 when Dr. Howard gave \$25 to a student who didn't quite have enough money to enroll at Wake Forest College.

Through the years, the fund has distributed more than \$4 million in loans, scholarships, and gifts to more than 4,000 students and other Christian workers. It has endowed two faculty chairs at Campbell University as well as a number of scholarships. It has provided low interest loans to churches for buildings, to faculty and staff for mortgages, and to faculty to pursue further

education. It has supported prison ministries, a handicapped ministry, counseling services and the daycare center at Memorial Baptist Church in Buies Creek.  
A pretty amazing testament to the power of Christian giving, isn't it, considering that Dr. and Mrs. Howard never earned a salary of more than \$3,000 per year together?<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> <http://biblicalrecorder.org/post/2008/09/09/Remembering-Baptist-giant-Charles-Howard.aspx>.