II Cor. 8:1-7; II Cor. 9:6-15; The Attitude and Action of Giving (Part 2) I. The Foundation for Giving II. The Character of Giving III. The Extent of Giving

**III. The Extent of Giving (LD 38; LD 42)**

As we return to II Cor. 8-9 this evening, we continue to focus on the call to be cheerful and generous in our giving. Jesus Christ teaches us to view and use money with an eye towards eternity.

Now that we understand what the giver is to look like, (they are cheerful and happy to give) in our last point we consider the extent of giving. When the attitude of the Christian giver is one of joy and cheer, we continue to look at the extent of his giving. So to start off, how much should we give? What is the extent of our generosity? Our reading from II Cor. 9:6 put it like this, if you sow sparingly, you will reap sparingly. If you sow bountifully, you will reap bountifully. V. 11- generous in every way; and again in v. 13- the generosity of your contribution. So the first thing we learn is that our giving is to bountiful- or generous. With an open heart and hand! Imagine a farmer who getting ready to plant his field. Upon inspection, he find that his bag of seed is filled and worth significant money. The seed used to sow will be lost- but this sowing- this spreading of the seed and planting it will only serve to increase his blessings. Imagine how foolish it would be for a farmer to avoid planting the seed because it would cost him. If he hold on to the seed because he is scared of the cost- scared to lose what he has. So in fear, he cannot open his hand to let the seed go! But if you do not sow- you will not reap! A farmer has to have an eye to the future- in fact the more that you sow the greater your reaping will be! The larger your garden, the more you will gain! Here again, Paul states that there is a link between the amount we give and the amount we receive. Keeping in mind what we learned last week, we are not earning a reward and our giving does not merit God’s gifts in return. Remember, what do we have that we have not first received. So when we give to the church, we are in fact simply returning to God what He has first given to us. How could we earn a reward when what we give was itself first a gift to us? But it is stated here that if you sow bountifully you will reap- your return will be bountiful. Literally, you will reap a blessing- a commendation! There is an inverse relationship here when it comes to giving. This goes against human logic and reasoning- but the truth is this. The more you give away the more you will have! The more you try to hold on to and keep, the less you will have! So not only will you reap what you sow- you will also reap a return and expansion! Now to be clear, Paul is not saying that God will give you more money than you give away. The nature of our return is not in physical things. The way that things work in the Kingdom of God is not a one to one or like manner return. This is the teaching of the Prosperity Gospel- which is heresy. This false teaching states that if you give some money to the church, God will cause more money to flow back into your bank account. That is not how God works. Rather, we are called to give away and be generous with our earthly treasures with an eye toward a heavenly return! As 9:10 says- the increase is a harvest of righteousness! As Jim Eliot said, “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.” So the location and manner of our reward- what we will reap- is not the same as what we sow. Jesus put it this way in Matthew 6:19- do not store up treasures on earth were moth and rust destroy and thieves steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also! As those living in California have found out- the things of this world are temporary and passing. As the fire raged on, their million-dollar homes were reduced to dust. And as the looters arrived- even the little that remained was stolen away! Earthly treasures can and will be lost! So we sow by giving away our time, treasure and talents in this life in the hope of a promised reaping of a reward in the life to come! The physical gifts you give today are then being stored up for you as spiritual gifts in heaven. So those who are looking forward to a heavenly reward- seeking first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness- will be bountiful or generous.

Continuing in chapter 9:7, those who sow bountifully will also give as he has decided. You have to make up your mind, if you will, and give according to that decision. The fact is, many people in the church are undisciplined when it comes to their giving. They think little and plan less. Without preparation, thought and plan; their giving is limited to whatever cash they might have on hand. How much do I have in my wallet this morning- what loose change can I find in my purse? But here we are called to plan- to have a decided number and manner of giving. Many people have good intention- desires to be generous. But those plans failed for lack of planning and execution. So make up your mind and carry it out- as you have decided! In this context, at the church in Corinth, Paul was exhorting the saints to finish the work they had begun. Back in 8:6 Paul says, complete this work- this act of grace. The church in Corinth had promised to support the needy saints in Jerusalem- they had already taken an offering and they began this work- but they needed to finish it! To carry out what they had promised- to keep their word and carry out their commitment. It is not enough to have plans- but the work needs to be completed. So give as you have decided- and give all that you have committed. This is a call to perseverance- to be steadfast and committed in your giving. Being committed to carrying out what you have been moved to do!

So we are to give generously and as much as we have decided- as much as the Spirit has moved our hearts to give we are to carry this out. But let’s get down to the brass tacks- the real burning question. How much does God expect me to give? What amount does God want me to give to the church? First of all, I need to make a distinction. The fact is, everything you have is from God and for God! All of your treasure, time and talent is from Him and is to be used for Him! Nothing is exempt- all is to be used as a pleasing offering to Him. As the Lord of your life- all that you have is His and is to be used for His glory! But that is not the whole answer- for God calls us to return a portion for the specific use of supporting the ministry. So how much does God want you to give to the church? Well, Paul says in 8:12- that you are to give according to what you have. There is a direct link between the amount God has given you and the amount that God calls you to give! So if you have little, like the widow of Mark 12 who gave 2 pennies, then God calls you to give out of your poverty. In fact, God praises the widow for giving as much as she did even though she had so little. But to the rich, our God calls them to give according to the riches that God has given them. Only you and your Lord knows how much talent and treasure He has given you. So in the church of Corinth, those who had much would give much and those who had little would give little- so the those with less would not be overly burdened and those who had plenty could give more. This is fair- v. 13 says. If you have an abundance, you should be giving more! There is no quota system in the church where we all pay the same amount- no membership fees or dues that are collected. Rather, those who have less will give less and those who have more are expected to give more. And although Paul does not use the term here, the concept of a tithe fits very well. The tithe or the 10% is a good place to start. Of all the money that comes into your account, 10% is returned to the Lord as your thankful response. On average, only 5% of church members tithe. Statistically, the average church member gives around 20$ a week which is about 2% of their income. This is particularly striking, when the average American spends 20$ a week at Starbucks. So generally speaking, those who attend church spend the same amount at Starbucks as they do in supporting the local church. Now to be clear- I am thankful for the generosity and commitment to giving that I see in our church. I have personally seen the faithful giving and generosity of many members. But we can all use an encouragement- to finish the work by doing it well as 8:11 puts it. So the 10% tithe is a good place to start- and anything above that would be called a free will offering. Malachi 3 includes a pretty stern warning for those who enjoy the benefits of being a member of the covenant without supporting that community. (Malachi 3:6-12) Malachi 3:8- you are robbing God if you do not bring in your tithes and offering! You are under a curse because you are robbing me- God said. On the flip side, if you would bring in the full tithe God promises to open the windows of heaven and pour out blessings upon them. So God takes the support of the temple very seriously! And as God’s people, we too will be committed to the well being and support of the church. As LD 38 clarifies- we keep the Sabbath Day holy not only when we attend the sacred assembly of God’s people; but when we support the gospel ministry. Supporting the church- bring in your tithes and offering- is part of keeping this commandment! So knowing that God is pleased to use us to support His work within the church will move us to bring in our tithes and offering. It is a privilege- but also a responsibility. God could just cause every ministry to be fully funded- He could cause the bank accounts to just grow by themselves. He could move some tech billionaire to send us a check for millions of dollars. But rather, He is pleased to use means! Specifically, God wants us to trust Him! He tests us- in a good way. Malachi 3:10- put me to the test! See if I will not bless you and provide for all your needs! Again in II Cor. 9:10- He supplies seed to the sower and bread for food. He will supply your need- suppling the needs of the saints. One main challenge to generosity is fear. How will I be able to supply for myself and my family if I give to the church? If I bring in the full tithe, I will not have enough. So what tends to happen is that people wait until the end of the month to see if there is anything left over- and there seldom is. The money flies out the door- and we come to end of the month and nothing is left over so we don’t give to the church as we had once desired. The Biblical pattern puts this process on its head. We are called to give first- to support the church with our first fruits! Not last- not giving whatever is left over. But giving first- putting a priority on our offerings. How do I know this? Well, listen to I Cor. 16:2- on the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper. The point is that the collection is to be priority- the first day of the week. Not the last day of the month. The first-fruit and not the leftovers. Giving within the church is not like a tip that we hold back. At the end of a meal- if the meal and service was good- we might throw a few extra dollars to the waiter. No- that is not how giving works. We are not using charity as a way to manipulate- telling God that if He gives us what we want we will in turn give some more back to Him! No- rather our hearts are moved by what God has already done- in the light of what we have already received we show Him our thanks. We are not paying our bills with God- nothing we do can ever repay God! Rather, it is joyful response not a reimbursement!

Before we close, we remember that giving within the church prepares us for glory. The most important things in life are not things at all. The love of money is the root of all kinds of evil- being generous with our treasure teaches the heart to seek first the things above! LD 42 says that we are to do whatever we can for our neighbor’s good- and I work faithfully so that I can help the needy in their hardship. One of the key uses of the Benevolence of church is to support this very need. Those who are undergoing financial hardship are to be supported by the generous giving within the context of the church. So the early church saw the rise of the office of deacon in Acts 6. 7 Men were chosen to distribute food and money to the widows of the church- to literally wait on tables- so that the widows would not be overlooked. So it is today- that our deacons are called ministers of mercy. They collect our money so that the needs of the church- the functions of the church would continue. But also so that the needy in our church- in this household of faith- would be ministered to. And as able, to help the needy in our community as well. So the Benevolence Fund is designed to help in this way. The deacons encouraging generosity, collecting and distributing gifts according to need, and in ministering to those that are suffering with kind words, deeds and prayers. God is pleased to use the generosity of the church to bless His people- but also to bring glory to His own name. The ministry of generous giving not only supplies the needs of the saints as 9;12 says- it also overflows in many thanksgivings to God! In other words, people will glorify God as they are blessed when they receive from your cheerful giving! So giving within the church is not only rooted in the gratitude of the giver- but also lends to the gratitude and thanksgiving to God from those who receive!

To conclude, the making and spending of money is the key to a consumerist society. I make money to have it- I save money to keep it- I spend money on the things that I want. Capitalism is the system of commerce where profit is the goal- but this teaches us that whoever dies with the most toys wins- right?! Unfortunately, this mentality can easily creep into the church and infect the minds of God’s people. So much time is spent worrying about finances today. Now this is not to say that we should be foolish with our finances- we should plan and save for the future. We should store up a little at a time in order to be prepared for the future and save up for big purchases. As much as possible, we want to avoid debt because the borrower is slave to the lender. But money is not evil- it is the love of money that is the root of all kinds of evil. If we are cheerfully and generously supporting the local church, we can enjoy an expensive meal or vacation without the feeling of guilt. God gives us money- talents, time and treasure- for the purpose of testing us. How will you use it? How will you view it? Does the gold and silver glitter- does the weight of cash in your pocket give you comfort? May we all learn to see money as a tool- even a gift from God that we can use to show our gratitude as we put it to use in the kingdom with a heart of faith! Jesus Christ teaches us to view and use money with an eye towards eternity. So look to the future harvest as you sow the seeds of cheerful giving today!