

Sharing: Because we may
Bible reading 2 Cor 8.9, 9.6-15

Introduction: this mornings passage is a familiar one, and is often used, quite rightly as a base passage for an understanding of Christian Giving; however this morning the subject is sharing, and there is a significant difference between the two – it is possible to give money without giving ourselves, whereas sharing is a matter of the heart – we cannot share our money without in some way giving ourselves.

It is possible for us to give, and the recipient feels ignored, belittled, patronised or in some way uninvolved – when we share however, we notice the other person, we engage with them; look at it like this:

There are few things we like less than having something done for us out of duty. What might otherwise have been a valued act of service brings instead a sense of humiliation; what appeared to be an act of friendship becomes a cause of rancour; what seemed a hugely generous gift feels suddenly like a tarnished trinket, all but worthless. We want people to respond to us not because they feel they should but because they want to.

How about if you gave your wife flowers and she asks why and you said you had to?

We want their dealings with us to be transparent rather than hiding some ulterior motive. What we *don't* want, above all, is to be patronised.

We do well to bear that in mind when it comes to our dealings with God, for all too easily the service we offer him becomes a matter of duty rather than privilege. We don't intend it to happen, nor are we always conscious of doing so, but little by little the sparkle in our faith fades and the spontaneity that once characterised our relationship with God has become a routine of going through the motions. We bring our offering because it is expected of us; we read the Bible because we feel guilty if we don't; we say our prayers because we feel we ought to -and we hope God won't notice. Is that what he wants from us? Of course not. He wants us to love him, serve him and worship him not because we must but because we may. He wants us to offer our discipleship not because we should but because we can. Some of the words that we use in the invitation to communion echo this thought – ‘come to this table, not because you must, but because you may’.

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In the context of these verses we find that there had been a food shortage in Jerusalem and the believers across the area had raised money to send to them – now a year later Paul wants to encourage them to be ready to send their aid to those who needed it.

It actually becomes a matter of the heart – if you have a generous heart, one that is joyful and overflowing, then what God pours into you, you let overflow and bless others – if however you give to get, or are not overflowing but trying to manipulate God then you find that there is no flow – there is no joy or life or blessing, even if you have material goods. We try and bottle up life and in the process start to wither inside. It is the old parable of the two seas in Israel: one, the sea of Galilee flows out into the river Jordan, and is full of life – the other, doesn't flow out anywhere and we call it the 'dead sea'.

Pro 11:24-25 One man gives freely, yet gains even more; another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty. A generous man will prosper; he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed.

The blessing of the Lord makes rich and he adds no sorrow with it. Proverbs 10.22

Look at the language in v.8 'all, always, every' – it is the language of abundance, but the purpose is liberality, generosity and grace – the concept of Christian charity, compassion on the poor is called a grace in 8.1,6,7,19 & 9.14 – it is a grace, something lovely and life-giving – we see it in Jesus example v.8

The grace of giving is shown in these two chapters when:

- a) we give in spite of circumstances (8.1-2)
- b) we give enthusiastically (8.3-4) cp Mars Hill 'Joy Buckets'
- c) we give as Jesus gave (8.5-9)
- d) we give willingly (8.10-12)

9.10 'supply' = Gk 'choregeo' – the leader of a chorus, the one who defrayed the expenses of the chorus at public festivals

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Here God arranges the circumstances, supplies what is needed and underwrites it all both directly (through supernatural means like the feeding of the 5000) and indirectly through cause and effect. The purpose is that through these situations our lives become harmonious with others, with him and result in joyful thanksgiving, praise and glory.

Your giving will meet needs, which is good, but your *sharing* will:

- a) bless you (9.6-11)
- b) will meet needs (9.12)
- c) Glorify God (9.13)
- d) Unite Gods people (9.14-15)

2Co 9:6-8 Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. 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.

So as we move towards our time of communion together, let us thank God for his grace of giving which sent Jesus for us, and also share our lives with him and with each other - not because we must, but because we may. Amen.