**God loves a cheerful giver** 27/2/22 dkm

Read: Matthew 5:38-6:4, 2Corinthians 9

Text: 2Corinthians 9: 6-15

Psalms: 34:1-10, 1, 112, 117

One of my tasks as an agronomist was to determine the optimum rate of sowing for various crops. After conducting field trials, I could tell farmers how many kilograms of seed per hectare they should sow to get a good crop of corn or lucerne. Wheat is a bit more flexible as it can produce tillers. When seed is expensive, some farmers cut back on their sowing rate but in doing this they limit the potential yield of their crop.

In Israel there were lots of farmers, even in the time of Jesus. Jesus used pictures of farming practices in his parables e.g. Parable of the sower. It was common knowledge that, ‘He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly’ (9:6). The apostle Paul reminds the Corinthians of this basic truth as he continues to challenge them to give to the collection for poorer brethren in Jerusalem.

Let no one think that in giving to others, after having given themselves to the Lord, they will be worse off. God’s arithmetic is very different to that of sinners like us! With God, ‘minus’ can mean ‘multiply’. Our three subheadings are, ‘Generous and joyous giving’, ‘Grace abounding’ and, ‘Glory to God’.

**1. Generous and joyous giving**

Philanthropy is rare in our country. Rich people tend to hang onto their money, telling themselves that they worked hard and deserve every dollar they have. Poorer people tend to more generous than the rich. But most giving to charities has to be ‘facilitated’ with raffles or lotteries. People give in the hope of getting a prize. For some the prize is a ‘thing’ while for others it is recognition or fame.

In a school I know, you get your name on a tile on a wall when you give a certain amount. People feel good at seeing their name on the wall, or feel guilty at not seeing it. Some churches adopt a similar method of fundraising, listing people’s names and the amount they give on the wall of the church. Such methods fundraising, such enticements to give, are contrary to the method of giving taught by Jesus and the apostle Paul (Mat 6:3). Such methods are rejected by our church as stated in our handbook: ‘The approved method of fundraising is by free-will offerings. Raffles, games of chance, or other forms of lottery are forbidden’.

After referring to a proverb about sowing seed, Paul tells the Corinthians and us to give generously. He was not teaching anything new to the people of God. Moses commanded the people to be generous towards the poor and not ‘tight-fisted’ (Deut 15:11). In Proverbs we read, ‘There is one who scatters yet increases more, and there is one who withholds but it leads to poverty’ (Prov 22:9). Paul himself quotes from Psalm 112:9 about giving to the poor. Jesus linked giving to hungry brethren with giving to Jesus, pointing out the blessing that would come from doing this (Mat 25:34f).

The link between giving and receiving is not a strict like-for-like equation of course. Firstly, the material gift to the poor may bring spiritual blessings to the giver. We do not agree with those preachers of the ‘prosperity gospel’ who say that material riches are a sign of God’s blessing. God does promise to supply our needs, but not our greed’s. He does not link our prosperity to our effective proclamation of the gospel. On the contrary, it is our giving, giving not only of our goods but of our time and our lives, that is most effective in our proclamation of the gospel. The missionary Jim Elliot, who died at the hands of the Auca Indians, wisely said, ‘He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose’.

The second way in which God turns the ‘equation of giving’ on its head is the abundant grace that he brings into the equation. Just as it is said of Christian marriage that it involves three persons, husband, wife and Christ, so Christian giving involves three persons, giver, recipient and Christ. The cheerful giver is loved by God, which makes a big difference to the equation. One who gives under compulsion, or grudgingly, or with selfish motives, is not pleasing to God because ‘God loves a cheerful giver’ (9:7).

Paul wanted each of the Corinthians to give what he or she had determined in their heart to give. They should give in relation to their income or what they have, not in relation to what others are giving. Paul of course, challenged them to give liberally like the Macedonians, but it was always giving in relation to one’s ability and personal decision to give- meaning a decision that is the outcome of prayer.

**2. Grace abounding**

While it is true that God supplies our needs (Phil 4:19), it is also true that he often does this through other people in the church. ‘The believer must always be a human channel through which divine grace flows to enrich others’. In this way God strengthens and unites the fellowship of believers- more on this in our next point. For now, Paul’s focus is on the grace of God that knows no limits. God can use other people to supply the needs of his people. Or he can ‘multiply loaves and fishes’ as we might say. While some think Jesus’ feeding of the five thousand was through everyone sharing their lunch like the boy, clearly this was a miracle. Moreover, God’s grace is not only about material blessing. There are many rich people who are spiritually poor. God in his grace, and through his Spirit, gives many gifts to his people; he might even use a beggar to bring blessing to a rich person!

‘God is able to make all grace abound toward you’ (9:8). This verse is full of superlatives- all grace, always, all sufficiency, and every good work. ‘Those who seek the Lord shall not lack any good thing’ (Ps 34:10). There will be times when you will not get what you pray for, but never doubt God’s ability to give every good and perfect gift (James 1:17). God may withhold something for your benefit, or even take something away, as Job says (Job 1: 21).

We note the term sufficiency, ‘all sufficiency’ (9:8), meaning all my needs not all my greed’s. And this sufficiency is in ‘all things’, not just material things. And further, this grace of God, this sufficiency, and this abundance is ‘for every good work’. God gives to you, that you may be able to share with those in need. If we think all that God gives us is for us to accumulate, and for us live a life of luxury, we are sinking into sin. Heaping up treasure for yourself is condemned (Luke 12:20-21, James 4:3).

Psalm 112 is a wisdom Psalm, a Psalm about the righteous man who fears the Lord. God will bless such a person, and he will in turn be a blessing to others, being compassionate and gracious, just like the Lord himself (Ps 111:4). His giving to the poor is what draws the attention of the apostle as he quotes from Psalm 112 (9:9). If we know Christ’s love for us, we will want to show this love to those in need, and do so in practical ways.

Paul returns to the agricultural proverb about sowing and reaping in verse 10. He tells us that it is God who supplies seed to the sower, and then grain to the farmer to make into bread. The person who says, ‘I have earned everything I have’ is forgetting that God enabled him to earn everything he has. For the farmer, God supplies the seed, the rain, and the sunshine, not to mention health and strength to sow and reap. It is God who gives us our job and the skills to do this job, as well as the health we need to do our work.

We are told to do our work as unto the Lord (Gal 3:23), and to work that we may have something to give to those in need (Eph 4:28). God enables you to work to provide for your family and give to those in need because of his grace and love towards you. He wants you to be righteous like him, a person ready to bless others in the name of the Lord.

As we acknowledge the Lord in everything we do, we acknowledge him in our giving also. We do not agree with individuals and agencies who think acknowledging Jesus in our giving is somehow offensive. When I was involved in drilling wells to provide drinking water in Hindu villages, I took the opportunity to talk about Jesus as the living water (John 4).

**3. Glory to God**

We give to others because God gives to us. We give generously and joyously. We give according to what our Spirit-illuminated heart tells us to give, not according to what others are giving. Our giving is a test or proof of our faith in God. Our giving obviously helps others, but also results in thanksgiving and glory being given to God. This is the final outcome of Christian giving- glory to God (9:11-13).

Paul returns to the administration of this collection, of this service towards the saints in Jerusalem (9:12). Remember how careful he was about the administration of this collection in terms of transparency; he chose tested man and the church chose men also to administer this collection. This collection was not just a matter of almsgiving, of an unknown person throwing some coins to an unknown beggar. This collection was about one part of the body of Christ helping another part in a time of need. Moreover, Paul saw it as Gentile churches returning a material gift in response to the spiritual gift they had received from the Jews (Rom 15:27).

When Paul left Jerusalem to take the gospel to the Gentiles, he promised to remember the poor (Gal 2:10). Not all Jewish members of the church were pleased to see him going to the Gentiles. We will learn more about the pressure some Jewish Christians, or Judaizers, were putting on Jews and Gentiles to conform to the old covenant and its rituals. Paul saw this collection, so it seems, as a way to assure the Jerusalem church of the faith and love of the Gentile churches. He anticipates believers in Jerusalem giving thanks to God when they receive this collection from the Gentile churches.

Their thanksgiving for the material gift will flow into the giving of glory of God for the Corinthians demonstrating their obedience to the gospel of Jesus Christ (9:13). If they had any doubts about the sincerity of the faith of the Corinthians, or of the Gentiles more widely, then this gift would go a long way towards overcoming such doubts, and to the strengthening of the fellowship between the Jerusalem church and the Gentile churches. Indeed, it would be a blessing throughout all the churches as they learnt of this gift and see in it the ‘grace of God in you’ (9:14).

‘Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift’ (9:15). Paul ends his teaching on the grace of giving with this doxology. While some think he is giving thanks to God in anticipation of his collection for the saints in Jerusalem being a success, most see this doxology as giving praise to God for the gift that is above all gifts, namely God’s gift of his Son, Jesus Christ for our salvation.

The word ‘indescribable’ occurs only here in the NT; it refers to something that cannot be expressed in words. Paul has already referred to Jesus who, ‘was rich yet for your sakes became poor’ (8:3). In his closing words he returns to this ‘indescribable gift’ from above that we as believers know but cannot describe, this gift of saving grace in Jesus Christ our Lord (John 3:16, Eph 5:2).