

2 Corinthians 9:6-8

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[0 : 00] You should have received, when you came in this morning, the intimation sheet, and in the intimation sheet I think most of you will have received one of these little flyers.

So if you have, you'll know what I'm talking about, and on the cover we have a very youthful looking Norman Mackay, until recently the minister of the Free Church in Falkirk, and he's donning a rather fetching hoodie, very youthful look, that advertises the Govan Church plant.

In fact, he's got that on the hoodie. There's a mention there also, if you've got the flyer you'll know what I'm talking about, there's a little code there, G51.

When I first heard about this initiative and I heard G51 I was a little confused, I've heard of the G6 and the G20, but G51 was new to me, but those of you who are quicker on the uptake will have worked out that that's a reference to the postcode for Govan, where Norman, together with his family and I imagine others, will be involved in a new church plant.

Now the purpose of this flyer, and even just a fleeting glance at it, you'll have established, I imagine, what the purpose is. The purpose is to encourage giving, giving that would help finance an initiative such as the one highlighted, and indeed other mission initiatives within Scotland and beyond.

[1 : 35] And so we are being encouraged, that would be you and me, to give generously to the work of the gospel, and very particularly through the church that we form a part of.

I'm not sure how useful these appeals are. I commend those who have made the effort to bring these matters to our attention, but I'm just not sure how useful they are.

What we tend to do, I certainly speak for myself, we get a leaflet like this, we have a glance at it, we put it to one side, and life goes on. I think that's often the case.

I hope that's not unduly cynical, it's not intended to be cynical, it's just my observation of how things often happen, certainly in my own case.

That so, it is true that the call or the encouragement, and I would stress really the word encouragement, the encouragement to generous giving is important.

[2 : 41] And I want to spend today considering this matter in reference to the passage in the Bible that the flyer highlights. If you've had a look, you'll notice that on the back there is a Bible text, a passage printed there.

And it is from the passage that we've read this morning in 2 Corinthians chapter 9 and verses 6 to 8. And I want to think about these verses this morning.

We'll be returning to the passage more broadly this evening. But this morning, we will concentrate our attention on these verses, though also extending ourselves a little bit beyond them.

And what we'll do now is we'll read again these verses so that they will be, I trust, very fresh in our minds as we then proceed to think about what they are saying.

2 Corinthians chapter 9, reading from verse 6. Remember this, whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously.

[3 : 50] Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

And God is able to make all grace abound to you so that in all things, at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. As it is written, he has scattered his gifts to the poor, his righteousness endures forever.

Well, I continued on to verse 9 there. In this passage, we have a lovely affirmation around which I want us to concentrate our thoughts.

And it is this, we are told, Paul tells us, that God loves a cheerful giver. God loves a cheerful giver. We couldn't really continue, but we could, but we're not going to continue without posing the question, are you a cheerful giver? Does that adjective fit?

[4 : 57] Are you a cheerful giver? Well, Paul assures us that God loves cheerful givers. Now, you might imagine that there isn't much that could be said about this statement.

It's simple enough and speaks for itself. God loves a cheerful giver. He just does. However, if I'm going to occupy your time for half an hour or so, which is the norm, I'm going to have to do a little bit more than simply say, well, it's clear, take it away and do what you will with it.

And we're going to spend a little time exploring, just a little deeper, this statement that Paul makes, God loves a cheerful giver. We'll do so by posing a few questions and trying to answer them around this statement.

And the first thing we're going to do is a very, perhaps, obvious starting point and may seem a simple enough task. But ask the question, what does the statement mean? What does it mean when it states or when it is stated, God loves a cheerful giver?

But then we are going to dig a little bit deeper and ask the question, why does God love a cheerful giver? It's one thing for it to be stated. It's one thing for it to be stated and for us to say, well, if that's what it says, it must be true.

[6 : 14] But I think we can helpfully, profitably go a little further and ask, well, why? Why is it that God loves a cheerful giver? But then I think we can also ask the question, and I think we find an answer to it in these verses.

We can ask the question, how does God help us become cheerful givers? We're not born cheerful givers. We become cheerful givers.

Now, how does God help us become cheerful givers? If, when I pose the question to you, are you a cheerful giver, you couldn't really answer immediately yes, but you'd like to become one, well, pay particular attention, well, hopefully for the whole, everything I've got to say, but particularly as we think about how God helps us become cheerful givers.

And then finally, in these verses, and especially as we proceed a little bit further, what is the outcome? What outcome is identified by Paul of cheerful giving?

So let's think about this statement along these lines. First of all, what does the statement mean? God loves a cheerful giver.

[7 : 28] However, the origin of this statement, you might think it's a saying or a proverb, it's got that kind of feel, God loves a cheerful giver.

Its origin is intriguing. We can't know for certain if Paul is drawing on some existing statement that he was familiar with, but it's very possible that he was.

But interestingly, if you were to have one of these clever concordances where you can look up not only words, but statements, and you put in this statement, you wouldn't find it in the Bible.

And you say, oh, well, this statement has not been drawn by Paul from the Bible because I've looked up my concordance and it doesn't come up. It's not to be found. Well, that's true.

But the intriguing thing is that in the Septuagint, which many of you will be familiar, is the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament, and it was available, it was current at the time of Jesus and Paul, and so in the New Testament, the New Testament writers, when they're quoting from the Old Testament, they also, or they often quote from the Septuagint, for obvious reason that it was in Greek and they were writing in Greek, so it was simple for them to do so.

[8 : 45] It was very interesting that in the Septuagint, there is a translation of Proverbs chapter 22 and verse 9, where this is the rendering that is given to that verse in Proverbs.

Well, what is the original in Hebrew, or translated into English for our benefit? Well, in Proverbs chapter 22 and verse 9, you have this statement, a generous man will himself be blessed, or as it is phrased much more attractively in other versions, whoever has a bountiful eye will be blessed.

That's what it says in Proverbs. The interesting thing is that that statement in the Septuagint is translated, God loves a cheerful giver. Now, that's intriguing because it, although clearly it's on the same basic theme, it does seem a bit of a stretch if you're going to call that a translation, but that's the way it is.

So, it may be that Paul was familiar with this statement, and that is where he is drawing it from.

Now, is this of any interest beyond just being intriguing?

Well, I think it is, because if indeed that is its origin, then the original statement in Proverbs gives us insight into the bigger picture from which flows this pithy statement, God loves a cheerful giver.

[10 : 07] And of course, the original statement in Proverbs, a generous man will himself be blessed, or whoever has a bountiful eye will be blessed, really gets across some big truths about

God and about God's delights and what God likes.

God loves generosity. That much is very clear. God loves generosity. But we can go further. From what we read in Proverbs, God blesses the generous.

He blesses those who are generous. And summarizing that in this very memorable way, we have this statement that Paul employs here in encouraging the Corinthians.

God loves the cheerful giver. But as we think a little bit more about this and what it means, God loves the cheerful giver, if we were to analyze it a little bit more and possibly be guilty of over-analyzing, never a good thing to do in life generally, but it can also not be a very clever thing to do on occasions with the Scriptures.

But if you just indulge me for a moment as we maybe over-analyze it a little bit, can we conclude from this statement, God loves the cheerful giver, could we conclude that God does not love the reluctant giver?

[11 : 32] That might seem a logical inference. He loves the cheerful giver, therefore, He does not love the reluctant giver. Now, if that's the case, it creates a big problem for many of us, because if we are ever reluctant givers, as we sometimes are, then that would call into question God's love for us.

Happily, in the light of the teaching of Scripture in its totality, we know, of course, that God's love for His own people is unconditional. He loves you, and forgive the rather blunt language, but He loves you even when you are a tight, miserable git.

He still loves you when that is what you are. He still loves you because His love for you is not dependent on how generous you are, how cheerful you are, how productive you are, how good you are.

It's not dependent on those things. But though that is true, and that is a great comfort for us, it is also true that God does love.

God takes delight in the cheerful giver. God is thrilled by cheerful giving. God celebrates and rejoices in the generosity of His people.

[12 : 50] Or in the pithy manner in which Paul describes it, God loves the cheerful giver. He delights in cheerful giving.

Which leads us on to the second question that we anticipated, and it's this. Why does God love a cheerful giver or cheerful giving? Why is it that God loves this?

Well, in the passage that we've read, as we read it, and I didn't begin the reading by asking you to think about this, so this is maybe a little bit unfair to ask the question, but as you remember the passage as we read it, who stands out in the passage as the ultimate cheerful giver?

Now, the use of the word ultimate kind of gives the game away as to what I'm trying to get to. Who is presented by Paul as the source and fountain of generosity?

Well, how does Paul close this section of his letter encouraging generosity? How does he draw this section of the letter to a close?

[14 : 04] Well, he does so in this very dramatic way in verse 15. Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift. Now, we're going to come back to this really can only be described as explosion of praise.

We're going to come back to it this evening, but the message for the moment is clear. God is the ultimate giver. He is the original giver.

Our God is a preeminently giving God. That is what our God is like. Now, with that in mind, with that at the very forefront of our mind, we return to our question.

Why does God love a cheerful giver? Well, we can say this, and no doubt we could say more, but we can certainly say this. In a cheerful giver, God sees himself.

He sees something of himself. In cheerful giving, he sees his own image and likeness. And that, as we well know, is why he created us, that we would reflect his image and likeness.

[15 : 13] God delighted in creating us. God delights in giving us life and providing for us. God delights in saving us. God delights in giving us a Savior in the person of his own Son, Jesus.

For God so loved the world that he gave us his one and only Son. And in a cheerful giver, God the Father sees himself.

But also, very beautifully, in a cheerful giver, God sees his Son. He sees something of Jesus. Jesus was given by the Father, but Jesus also gave himself for us.

This is the very point that Paul has made in this same section of the letter, developing the same theme of generosity in chapter 8. We haven't read that, but we can read it now in chapter 8 and verses 8 and 9.

He's begun this section. It's entitled there, Generosity and Courage. Notice what he says in verse 8 of chapter 8. The Father gave his Son.

[16:41] And the Son gave of himself. God is a giving God. And we know that the purpose of God in our lives as believers is that we would be transformed into the image of his Son.

That is the work that God is doing in us. And when God witnesses cheerful giving, when he sees you giving cheerfully, he not only sees something of Jesus, and that is a pleasing thing for the Father, but he's also able to establish that his purpose in us is in a measure being fulfilled as we are becoming more like Jesus.

And the Father loves that. He loves it when he sees his children becoming like his Son. How does God help us become cheerful givers?

Or we put it another way, if we could pose the question another way. What does God do to achieve this objective, if we can call it an objective, that we would be cheerful givers?

What does God do? You might think there's a lot that we need to do, but the question at the moment is, what does God do in order that this would be the outcome? What does God do? In a word, everything.

[18:09] God does everything. Is that not what the apostle, is that not what Paul says? In a more developed way, more comprehensively, but essentially, is that not what Paul says in the immediately following verse?

Having made the statement, God loves a cheerful giver, what does Paul immediately go on to say? Well, notice there with me in verse 8. At the end of verse 7, we read, for God loves a cheerful giver, and then what does it say?

And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things, at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.

And the close of that, what can we call it, this description of what God does, speaking of Christians abounding in every good work, really abounding in every good work, is equivalent to cheerful giving. Paul's concern here particularly, though the principle applies beyond this, but his particular concern was that the Corinthians would be generous in giving for the poor in Jerusalem. And his concern is that they would abound in this good work, that they would be cheerful givers in this matter, and of course in other matters as well.

[19:25] But where does that come from? Where will this abounding in good works come from? Where will this cheerful giving proceed from? Well, it proceeds from God.

It is God who makes all grace abound for us. It is God who ensures that in all things and at all times, we have all that we need.

Talk about comprehensive. At all times, in all things, we have all that we need. And consequently, as we experience and appreciate such generous provision from God, we in turn abound in every good work.

Our good work, our cheerful giving is in response to, it is the product of what God has done for us. How God has been able to make all grace abound for us.

There's this chain of grace with a start point and an end point. We might see it or picture it in other ways as circular as well, but let's not go down that road.

[20:35] Let's just stick with a chain. And if the end point is missing, the abounding in every good work or cheerful giving, if that is absent, I ask the question, where in lies the problem?

Not in God's provision. The problem doesn't lie in God's provision. It must be in our failure to appreciate God's provision. For if we appreciate God's provision, then things will be as they are described by Paul.

You will abound in every good work. You will be a cheerful giver. Our penultimate question that we want to pose and find an answer to in the passage is, what does cheerful giving look like?

What does it look like? For that, we backtrack from verse 8 to verse 7, and then we'll backtrack to verse 6, in fact. But beginning at verse 7, we can identify three characteristics of cheerful giving as presented by Paul.

The three characteristics I would highlight for us to just notice. First of all, cheerful giving is thoughtful. It's thoughtful, it's voluntary, and it's generous.

[21 : 47] Let's just think of these three characteristics of cheerful giving. First of all, thoughtful. What does Paul say there in verse 7? Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give.

The picture is of thoughtful consideration being given to the matter at hand with the outcome of such thoughtful consideration, a determination, a decision.

The man, the woman, thinks about the matter at hand, the need that has been presented to them. Think about it, and having thought about it, they decide, we decide what we will do, what we will give.

Now, this very point had been made in the concrete case of the Corinthians' gift for the Christians in Jerusalem. It's interesting, we don't really have the time to do this, so I'll just paraphrase what Paul has been saying in the previous part of the letter.

What he's been saying to them is, I'm going to come, I'm going to come to Corinth. When I come, I want to collect the gift that you have gathered, and then I'll take it to Jerusalem.

[22 : 56] But the reason I'm writing to you now, why? So that you can think about it. I don't want to arrive and say, listen, I need a gift for the needy in Jerusalem, so come on, quickly, let's just gather something together.

And so people might feel under pressure, people might think, well, I don't know what this is about. He says, no, I'm anticipating what I'm going to be doing when I arrive. And what does that permit? Well, it permits this, it permits the believers in Corinth to think about the letter that's been written, to ponder on the things that Paul has said, to think about the needs that have been presented to them, to consider all that God has blessed them with, and to decide, to thoughtfully determine what they will do with what God has given them.

That's what we need to do. That's what we need to do in the matter of giving, in the matter of financial giving. When we receive a flyer like that we've won receive today, we can read it, we can think about it, we can consider what it says, and we can come to a determination.

That's what we should do. Because cheerful giving is thoughtful in its character. But it's also voluntary. That is so clearly stressed by Paul there in verse 7.

[24 : 10] Not reluctantly or under compulsion. Not under compulsion, therefore voluntary. Of course, that simply reiterates what Paul had very clearly stated in verse 8 of chapter 8.

I am not commanding you. He wants to be very clear. I'm not commanding you. I'm not ordering you. I'm not requiring you. Because this is a voluntary matter. It's voluntary.

But actually what Paul is saying here when he says, not reluctantly or under compulsion, I think what he's saying is actually more radical than simply emphasizing the voluntary nature of our giving.

I think what he's saying is that we ought not to give reluctantly. He's not simply saying it's good to give in a voluntary way.

It's good that your giving shouldn't be under compulsion. But he's actually saying if your giving is reluctant, then don't give at all. If your giving is reluctant giving, then my advice, and I think fairly echoing Paul, is don't give at all.

[25 : 22] Because God will not delight in reluctant giving. God takes no pleasure in a grudging gift. He takes no pleasure in it. Now in our mindset we might think, well, it's reluctant, it's grudging, but, you know, it's necessary.

But, you know, I think that really betrays a misunderstanding of God and his resources. God doesn't need your giving. God does not stand in need of your tithe, of your giving, of your offerings.

He doesn't need them. He is the one who owns everything. And so it's not a case of, well, I don't really want to give, but I suppose I should, so I will. Because if I don't, well, you know, disaster.

No, there'll be no disaster if you don't give a penny. Because God doesn't need your giving. And God will not delight in a grudging gift. So it's better not to give it at all.

If it's going to be grudging. Thoughtful, voluntary, and generous. Cheerful giving is generous. We backtrack to verse 6.

[26 : 25] Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly. And whoever sows generously will also reap generously. The same picture really is, got across.

In fact, the language of generosity is found in verse 11. And you will be made rich in every way. So that you can be generous on every occasion. And through us, your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.

Generosity cannot be contrived. It can't be forced. It can't be imposed. It can't even be self-imposed. You can't look in the mirror and say, I'm going to try really hard to be generous. That's not the nature of generosity. It flows from a cheerful heart. Cheerful giving will of necessity be generous giving. And generous giving, by definition, will be cheerful giving.

There is a happy marriage between generosity and cheerful giving. They go together. The example that Paul points to as an encouragement to the Corinthians of this generosity are the Macedonians. [27 : 38] In chapter 8, we haven't read this, but let's just quickly read what he says about the Macedonians. He's using them as an example, as an encouragement to the Corinthians. And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches.

Notice how he begins. The grace that God has given them. Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity.

You see, their overflowing joy wells up in generosity. It's not contrived. It's the outflow of their grateful heart. And so, I ask myself, and I ask you, is your giving marked by these characteristics? Is it thoughtful? Is it voluntary? Is it generous? I can't and I won't exhort you to give in this way. God doesn't command you to give in this way.

Such giving springs from a grateful, cheerful heart, a heart in love with Jesus. Finally, what is the outcome of cheerful giving?

[28 : 42] Our text begins at verse 6 with what has been described as a law of spiritual economics. But I think even the introduction of the word economics isn't helpful. The imagery there in verse 6 is agricultural, sowing and reaping.

But the message seems plain enough. If you give generously, the payback will be generous. You know, if you sow generously, you'll reap generously.

And at first sight, such a statement would seem to pander to self-interest. Here are my notes. I've got selfish self-interest, but I suppose self-interest is, by definition, selfish.

And of course, prosperity gospel preachers, if you've ever had the misfortune of seeing the obscenities on the God channel of these prosperity preachers, they love a verse like this. And they come onto their screen and they say, sow a hundred pounds and you'll get a thousand pounds or something equally obnoxious.

And that, you know, at first sight, that seems to be what is being said here as the outcome of generous, cheerful giving. Is that what Paul is teaching? Well, to answer the question, we need to establish what is the nature of the harvest promised.

[29 : 54] There's the promise of a harvest, of reaping generously there in verse 6. Well, what is this harvest? Well, helpfully, Paul tells us what the harvest is in verses 10 and 11.

Now, he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your stoward of seed and will enlarge, and listen carefully, the harvest. This is the harvest.

If you sow generously, there'll be a harvest. Well, what is this harvest? The harvest of your righteousness. And what does this righteousness refer to? Well, it refers to the righteous acts that Paul has already been spoken of, abounding in every good work.

The harvest is the opportunity and the desire to do more giving, to serve in even greater measure. This is the harvest, the harvest of your righteousness. Verse 11 makes it explicit. You will be made rich in every way. Why? So that you can be generous on every occasion.

[30 : 54] Rich in every way, to be generous on every occasion. This is the harvest. Giving more. And of course, for the cheerful giver, that's a delightful thing. I can give more.

I can be more generous. I've been blessed, and so I can give more liberally, even than I have done before. And I delight in that. This is the outcome of cheerful giving.

This is the harvest that Paul speaks of. In actual fact, Paul, as well as establishing this basic principle of what the harvest involves, also anticipates in the specific circumstance of the poor in Jerusalem, particular outcomes of the cheerful giving of the Christians in Corinth.

And he speaks about them there in verse 11 and 12. What will be the specific outcomes of their cheerful giving? Well, what do we read? Indeed, from verse 12, this service that you perform, here he's speaking very specifically about the gift that they'll gather for the poor in Jerusalem, this service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of God's people, so one outcome is that these very clear, specific needs are supplied, but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God.

God is glorified. God is worshiped. God is praised. The poor in Jerusalem praise God for what they've received from the Corinthians. And the givers as well, those who are giving, are enriched. [32 : 28] That's what we noted in verse 11. So the outcome of this cheerful giving is the giver is enriched, the needy receive what they need, and God is glorified. Isn't that a wonderful outcome of cheerful giving?

We draw things to a close. And I ask the question that I posed at the beginning. And I ask it not because it would be foolishness in the light of all that we've said already, not as some kind of psychological guilt trip, but simply to pose the question for you to consider. Are you a cheerful giver? Remember, I'm not commanding you. Paul is not commanding you. God is not commanding you. It's not about duty.

It's about desire. Let me just illustrate this rather trivially. I just saw it as a result of yesterday's games in the premiership.

[33 : 26] Paolo Di Canio, those who follow football will know about Paolo Di Canio. Well, his team Sunderland, you know, it was the lowest of the low, they lost to Crystal Palace. It doesn't get much lower than that in the premiership.

So they lost 3-1 to Crystal Palace. And Paolo Di Canio, if you've ever seen him, he's very passionate. He's Italian and he's great for interviews. And he would say, oh, my players are excellent. They're very good players.

But then he said this, in the light of their ignominious defeat to Crystal Palace, he said this, I cannot change the heart of my players. What was he saying?

He's saying there's a question of desire that he can't manipulate. He can't change the heart of his players. If they don't want to win, if they don't want to use the abilities that they have, then there's nothing he can do.

And doesn't that, maybe in a small way, help us understand what Paul is saying here? I can't change your heart. I can't command you to be cheerful, to be generous.

[34 : 25] But what I can do, and what Paul is doing, Paul is doing this in this letter, he's encouraging, he's enthusing the believers in Corinth.

He's urging them to discover the delight to be found in cheerful giving. And where does cheerful giving begin?

Possibly we've attempted or, in a measure, answered the question. But it begins surely, as we are able, from the heart, to echo Paul's words, with which he finishes this part of his letter.

Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift. The believer who can erupt in praise with Paul in this way will be one who gives cheerfully.

Let us pray. Thank you.