

What the Bible *really* teaches about giving
with particular reference to 2 Corinthians 8 and 9

Everyone should give what he or she has decided in their heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver (2 Corinthians 9:7)

INTRODUCTION – ISN'T 'TITHING' ALL THERE IS TO SAY?

Many Christian churches continue to teach tithing as the basis for Christian giving – so much so, in fact, that it has become almost a taboo subject to challenge this understanding. However, when we study what the New Testament actually teaches, we discover that an entirely new understanding of why Christians give is at work. In essence, the NT teaches 'the grace principle' as opposed to a legal requirement.

So what did the Old Testament teach?

- 1 all we have and enjoy is a gift from God (we endorse this view!)

David's Prayer

¹⁰ David praised the LORD in the presence of the whole assembly, saying, 'Praise be to you, O LORD, God of our father Israel, from everlasting to everlasting. ¹¹ Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendour, for everything in heaven and earth is yours. Yours, O LORD, is the kingdom; you are exalted as head over all.

¹² Wealth and honour come from you; you are the ruler of all things. In your hands are strength and power to exalt and give strength to all. ¹³ Now, our God, we give you thanks, and praise your glorious name. ¹⁴ "But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand.

(1 Chronicles 29:10–14)

- 2 it is impossible to out-give God (we endorse this view too!)

Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this, says the LORD Almighty, and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it (Malachi 3:10)

- 3 tithing

The words 'tithe' and 'tithes' occur 28 times in the OT, contained in just 12 passages.

The word 'tithe' simply means a tenth; tithing was the Old Testament practice of requiring all God's people to give back to the Lord 10% of their income – in practice this meant a tenth of the harvest of both land and livestock.

A tithe of everything from the land, whether grain from the soil or fruit from the trees, belongs to the LORD; it is holy to the LORD (Leviticus 27:30)

Tithing supported the ministry of the Levites (Israel's priestly class) who had no land of their own and therefore could neither grow crops nor raise livestock

I give to the Levites all the tithes in Israel as their inheritance in return for the work they do while serving at the Tent of Meeting (Numbers 18:21)

However, at least some of the tithe was to be consumed by the people who were 'giving' it

Eat the tithe of your grain, new wine and oil, and the firstborn of your herds and flocks in the presence of the LORD your God at the place he will choose as a dwelling for his Name, so that you may learn to revere the LORD your God always (Deuteronomy 14:23)

In the same book, it was every third year's tithe which was set aside, not just for the Levites, but for the vulnerable

When you have finished setting aside a tenth of all your produce in the third year, the year of the tithe, you shall give it to the Levite, the alien, the fatherless and the widow, so that they may eat in your towns and be satisfied (Deuteronomy 26:12)

4 firstfruits

Closely linked to the principle of tithing is the practice of giving to God both the firstborn (livestock) and firstfruits (crops)

The first offspring of every womb belongs to me, including all the firstborn males of your livestock, whether from herd or flock (Exodus 34:19)

Bring the best of the firstfruits of your soil to the house of the LORD your God (Exodus 34:26)

5 freewill offerings

In addition, the OT people of God were encouraged to give 'freewill offerings', often connected to specific projects such as the creation of the Tabernacle or the building of Solomon's Temple

All the Israelite men and women who were willing brought to the LORD freewill offerings for all the work the LORD through Moses had commanded them to do (Exodus 35:29)

6 freewill giving is a matter for celebration and according to means (we endorse this view!)

In Deuteronomy, the principle of joyful giving according to the measure of wealth with which the Lord has blessed them is clearly evident

celebrate the Feast of Weeks to the LORD your God by giving a freewill offering in proportion to the blessings the LORD your God has given you. And rejoice before the LORD your God ... Be joyful at your Feast ... No man should appear before the LORD empty-handed: Each of you must bring a gift in proportion to the way the LORD your God has blessed you (Deuteronomy 16:10-17)

7 no legalistic approach is enough to satisfy God (we endorse this view!)

The OT certainly does not suggest that a legalistic approach to tithing is all that God requires

Go to Bethel and sin; go to Gilgal and sin yet more. Bring your sacrifices every morning, your tithes every three years (Amos 4:4)

Note – tithing as a system applied when every member of the OT people of God had an equal amount of land, so a 'one-size-fits-all' approach was fair. Today's socio-economic situation is very different, as it already was by the time of the NT.

What does the New Testament teach?

1 The NT is clearly concerned about money, as the parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14-30) shows – in particular, it is concerned with

- the potentially corrosive effect that reliance on worldly wealth can have on spiritual life
- the use of money for the wider good

2 Jesus overturned the assumption of his hearers that wealth was invariably a sign of God's favour. When he famously said that it was easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for someone who relied on their wealth to get into heaven ...

the disciples ... were greatly astonished and asked, "Who then can be saved?" (Matthew 19:25 – also Mark 10:26 & Luke 18:26)

James teaches that

⁹ The brother in humble circumstances ought to take pride in his high position. ¹⁰ But the one who is rich should take pride in his low position, because he will pass away like a wild flower (James 1:9-10)

The Parable of the Rich Fool

¹³ Someone in the crowd said to him, 'Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.' ¹⁴ Jesus replied, 'Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?' ¹⁵ Then he said to them, 'Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.' ¹⁶ And he told them this parable: 'The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. ¹⁷ He thought to himself, "What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops." ¹⁸ Then he said, "This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. ¹⁹ And I'll say to myself, You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry." ²⁰ But God said to him, "You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?" ²¹ This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God.' Luke 12:13-48

3 The words 'tithe' & 'tithing' do not appear once in the New Testament, but the practice of tithing is clearly mentioned, in 3 places in the gospels, and once elsewhere – in not one of these instances is the reference favourable

- Jesus condemns the Jewish religious leaders for taking tithing to legalistically ridiculous lengths, while sidestepping God's wider demand for holy living

Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices – mint, dill and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law – justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former (Matthew 23:23 – cf Luke 11:42)

The 'religious' spirit is drawn to legalism precisely because it offers a limit to what is expected: the 'law' of Christ (to love God and to love neighbour) knows no limits. Legalism tells me when I can stop giving. Responding to the grace of God in Christ tells me I can never stop giving.

- In the parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector (Luke 18:12), it is the unrighteous Pharisee who is condemned, despite his boast, *'I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get'*
- Outside the gospels, the practice of tithing is mentioned only in the letter to the Hebrews, where it is given as an example of what is being swept away by the 'new covenant' established by the death & resurrection of Jesus Christ.

As mentioned above, the practice of tithing in the OT was closely linked with supporting the Levite priestly class – here, the writer argues that, as that priesthood has been superseded, there is no longer any need for that 'former regulation' –

Now the law requires the descendants of Levi who become priests to collect a tenth from the people – that is, their brothers – even though their brothers are descended from Abraham ... If perfection could have been attained through the Levitical priesthood (for on the basis of it the law was given to the people), why was there still need for another priest to come – one in the order of Melchizedek, not in the order of Aaron? For when there is a change of the priesthood, there must also be a change of the law ... The former regulation is set aside because it was weak and useless (Hebrews 7:5-18)

By calling this covenant 'new,' he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear (Hebrews 8:13)

4 Whereas in the Old Testament, God's people gave in response to a legal requirement to give, the apostles stress grace & freewill. Christians are called to respond to God's grace, freely and without compulsion of any kind – this is why Paul writes as he does in 2 Corinthians 9:7 (quoted above).

5 This also means that 'Christian Giving' covers a far broader spectrum of our lives than simply what we do with our money. A Christian approach to giving must address the way we use our time, our talents and our energy, in addition to our money. Everything about who we are and what we do – including the way we view and use whatever material wealth we enjoy – is to be marked by the generosity and grace of the God who 'loved so much that he gave' (John 3:16)

Paul's teaching on giving in his two surviving letters to the Christians in Corinth provides a good guide to giving today. The key passages are 2 Corinthians 8 & 9, and 1 Corinthians 16:1-3.

6 The key truth is that our giving (of self, time, talents and money) is a response to the wonderful love and grace we have been shown by God in the gift of Jesus Christ to be our saviour –

'For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.'
(2 Corinthians 8:9)

If you wish to read more extensively on the subject of tithing for today, R.E. Kelly's 'Should the Church teach tithing? (A theologian's conclusions about a taboo doctrine)' provides an excellent guide, from which much of what follows is condensed.

13 PRINCIPLES OF CHRISTIAN GIVING (from 2 Corinthians 8 & 9)

1 giving is totally 'of Grace' in the Christian church

No other chapter in the Bible uses the word 'grace' more often than 2 Corinthians 8! Thayer defines 'grace' as 'that which affords joy, pleasure, delight, sweetness, charm, and loveliness.' What a rich word for God to apply to giving. Therefore, those who give to God's work actually receive of the grace of God. God gives us grace in order to give, and then God gives us more grace when we do give.

- 8:1 'the GRACE that God has given'
- 8:4 'the GRACE of sharing' (Greek – NIV translates 'privilege')
- 8:6 'the act of GRACE'
- 8:7 'this GRACE of giving'
- 8:9 'the GRACE of our Lord Jesus Christ'
- 8:16 'but GRACE be to God' (Greek – NIV translates 'thanks')
- 8:19 'this GRACE' (Greek – NIV translates 'offering')
- 9:8 'God is able to make all GRACE abound to you'
- 9:14 'the surpassing GRACE God has given you'

In contrast to the Law which commanded giving, New Covenant giving is grace from beginning to end. It is an act that shares. It rebounds to the giver because it is impossible to out-give God.

2 give yourself to God first

they gave themselves first to the Lord (8:5)

Until we join the family of God through conversion, grace cannot govern & shape our life (John 16:9). After that, if we are not giving ourselves to God in private devotion, prayer & study of his Word, and publicly joining with our brothers and sisters in worship, we won't get our giving of anything else straight.

3 give yourself to knowing God's will

first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will (8:5)

A Christian must seek for, and yield to, the will of God. It is not for any human leader to dictate or command anyone's response in giving. It is the responsibility of each individual, couple or family to seek the Lord in prayer for his guidance and direction. We must seek to know God's will in our lives in the area of giving as in every other

area of our lives. In the context, 'gave themselves to us' means that they agreed with Paul's request to collect famine relief for the saints in Judea.

4 give in response to Christ's giving

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich (8:9)

Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift! (9:15)

Christians who are yielding to God's will, eager to know the Word of God, and who are filled with the Holy Spirit are being changed day by day to follow Christ's example. This example includes every part of their lives, including giving.

5 give out of a sincere desire

I want to test the sincerity of your love (8:8)

Paul reminded the Corinthians that in the past they *were the first not only to give but also to have the desire to do so (8:10)*

For if the willingness is there (8:12), again emphasizes the desire. This principle is repeated in 9:7, 'what he has decided in his heart to give'

A believer who is in God's will should naturally have that sincere desire to give. Under the law, a sincere desire was the motive for freewill offerings, but it did not matter concerning tithes. God commanded a tithe and expected it, whether or not it was given out of a sincere desire.

¹⁴ What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? ¹⁵ Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. ¹⁶ If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? ¹⁷ In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead (James 2:14-17)

6 give not because of a commandment

I am not commanding you (8:8)

And here is my advice (8:10)

Every one should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver (9:7)

On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income (1 Corinthians 16:2)

It is clear from these references that there is no hint of any compulsion, demand, or commandment to give under the grace principle.

'In contrast with the law, which imposed giving as a divine requirement, Christian giving is voluntary, and a test of sincerity and love.' (Scofield, C. I. – *New Scofield Reference Bible*)

'The grace principle contrasts with the Old Testament legal system of tithing ... Tithing has been superseded by a new system of giving which is adapted to the teachings of grace ... Under grace, God is not seeking the gift, but an expression of devotion from the giver. Under grace no law is imposed and no proportion to be given is stipulated.' (Chafer, Lewis Sperry – *Major Bible Themes*)

Under the New Covenant Christians obey God because we are 'new creation,' and the Holy Spirit is our teacher.

By calling this covenant 'new,' he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear (Hebrews 8:13)

The 'commandment' to give has now been replaced by the 'sincere desire' of a new creation. The Christian gives spontaneously because the desire to give is part of the new creation.

7 give as much as you are able and even beyond your ability

For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability (8:3)

Now finish the work, so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it, according to your means (8:11)

For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what he does not have (8:12)

On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income (1 Corinthians 16:2)

Rhodes Thompson, writing about the generosity of Christians in India, says that Christians are to be 'Stewards Shaped by Grace'

'Another discovery is now revealed: God's grace shown in those churches [in India] was complemented by people's voluntary response ... No legalistic response to the amazing grace of God is appropriate. That is why Paul wrote this. God's grace obviously encourages, but does not force, the decision to be made. However, when faith responds to grace, God's power at work within that life ... or within the churches ... is able to do far more abundantly than all that people can ask or think (Ephesians 3:20). What we cannot do or cannot even imagine being done, God's grace working through our faith does.' (Rhodes Thompson, *Stewards Shaped By Grace*)

8 give in order that there might be an equality

¹³ *Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality.* ¹⁴ *At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. Then there will be equality (2 Corinthians 8:13-14)*

Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share (1 Timothy 6:17-18)

³² All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had. ³³ With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all. ³⁴ There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales ³⁵ and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need. (Acts 4:32-35)

While some are simply not able to give much at all, others can afford to give much more than the Old Covenant 10%. Circumstances are different from household to household. God understands.

Let us not forget the saying 'little is much if God is in it.' God can do more with the widow's mite (Mark 12:40-42) given sincerely than with millions given to purchase his favour.

The grace principle of 'equality giving' refers to giving as much as one is able. This does not mean that everybody is to give the same percentage. It means that those who are prosperous should give a lot more, until they actually notice a crimp in their chequebook – 'Give until it hurts!' When those who are prosperous give more, and those who are poor give less (but still as much as they can), the results are an 'equality' according to what each is able to give.

New Covenant grace-giving principles are fair; they are not set at the same legalistic level for everybody. In Christ Church we recognise that different members face different circumstances

- pensioners (state or private scheme)
- couples (one earner or two)
- couples (one non-attender)
- singles (many of the same financial burdens as a couple)
- family responsibilities (children at school / university, carers, dependent parents)
- those with Capital Investments and no regular income in a conventional sense

The Bible teaches us to give 'in keeping with your income' – we want to be sensitive to individual situations, and informal advice can be given if requested. Please do ask.

It was noted above that the OT system of tithing applied at a time when all members of God's people enjoyed socio-economic equality. That is not the case today

While some families have good incomes and few bills, others have low incomes and many bills.

1. a family giving 10% of £200,000 would have much more remaining than the same size family giving 10% of £20,000. Under the modern definitions of 'tithing,' this is an unfair legalistic burden.
2. if two families both earned £40,000 and only one had free housing, paid expenses, and insurance, should both give the same amount? What would be a burden for one to give would not be felt by another.
3. if two families had the same income and one had oppressive medical bills, does God expect them both to give the same amount? Under grace giving principles,

the answer is 'no.' But God will expect both to give sacrificially according to their relative means.

Under strict 'tithing' teaching, no exceptions are offered according to circumstances. These examples illustrate why grace principles are superior to tithing.

There is no commandment after Calvary concerning how much to give. God has no desire to cause some to be 'hard pressed' because of any guilt about how much they must give (8:13). The greater burden of giving falls on those who are able to pay more (1 Timothy 6:17-18).

See also

¹ Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. ² So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honoured by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. ³ But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴ so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you (Matthew 6:1-4)

Favouritism Forbidden

¹ My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favouritism. ² Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in. ³ If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, "Here's a good seat for you," but say to the poor man, "You stand there" or "Sit on the floor by my feet," ⁴ have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? ⁵ Listen, my dear brothers: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him? ⁶ But you have insulted the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court? ⁷ Are they not the ones who are slandering the noble name of him to whom you belong? (James 2:1-7)

Warning to Rich Oppressors

¹ Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming upon you. ² Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. ³ Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth in the last days. ⁴ Look! The wages you failed to pay the workmen who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty. ⁵ You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter. ⁶ You have condemned and murdered innocent men, who were not opposing you (James 5:1-6)

9 give because of a burden for lost souls

Although not mentioned specifically in these two chapters, this was, and should be, a key reason for all spiritual giving. When Paul said 'Yet when I preach the gospel, I

cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!' (1 Corinthians 9:16), he was eloquently expressing his burden for souls.

Every Christian needs a vision of the lost, dying without Christ.

10 give joyfully

Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity (2 Corinthians 8:2)

The secret of the Macedonian churches' abundant generosity in giving included:

- a great trial of affliction
- abundant joy, and
- deep poverty

'In Christ' they had abundant joy which could not be erased through any amount of persecution or poverty. It was this great joy in the gospel which provoked them to give over and above that which was expected by mortal man. 'God loves a cheerful giver' (9:7). Happy and joyful Christians are also 'giving' Christians.

When the gospel is preached, the forgiveness of sins is realized, and the assurance of salvation is known, God's peace and joy transform lives and giving practices.

11 giving is the result of spiritual growth

Not only did they give 'as much as they were able,' that is, all they could spare, but they gave 'even beyond their ability' that is, they did without some necessities for a while (8:3).

Moreover, 'they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints' (8:4)

This is true New Covenant giving at its best – what more could a pastor ask? The church was literally 'begging' (NAS) for Paul to let them give beyond their means!

'But just as you excel in everything – in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us – see that you also excel in this grace of giving' (8:7)

Giving is the normal result of spiritual growth. Christians who are fed the right spiritual food grow spiritually and give in accordance with our new nature.

See also the way that giving is a demonstration of transformation in the life of Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10).

12 giving produces more spiritual growth

*'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' (9:8)
God 'will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.' (9:10-11)*

When we give to God's work, he promises to supply our 'sufficiency.' This means that he will make us 'contented' in what we 'need,' as compared to what we 'want.' The purpose of this sufficiency is that we may then, in turn, 'abound in every good deed,' that is, keep right on performing God's work with that sufficiency.

Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only (Philippians 4:15)

And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:19)

The wonderful promise of Philippians 4:19 is not an unconditional promise to be claimed by all believers. We cannot ignore the context of verses 14-18. Paul made that particular promise only to those in Philippi because they had supplied his needs. Christians who refuse to contribute to the needs of God's people have no claim to the promised blessings in verse 19!

Giving is a circle: God gives first, we give second, then God gives more, so we can give more. God's spiritual blessings stop flowing into us when we stop becoming a spiritual blessing to others. Since we cannot out-give God, the circle should keep on expanding to include more and more people! Our needs (not our wants) will be met on earth and givers will accumulate spiritual blessings both here on earth and in heaven. God will continue to enrich the believer throughout eternity with him in the new Creation.

13 giving results from preaching the gospel

'Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, men will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else' (9:13)

The circle returns to its beginning at the grace of God and the gospel. The text does NOT say 'obedience that accompanies your preaching and the practicing of tithing.' A church that obeys the grace principles of giving will be blessed. When Christ is preached (which is God's great gift to us), we give ourselves, and then keep on giving as we become burdened for lost souls. Again, preaching Christ grows his church! Preaching tithing is preaching an 'unprofitable' Old Covenant principle which has been abolished

Now the law requires the descendants of Levi who become priests to collect a tenth from the people – that is, their brothers – even though their brothers are descended from Abraham. (Hebrews 7:5)

If perfection could have been attained through the Levitical priesthood (for on the basis of it the law was given to the people), why was there still need for another priest to come – one in the order of Melchizedek, not in the order of Aaron? For when there is a change of the priesthood, there must also be a change of the law. (Hebrews 7:11,12)

The former regulation is set aside because it was weak and useless (Hebrews 7:18)

Summary

The key truth is that our giving (of self, time, talents and money) is a response to the wonderful love and grace we have been shown by God in the gift of Jesus Christ to be our saviour –

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich (2 Corinthians 8:9)

In 2 Corinthians 8:1–8 we discover that Christian giving is

- a response to 'grace received' (1)
- marked by 'rich generosity' even despite relative poverty (2,3)
- a privilege (4)
- only part of a whole mind-set of offering our whole selves to God (5)
- not a command, but a test of 'the sincerity of our love' (8)

In 2 Corinthians 9:6–15, Paul explains that we can approach life with either a generous or miserly heart. Paul encourages us to be 'cheerful' givers, not giving 'reluctantly or under compulsion.' He promises that if we look to God to supply our needs, we will always have the freedom to be generous in our giving

You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion (2 Corinthians 9:11)

In 1 Corinthians 16:2, Paul offers some practical guidelines

On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with your income, saving it up

helping us to see that Christian giving should be

- **perpetual** ('on the first day of every week') – Christian giving is regular and ongoing
- **personal** ('each of you') – all members need to play their part
- **planned** ('should set aside a sum of money') – we all need to think through our giving, rather than approaching it haphazardly
- **proportionate** ('in keeping with your income') – we are all in different financial situations and we need to give in line with what we can reasonably afford, although the story of the widow's mite should remind us that a sacrificial approach is close to God's heart – hence the final 'p' ...
- **painful** ('saving it up'); Christ was extravagantly generous, giving even his life for us – he looks for us to mirror his generosity as we handle what he has given us

So, we should ask God to grant us 'the Corinthian attitude' –

each of you should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver (2 Corinthians 9:7)

Conclusion – How do we respond?

Every aspect of **Christ Church's** mission and ministry is dependent for funding on our own giving. From what we have seen above, each individual's giving is a matter for prayerful consideration between him or her and the Lord. No one else can tell you what to give.

However, giving benefits everyone

1 the giver

- is enabled to make an investment in God's mission through the Church
- finds that the power of money is broken by giving it away

2 the church

- is able to develop and take mission forward
- rejoices as money becomes a solution rather than a problem
- finds that numbers and commitment increase

3 the Lord

- rejoices to see people respond to His grace
- rejoices to see the body of Christ gain a new confidence
- rejoices to see the power of money broken and people growing spiritually
- rejoices to see 'kingdom values' expressed here and now

Thank you for reading this far! There is a great deal here to digest, and all we ask is that you do so prayerfully, taking time to reach your own decision as the Lord leads you.

Once you believe the Lord has guided you, and you believe He is calling you to support the ministry of **Christ Church** financially, please fill in the forms which came with this leaflet, or which can be picked up at the back of church. If you would like to talk with someone about any aspect of your financial giving, details of the people to contact are given on those forms.

And please remember that giving is not just about money – if you feel the Lord is calling you to give time as well, please do contact a member of staff or the Office. We will be happy to arrange for someone to talk with you about your gifts and passion, so that you can find your place in ministry within the church family here.

One thing of which we are convinced is that no one can out-give God – there is a joy in giving sacrificially which can only be experienced. The scriptures promise that we will not suffer if we are faithful to what God asks of us. So ...

Give to the Lord what's right, not what's left!

*'God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus'
(Philippians 4:19)*

*Paul Langham
October 2013*