

## Cheerful Givers

*Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. 2 Corinthians 9:7 NIV*

Today, we will continue talking about giving. The apostle Paul was getting ready to depart from Ephesus, and as the elders of the Ephesian church shared with Paul their last minutes together, Paul, remembering the words of Jesus, encouraged the leaders of the church saying: *“It is more blessed to give than to receive”* (Acts 20:35). We know **God wants us to be generous givers; and the Biblical meaning of giving generously is this: It is not how much you give, but how much of yourself you are investing as you give.** Now, I firmly believe that the Lord wants us to be generous and also cheerful givers.

There is a story that tells of a mother who wanted to teach her daughter a moral lesson. She gave the little girl a quarter and a dollar for church. “Put whichever one you want in the collection plate and keep the other for yourself,” she told the girl. When they were coming out of church, the mother asked her daughter which amount she had given. “Well,” said the little girl, “I was going to give the dollar, but just before the collection the man in the pulpit said that we should all be cheerful givers. I knew I’d be a lot more cheerful if I gave the quarter, so I did.”

I wonder if there are times when our thinking matches that of the little girl in our story. Paul wrote to the church of Corinth that God loves a cheerful giver. Today, I want to invite you to ponder on our understanding of “cheerful giving.” Are we mistaking “comfortable giving” with *cheerful giving*?

I wonder if cheerful giving is based on the way you believe (faith), rather than on the way you feel. I wonder if cheerful giving has more to do with convictions than with feelings and we are getting it backwards. Or perhaps, cheerful giving is based on both (feelings and convictions). Either way, I want to invite you to find the meaning of the word “cheerful” **not** in the feeling we get from the value, comfort, and security that our material possessions provide us with; rather, I want to invite you to find such meaning in the act of giving.

Julian of Norwich wrote, *“Cheerful givers do not count the cost of what they give. Their hearts are set on pleasing and cheering the person to whom the gift is given.”* **Cheerful giving is happy giving; but happy does not mean contented or comfortable.**

Remember, Jesus said that our hearts tend to gravitate towards our treasure and not the other way around. In other words, the heart is attached to our treasure and our treasure has the commanding position. Happy, cheerful giving is not (and cannot be) comfortable giving. We have to admit that if we only give what is comfortable for us to give then, like the little girl, we will keep those things that give us security.

Like it or not, we have to recognize that when we keep the bigger and most valuable portion because it makes us feel more secure and happy we are saying, not with words but with actions (and we know that actions speak louder than words), that our happiness, joy, and security come not from the Lord, but from our material possessions. **We need to start seeing our giving and**

**keeping as statements of our faith**, because in reality these two things (giving and keeping) are gauges that demonstrate how much we really trust in God’s providence.

I have found myself several times facing the temptation of putting my trust in what I have (which is not much) rather than God’s love and faithfulness. I would say that many of us have had similar experiences. Facing the temptation of putting your trust on material possessions rather than God does not make you a bad person. Remember, our Lord and Savior was tempted, but perfect in all his ways.

It is true that temptations can be stumbling blocks, but with the help of the Holy Spirit, temptations can also be stepping-stones. We can see temptations as situations meant to destroy our faith, or as opportunities to express our faith, as we commit to do what is right. It is my prayer that the Holy Spirit will empower us to make the most of any and every situation we face.

Returning to the topic of the day, we cannot mistake “comfortable giving” with *cheerful giving*. Let’s examine together the biblical meaning of cheerful giving.

The Greek word for “cheerful” means pretty much the same in English—cheerful, joyous—but the word in the original language also has an inbuilt sense of readiness. It means to be ready to act at a moment’s notice, to be prepared. **Cheerful giving is willing and spontaneous.** When Paul writes, “God loves a cheerful giver”, the apostle is saying, “God loves those who are willing and ready to glorify the Lord as they store up treasures in heaven by contributing to the well-being of others.”

From the text, we learn that cheerful givers do not give out of compulsion or reluctantly, which leads me to believe that **cheerful givers give out of gratitude**. Cheerful givers always have in mind that it is God “*who gives [human beings] the ability to produce wealth*” (Deuteronomy 8:18), and in response to God’s kindness and providence, they give generously.

Giving out of gratitude means that we are thanking God for what He has already done, not for what He might do. Although we believe that “whoever sows generously will also reap generously and whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly” the motivation of our giving is not to receive more but to express our gratitude to God.

Paul writes, “*Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give...*” Many people think that Paul is saying, “Give whatever you want to give.” I think this interpretation can be dangerous if we are not honest with the reading of the text and we try to use Paul’s words to justify our preferences and practices. If we want to be honest we have to put this statement within that context of scripture.

For instance, when Zacchaeus had his encounter with Jesus “*he said to the Lord, ‘Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount’*” (Luke 19:8 NIV). Pay attention to what is happening here. This story is a perfect illustration of cheerful giving. First, Zacchaeus says “*Here and now...*” demonstrating readiness, willingness, and spontaneity. Second, Zacchaeus is

responding to Jesus' generous act of coming to his house when nobody else in town was willing to do so. Third, Zacchaeus sets the amount, not Jesus. In other words, Zacchaeus is giving whatever he wants to give, but Zacchaeus' giving is proportionate to his means.

What I am trying to say, dear friends, is that I am convinced that, "*we should give what we decide in our hearts to give...*" But, if we want to make an honest interpretation of Paul's writing, we need to put this statement within that context of Scripture and remind ourselves that God, through Moses, commanded us saying, "*Each man must bring a gift in proportion to the blessings the LORD your God has given him.*" **Deuteronomy 16:17 GW**

I am impressed by the fact that Jesus sees Zacchaeus' generosity as an expression of his conversion. This reminds me of Luther's famous quote, "*There are three conversions necessary: the conversion of the mind, the heart, and the pocketbook.*"

Let me finish with a story. Sam Houston, hero of Texas history, gave his life to the Lord in the later years of life and asked to be baptized. He was taken down to a little country stream, and the pastor said, "General Houston, you should take your glasses off because I am going to immerse you in water." The General took his glasses off and took out some paper he had in his pockets. Then, just as he was getting ready to go into the water, the pastor noticed that Houston still had his wallet in his pants. He said, "Well, General, you might want to take that wallet out of your pants. It is going to get wet." Houston responded, "If there is any part of me that needs baptizing, it is my wallet." So, Houston was baptized wallet and all.

Dear church, our financial life is not detached from our faith. As I said a couple of weeks ago, we are called to be, generous givers. Today, we are reminded that we need to be cheerful givers:

1. People who are ready and willing to give
2. People who give out of gratitude
3. People who give what they decide in their hearts, but we make such a decision, keeping in mind the blessings the Lord God has given us. Our giving is proportionate to such blessings.

I borrow the words of C.S. Lewis for my closing statement. "*I do not believe one can settle how much we ought to give. I am afraid the only safe rule is to give more than we can spare.*" **C.S. Lewis**