

Sermon for Sunday, November 11, 1973 by Andrew A. Jumper, D.D., Pastor  
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THE GIVER GOD LOVES

II Corinthians 9:1-8

Text: "Each one must do as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." II Corinthians 9:7

I feel much about this time of the year as did the young doctor fresh out of medical school who went into a rural area to begin his practice. His first patient was the old patriarch of the area. After listing his many aches and pains and listing his complaints, the old man sat back waiting for the smart doctor to determine what was wrong with him. Now, unfortunately for the young doctor, the complaints did not fit any of the patterns he had learned in medical school in diagnosis. Finally he said, "Sir, have you had this problem before?" "Yes," replied the old man, "many times." "Well," said the young doctor, "you've got it again! Well, this morning, we've got it again."

It's Budget Sunday. At the conclusion of this service each of us will be given a chance to make a pledge to the work of the church for next year. And this afternoon, men of the congregation will begin a systematic visitation of all the families who are not here this morning or who have not yet made a pledge. By the end of the week we hope that most of the work will be completed. Now I don't mind talking about stewardship. Jesus talked more about money--I don't know if you know this or not--but almost one sixth of all he had to say was about money. He talked about money more than any other single thing. He realized that a man's attitude toward his money was in a real sense the key to that man's character.

As we come to Budget Sunday today, let me tell you quite frankly that I don't care if we make the budget or not. This is your church. I am simply your pastor serving you. It's your church. It is your program and if you want to make the budget, that's up to you. God didn't call me into the ministry to raise budgets. What I do care very deeply about is your relationship to Jesus. And that relationship is reflected in what you do with your money. Dr. Elton Trueblood tells us that you can tell a lot about a man from his books. If you look at his library books you can tell about his intellectual interests. If you look at his date book you can tell a great deal about him because it shows how he chooses to spend his time. And if you look at a man's check book you can tell where his heart really is. There are some entries in my check book I wish God didn't have to see. I've spent money on things that were not necessary or needful. God will be able to see what my heart was really like when he examines my check stubs.

Because this matter of your money is so important--because each of us will have to give an account to God for how we have used our financial resources, I don't want what I say this morning to be colored by church budgets or what I personally think. What I want to do is just stick to what the Bible says and share that with you. You can make up your own mind about what God wants you to do. When you make your commitment, I want it to be between you and God. I want your pledge to be your response to God as his Holy Spirit speaks to you through what the Bible has to say.

With that in mind, let us look at our scripture for this morning. First, in verse six, St. Paul speaks of the principle of giving. He writes, "The point is this: he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully." Here is a basic principle of giving--a law of returns--that you reap what you sow.

Let me say first what this does not mean. It does not mean a commercial transaction between you and God. It does not mean that financially speaking you will

get back as much as you give. That would be a sorry motive for giving. I know men who have given money to the work of the Lord and were blessed with increased financial means. However, if that is our motive for giving, let me warn you not to buy anything on credit on the basis of that expectation. An executive parked his car in a downtown garage every day. In early December he found a note on the seat that read, "Merry Christmas from the boys in the garage." He really intended to give the boys in the garage something for Christmas, but as the days went by he kept forgetting. Before very long he found another note on his car seat. It read, "Merry Christmas from the boys in the garage. Second notice. If your motive for giving is to get, you may have to send God a second notice."

Giving that has an ulterior motive is not Christian giving. But there is another kind of giving. There is the giving that has no motive but gratitude to God and love for others that expects nothing in return. And Jesus tells us that this giving is rewarded for even a cup of cold water given in his name bears its harvest. The rewards may not be in kind--that is, you won't necessarily get money for money. Let me quote to you from the Interpreter's Bible. "Love's true return is not even the love of others; it is the increased capacity to love." A generous hearted man looking back on his life remarked, "I have loved more than I have been loved, I have trusted more than I have been trusted, but the balance remains with me." The reward of generosity is the generous heart which rejoices in giving and seeks no return. But the law of returns remains. We reap what we sow. (Vol. 10, page 376) Yes, the principle of giving--we reap what we sow.

The second thing the bible tells us in our passage today is this: It tells us the planning for giving. St. Paul writes, "Each one must do as he has made up his mind...." When you make plans to give, you need to make up your mind. Now you spend what God has entrusted to you ought not to be determined by mood, whim, fancy or thoughtlessness. Since God requires an accounting, we need to do some thoughtful planning, some thoughtful praying. Then, when you make up your mind about your stewardship to God, stick to it. Your attitude toward the church may falter. Your liking of the preacher or the program of your Sunday school class may waver. Your desire for other things that the money would buy may be very intense. But your giving ought not to be determined by your moods or your likes. You need to make up your minds and stick to it. Besides, as time goes on, your needs may seem more urgent, more pressing, and giving to God may not seem too important right at that moment. But if you have made up your mind, then you can stick to it. Elizabeth and I have tithed every since we were married. Back during the days when we were putting ourselves through college and seminary and during the early years of our ministry when we had so very little, it would have been easy to give less. Often our needs were so terribly pressing. Yet, we had made up our minds and because we had, we could stick to it.

We have mentioned the principle of giving--you reap what you sow; we mentioned the planning of giving--each one must do as he has made up his mind. Let me mention thirdly the practice of giving--that is, in what manner should one practice his giving. St. Paul tells us how to practice our giving. He writes, "Not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." Some people are very reluctant to give to the church. They are like the Scotsman whose family was just setting down to dinner. His wife looked out the window and said, "O, here come the neighbors up the walk and I'll bet they haven't eaten yet." "Quick," said the Scotsman, "everybody out on the porch with toothpicks." Yes, a lot of us give reluctantly--grudgingly.

Some of us give under compulsion. We give because we feel we have to. We give because we can't get out of it. It's like the preacher who announced one Sunday, "There is a man in our congregation who is flirting with another man's wife."

Unless he puts a hundred dollars in the collection plate, I will read his name from the pulpit next Sunday." When the collection was counted, the Deacons found six one hundred dollar bills--and one fifty dollar bill with a note that said, "This is all the cash I've got on me, but I'll bring the other fifty next Sunday." Now, that is giving under compulsion!

But the Bible says that we are to give cheerfully. That's the kind of giver God loves. When a man knows that he reaps what he sows, when he has made up his mind, then he ought to give joyfully, cheerfully--grateful that he can do that much for God who has done so much for him.

But there is something else the Bible tells us. When we give the way the Bible says we ought to give, we are given a two-fold promise. Listen to what the Bible says, "And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that you may always have enough of everything (that's the first promise and here's the second) and may provide in abundance for every good work." There it is. The man who sows bountifully because he has made up his mind about his stewardship and who fulfills it cheerfully, gets a two-fold promise. First, for himself he always has enough of everything. Sometimes we feel that charity begins at home and we ought to take care of our own needs first. But the Bible promises us that our giving to God will never impoverish us. Yes, the Bible promises us that we will always have enough of everything. Second, not only will we have enough for ourselves, but the Bible promises us that we will have an abundance of every good work. When we give to others, God enables us to give more. Remember the story in the Old Testament of the widow who fed Elijah? From her meager supply she gave and in giving she found that she was replenished so that she could give again and again. Or look at the young boy who gave the loaves and fishes to Jesus one day. In giving he had enough for himself, but also he was able to feed five thousand others. He had no more for himself than if he had kept it all. But in giving, he had just as much for himself and an abundance for others.

Now the same is true for you and me. When we give, we have more to give. The man who has nothing to give is the man who has never given. I have found God's word to be true in my life and you will find it so in yours.

Let us give God our best. In his little book, "Time to Spare", Douglas Steer tells this story. In the winter war of 1939-40, the Finns were forced back by the Russians and orders went out to evacuate the residents living along a strip of eastern Finland. The soldiers notified an old woman in the morning that at dusk they would come to take her and her possessions away and would have to burn her cabin so that the Russians could not use it for shelter. When they returned in the afternoon they found her few sparse belongings piled on a little two-wheeled cart. They went into the cabin and found the old woman on her hands and knees, finishing scrubbing the floor of the hut. A soldier said, "But mother, didn't you understand that we have to burn the hut now? Why are you washing the floor?" Her only reply was, "If it is to go for Finland, then it must be the best I have to give."

Each one must do as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. If it is to be for God, then it must be the best we have to give.