

Why I Don't Preach Tithing

The Model is Jesus

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Let's look at this passage of scripture, 2 Corinthians 8:9, page 1,332.

9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.

I preached on this passage before because this is a great passage to preach on giving and that's what this is about. It's about giving.

I had to pump myself up in the congregation that was here for the largest attendance in the first service I think we've ever had, and this looks pretty good right now. So that was encouraging and I believe we had a harmonious meeting and I left for a part of it and so that's good.

I want us to look at some principles of giving from this passage of scripture. Let's look, first, at verse 9 because, for me, this is the heart of the matter when it comes to giving. 2 Corinthians 8:9, page 1,332.

Giving is never based on getting from God. Giving is never based on getting from God. Now we get from God and there is a relationship between giving and getting as we'll see near the end of the sermon today, but our giving is never based on getting from God. It's because of what we have gotten from God. Giving is never a manipulation trying to twist God's arm to obligate him to do something for us. Giving is an expression of gratitude and it is always based on what God has done for us in Jesus Christ.

Look at verse 9, "you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ," he says, "that though He was rich," what does that mean? Though he was rich. The Lord Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of the eternal God. There never was a time when he was not. You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, he was rich. I want you to know that the Lord Jesus Christ was the richest person in the entire universe. He was the heir of all things. He is the heir of God the Father. I want you to know that he lived with the Father in the glories of heaven before the ages ever began. He lived in a place where the Bible describes in the book of Revelation that its streets are paved with gold. That's where he lived. That's where he

reigned. He was the King of heaven. He was the King of angels and archangels. He ruled over all things and all of the wealth in the entire universe was the Lord Jesus Christ's.

But notice, "though He was rich," he says, "yet He became poor." He became poor. I want you to know that to be a human being in a post-Adamic world is to be poor. To be a human being in a post-Adamic world is to be poor. What do I mean by post-Adamic world? I mean this, that the world that we were born into and the world that Jesus was born into is a world that has been messed up and ruined. There is pain. There is pain in the very process of birth. There is pain as that baby gasps for air and takes his first breath. There is the pain of deprivation. There is the pain of the bonding and separation from the mother. There is the pain of discipline and all of those things.

And I want you to understand that though Jesus never sinned, Jesus was raised like other people were raised. He never sinned. His mother was the blessed virgin Mary. Jesus never sinned but I want you to know that like other boys he exasperated his mother and his step-father. You say, "How do you know that?" Well, the word of God says that when he was 12 years old, when he was bar mitzvahed, if you will, he went down with his family from the Galilee to Jerusalem and he stayed and lingered at the temple and he began to talk to the sages and they were so amazed that the learning of this 12 year old boy, they were astounded and so caught up was he in the conversations that he lingered. And when the family began to leave and all of the extended family had to travel back up the Jordan Valley into the Galilee, they thought that he was with other family but he stayed in Jerusalem. Then it dawned on them, "Uh-oh, uh-oh, where is Jesus?" And so they come back and if you've ever lost a child, I've lost a child. I remember one time we were visiting my wife's parents in north Florida, the further north you go in Florida, the further south you get, and the further south in Florida, you go the further north you get demographically. But anyhow, she was lost in the mall. Lost in the mall. There she was one minute, we turned our back and she's gone. And having a voice that is loud, I began to say to myself, "It doesn't make any difference what these people think and if they call the police, that's good." And so using every technique of breathing that I got from my voice teacher starting back in the late '50s, I bellowed at the top of my lung that child's name up one side of that mall and down the other. Everyone stopped. Do you know that within one minute someone came walking her out from another store. I know what it's like to panic. As they make their way back, you can hear the blessed virgin Mary saying those words but you can't really hear how she said it, "Son, how could you do this?"

I want you to understand that Jesus was born into a world that is full of sin and full of the effect of sin even though he never sinned. I want you to know that he wasn't born in the palace of the Caesars or in the palaces of the Herods, but he was born in a barn, that is, a cave that functioned as a barn, and his first crib was the feeding trough. He became poor. But there is a spiritual poverty that Christ took on that is beyond anything of physical poverty, he took on the wages of sin which is death. He took on your guilt and my guilt, your shame and my shame. Whatever it is that you were feeling today, if you are feeling shame, guilt, worry, fretting, not knowing what, feeling betrayed or whatever it is, whatever it is, I want you to know Jesus took it on. I want you to know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich yet for your sakes he became poor. Your

sakes, that's the part I left out because as sorry as you are and as sorry as I am and, dear ones, if we ever get a good, long, deep, honest look at ourselves, we will discover there is some sorriness about us. We're blame-shifters. We get bloated in pride. We get blinded. All those things. He loves you. I want you to know that. Jesus loves you. St. Augustine put it this way: he loves each of us as if there were only one of us.

Though he was rich. The richer you get, the harder it is to part with cash, did you know that? Come on now. Do I have a witness? The richer you get, the harder it is to part with cash. I kind of like Porgy, do you know Porgy, "I got plenty o' nuttin' An' nuttin's plenty fo' me," he said. "They can steal the rug from the floor, that's okay with me," but when you get plenty of something, you see, it's like Porgy said, rich folks always worrying because of what they got. Jesus had it all and he gave it up, every bit of it for you because he loved you because you are more important to Jesus than Jesus is to Jesus.

Then I want you to see why he did that, "that you through His poverty might become rich." What does that mean? What does it mean that you might become rich? Does that mean that he wants you to have 4, 5 homes to worry about? Somebody said years ago the more you got, the more has got you. Is that what he wants you to have just 4, 5 homes and a bunch of cars, to be like those thieves that operate in the Middle East that rule over the poverty of those poor people, exploit the poor, Mubarak worth \$70 billion while the average Egyptian earned about \$2 a day? I've been to Cairo, I was there a couple of years ago. Do you think that man worried about things a lot? The more you've got, the more it worries you. The more you've got, the more you've got to worry about.

What are the riches that are in view here? The riches that are in view here do include material abundance. You say, "Wait a minute here. We're going to have to get you a tv program you start preaching prosperity." No, hold on. It does include it because one day according to the book, according to the last book of the Bible, I'm going to be in a place and you are too where the streets are indeed paved with gold. Jesus left all that that you might get all that. So one day there is going to be incredible material wealth but do you know what? Most folks can't handle material wealth and if God gave you a bunch of that now, it would ruin you. It would turn you into a drunk. How many people do you know, I've known a few, came into a whole bunch of money and end up becoming drunks? How many you know? How many do you know because money can't satisfy. Gold is a cold god to serve but one day your heart is going to be so right, so pure, so free from any other attachment but the Lord himself that when you walk down streets of gold and when you pass through gates of pearl, it won't distract you, it won't pull you away from your love for God and your love for others.

So one day you're going to have enormous, fabulous, incredible, unbelievable wealth but what about in the here and now? I want to tell you something: God offers to you and to me today in the here and now something better than all the gold, something better than all the silver, something better than all this world's security, and that is he offers you a relationship that will never be severed. He promises to take care of you. He promises to make you secure, eternally secure, to hold you in the hollow of his hand, to keep you. And he promises you you will never be alone. When you feel alone, you've got to stop

and praise God. I found the cure for depression. I found the cure for anger. I found the cure for cussing. I just wish I always walked in it. It's praise. You can't praise Jesus and have a cuss fit. You can't praise Jesus and get down. You can't praise Jesus and be depressed. Sooner or later when you start praising Jesus, things happen inside you and they change you because it's not a hypnosis, it's not Cheech and Chong and their fine herb that we've wasted billions of dollars trying to stop. It's something better than that, it's reality because the God who created the universe comes to live inside you. When you cast yourself on his mercy in Jesus Christ, when you come to him just as you are without one plea and cast yourself on God's mercy in Christ, the God of the universe comes to live inside you and you've got something that money can't buy, you've got something that will never fade away, you've got a connection to the eternal that will never fade, and you've got a promise from that God that he will take the bad stuff that happens and, dear ones, you don't live long in this world without bad stuff happening to you, but he'll take that bad stuff and he will turn it into a blessing because the God of the universe promises to every Christian, "All things work together for good to those who love God." All things. All things.

All things work together for good to those who love God. Disease, firing, economic downturn, the IMF removing the dollar as the standard currency of the world, your IRA being seized by the IRS, whatever it is, trouble in your marriage, come on now, trouble in your marriage, trouble with your children. What? Trouble with your children, trouble at work, conflict with people, friends appearing to knife you in the back. All things work together for good to those who love God. All things. All things. All things.

You remember Joseph betrayed by his brothers, sold into slavery, bought by Potiphar, seduced by Potiphar's wife, but he would not be seduced and he says, "No, ma'am. I can't be disloyal. I must be faithful to my God and I must be faithful to my employer." And then she accuses him falsely of rape and that's a very difficult charge to defend yourself against and he's thrown into prison and he's forgotten there. Then one day he goes from the dungeon to being the Vicegerent of the entire Egyptian Empire. One day he rescues his brothers and he rescues their wives and children and he rescues his daddy, and then daddy 17 years later dies and the brothers are scared to death. Remember this: whatever you feel about others, you see, whatever you are afraid of you will tend to project that on other people. When you feel like people are against you, it's because of your own feelings you project on them. The brothers are sitting there and they're thinking, "Hm, what would I do?" And they know what they would do, they'd have Joseph's guts for garters.

A friend of mine was a Scottish schoolteacher before he went to seminary and that was one of his expressions and I like that. Have his guts for garters. I always like another one that one of you all sitting here today used about 34 years ago with me when I made a compliment and said, "Well, even a blind hog uncovers an acorn once in a while." I like metaphors.

And they're thinking, "If I were in Joseph's place, I know what I'd do with all of the years of suffering he had directly due to me." And they said to him, "Oh, have mercy! Remember what daddy said." Joseph didn't have to worry about what daddy said because

Joseph's heart was right with God because he knew this basic truth: all things work together for good to those who love God. All things and that's why he could say, "And as for you," he knew their hearts, "you meant it for evil but God meant it for good." And I want you to know that whatever the devil throws at you and whatever the world throws at you and whatever your foolish flesh gets you into, it makes no difference, all things work together for good. The devil may mean it for evil, as he does, but God means it for good. So God is working all things for your good. What a verse.

Now quickly, verse 9 is the foundation of all giving. Some years ago, one of our members who before he was a member of the church was speaking to a group of preachers in central Louisiana and I happened to be in the audience, and assuming that all preachers were overweight and greedy for money, and I only hit one of those, but I had one of my son-in-laws tell me recently, he said, "Well, Bob, you don't love money but you like it," and of course I do. Everybody likes money but that's different than loving it. Loving it means that you put getting wealth ahead of everything, that you're obsessed with it. There's nothing wrong with liking nice things. May I be honest and tell you a particular thing that I like and I don't ever want to give up? Indoor plumbing, especially when it's cold. I like to relax. I've used those other things. I like money but I believe God's freed me from the love of it.

So that particular brother asked the question, "Anybody here not believe in tithing?" He thought that he was going to get an absolutely universal answer and I raised my hand and he thought I was kidding. I don't believe in tithing. I once ran a little ad, we don't do any advertising, haven't done advertising about three years here, but I ran a little ad that said why I don't believe in tithing and I had a preacher get very angry with me over it, not anyone here. No, it was a pastor of another church. He said, "I can't believe that you put that in the paper!" But I don't believe in tithing. Do you know why? Because I believe that the standard for the believer, while it certainly has reference to Old Testament standards, in other words, you can't love God and violate the 10 Commandments without a hesitation there, that the standard isn't the 10 Commandments and the standard is not the morality of the Old Testament, the standard is the life of Jesus because Christ perfectly fulfilled the law.

And so I want you to understand that Jesus was not a tither. What was he according to verse 9? Anybody got an idea while I take a drink? What was Jesus? Was he a tither according to verse 9? Did he give 10%?

["He gave it all."]

He gave it all, there you go. Is the tithe useful? Sure, the 10 Commandments are useful as a rule of thumb but I want you to know the standard of holy living is not the 10 Commandments, the standard of holy living is the life of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the standard of giving under the Old Testament is the tithe in Malachi 3, but the standard of giving under the New Testament is the very life of Jesus who gave it all up. And it's not just that, it's not just the life of Jesus, it's the teaching of Jesus. You remember one day he's observing all the folks at the Together We Build banquet that was being held in

Jerusalem, and this one was pulling out this wad of bills, and this one was pulling out that wad of bills, and finally there was a poor widow who kind of snuck up there and threw her mite into the treasury and Jesus said something astounding and when he did all the people with their Mercedes and the BMW's and the Yugo's too, drove off. That's a little joke and I'll tell you about the joke in a moment. Jesus said, "Do you see this poor widow? She has given more than anybody else because she gave out of her poverty." So the standard of giving is not the tithe. Let me say, for some people the tithe is too much but for most Americans the tithe is too little.

Now the joke about the BMW's. One of my son-in-laws, the same one who told me that I liked money, said, "Bob, I know you don't love money but I get tired of hearing you say that because you like money. You like the good things that money buys." I do like indoor plumbing. I do like a warm bed. Went to a pastor's seminar, you know there are these things, they're given and you pay money to go to them, and there was a well-known speaker who spoke, this man even spoke here once, and when he spoke to those preachers, he even spoke at Promise Keepers and I heard him speak, this is what he said to them, he said, "What's the last thing you need to do as a pastor before you go into your pulpit on Sunday morning?" People think various things. Me, at my age, I try to make a go to the place down the hall. I always try to wash my hands, you know, shake hands with a lot of people, slip out and go wash your hands because you never know what you're liable to do in the heat of the moment, where you may touch yourself in your face, all those kinds of things. Check your zipper, that's good. Pat yourself on the stomach, use your little finger to check, "It's up, good," because at my age, again, you tend to forget these things. I don't know why. I don't know why. Old age is not for sissies. But let me tell you what that preacher told them, he said, "The last thing you need to go do before you go into the pulpit is check your parking lot and find who's driving the Cadillacs and the Mercedes and the Lexus's and the BMW's and those are the people you ought to focus on in the next week." That sounds like Jesus, doesn't it?

Though he was rich, yet for your sakes he made himself poor. I want you to understand that the heart of a real Christian church is to deal with everybody with grace and with dignity. Do we live up to that? Of course not, but I've made it my practice for over 35 years not to know who gives what and I'm going to tell you why, I'll tell you a time I found out who gave what. Some years back, I had a conflict with Miss Carol because according to my books I had given a certain amount of money and believing it's a sin to pay your taxes that you don't owe, I always want to make sure that I don't cheat them and I don't cheat me. So there was a conflict and I asked her about it. I said, "Carol, you know, by the way, these are my figures." And so she went to spit out the thing...you're not mad at me, are you, Carol? And all of a sudden somebody else's sheet came out and this was a person that I thought was a fringe person and they're no longer with us, by the way, so I'm not embarrassing that person. And there was over \$70,000 for the year. What! I mean, you know, that sounds like Everett Dirksen, the old senator from Illinois. He said, "A million here, a million there, before long you're talking about real money." Over \$70,000. This was somebody I thought was on the fringe, a person who's no longer here. That's why I don't want to know because it made me self-conscious about approaching the person about anything. I don't know what you give and I don't want to know what you

give because if you're a stingy skinflint, I want to treat you like Jesus would. So it's okay. This is the church for people who can give over \$70,000 a year and for stingy skinflints too.

The core of the thing is valuing people and what is it about giving that we must value the most? Let's look and see exactly what he says. Turning the page back from this passage which is the foundation of giving, I want you to see in verse 5, chapter 8, verse 5, page 1,331, "And not only as we had hoped, but they first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God." You need to understand that the entirety of chapter 8 and chapter 9 is about giving. What's he saying? He's saying what's important is to give yourself to the Lord. Why is it that my giving sermon, and I haven't done one in a long time, and this is an old sermon, tried to preach it in a new way today, why is it my giving sermon is not about trying to pressure you to give? Because the heart of the matter is your heart. I want you to give your heart to Jesus.

Now, of course, that's a gospel invitation. If you're here today and you've never really opened your heart to the Lord Jesus and asked him to come in, ask him to be your Lord and Savior, if you've never turned from your sins and cast yourself on God's mercy in Christ, that's what it's all about. And God forbid in order to pay a bill here, I would pressure someone about giving financially and have that person leave in disgust and think that they were not different than the casino in Marksville. But there's another reason here and it's what I want for you every Sunday and it's what I want from you every Sunday, and it's what I preach to you every Sunday, it's about rending the heart and not the garments. It's about giving your heart, as Calvin's motto was, promptly and sincerely, that is, wholeheartedly to the Lord.

"Give Me your heart," the Lord says. If you give the Lord your heart, guess what follows? Your time. How many people here could teach Sunday school? We have more kids evidently attending on Wednesday night than on Sunday morning. Wow. How many here could teach Sunday school? You see, if preach give me your heart, then we're talking about people volunteering to teach kids. If I preach give me your heart, we talk about people volunteering to sing. Thank you, Carl. And thank you, Claire and John. Thank you. We are blessed. And it's also about giving. So if we preach give me your heart and then we make a need known and you have the ability to meet that need, you meet that need.

"First you gave us," he said, "they gave themselves to the Lord first and then to us by the will of the Lord." I want you to notice something, look at verse 4. Is there a place for manipulative appeals about giving and begging? Absolutely. Are you with me? Is there a place for manipulation and high pressure begging about giving? Absolutely. Look at the verse. Who does it, who does the begging in verse 4, the getter or the giver? The giver. Do you see what he's saying? It wasn't that the preacher was up there begging them for money. They were begging for the opportunity. Do you see that? That's amazing. They were begging, they were imploring, they were saying, "Please let us do this. Please give us the opportunity to share in this." You see, it's very different, it's so different than the

foul, harlot called American Christianity. "Imploring us," verse 4, "with much urgency that we would receive the gift."

Now we notice something else, we want you to see here that there is abundant giving from those who can give the least. Look up a couple of verses, verse 2, "that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality. For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing." Wow, that's something, isn't it? By faith we can give more than we think we can. But I'm not for tithing. For some of you here, the tithe is too much, for others it's too little.

I want you to see some other criteria about giving that are in this section of two chapters and I want you to see that, because I'm going to skip over some things that I said in the first service to get to the heart of the matter here, and look at what he says in verse 7 of chapter 9, page 1,332. Verse 7 says, "So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver." The word that's translated "cheerful" and anytime you do this with Greek, it's turning things upside down because our words come from Greek words, Greek words don't come from our words. But the Greek word that's there sounds like our word "hilarious." Hilarious. "Ha, ha, ha, ha! I write another \$1,000 check today. Woo-ee!" Get the picture? That's hilarious, actually it's pretty corny, isn't it? Hilarious.

Here's the deal and I only say this after we take up the offering: if you're begrudging that big check, tear it up and write a different one. Seriously. Don't give more money than you can give with joy. Huh, that's an interesting set of criteria, isn't it? You've got to give by faith, you've got to give sacrificially, you've got to give with joy. Do you think God loves people who give grudgingly? What he says is the Lord loves a, what? Hilarious giver. "Oh boy, this is so fun. I love this. I love just putting this money into this purpose and this and this." So you see those standards there.

Then, of course, there are obligations on the other side. You can look there at verse 18 across the page, 2 Corinthians 8:18, "And we have sent with him the brother whose praise is in the gospel throughout all the churches, and not only that, but who was also chosen by the churches to travel with us with this gift, which is administered by us to the glory of the Lord Himself and to show your ready mind, avoiding this: that anyone should blame us in this lavish gift which is administered by us--providing honorable things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men." What is he saying? He's saying, "I," the Apostle Paul, "am not a crook." Let's see, Richard Nixon said that and he was a crook. There was just a little dog named Checkers.

St. Paul did not want people thinking he was a crook because there the big three that'll knock you out of the ministry, at least they used to knock you out of the ministry as I see tv preachers today and others, I just wonder whether anything knocks them out, but it's sex and finances and drugs or alcohol. Or what did I say in the first service? I had alliteration there. Booze, broads and bucks, there you go. And St. Paul is sensitive that he doesn't lose his reputation. He's sensitive that people not think he's unethical and careless

with money, and that means there needs to be transparency. That's why we had a meeting instead of Sunday school this morning where we reported on every penny that we took in and how it was spent, and then a budget that you voted on to approve or disapprove, to amend as you saw fit. Why is that? It's because it's important that you trust people when they proclaim the word of God to you, and if you think that I've got graphite on my zipper or that I'm dancing with Jack Daniel at night or that I'm putting my hands in the till, it's hard for you to hear the word of God. And I want you to hear the word of God.

"I swear to God this is the truth." You just took an oath. I did. I'd rather be bankrupt and have the word of God go forth with clarity and integrity than I would have to have millions of dollars. Integrity, and I believe that integrity with the administration of funds should elicit from people generosity. Let me tell you what I wouldn't do. I wouldn't give to the Girl Scouts. Are Girl Scouts sweet people? Of course but unlike the Boy Scouts, the Girl Scouts caved in on the issue of faith in God. Boy Scouts still held true to that, faith in God. The Boy Scouts still held true to being morally straight but in the Girl Scouts lesbianism and abortion, "Those are issues we're just not worrying about." I'm not going to give to the Girl Scouts and I'll give to agencies of the United Way but I'm not going to give to the United Way as such, because I want to be sure that every dime I give goes to things that I can support in good conscience.

And I hear a lot of appeals on tv, "Give to this to give to that," starving, bloated-bellied children because that's real famine when the kids' bellies are really bloated. "Give to this, give to that." I want to find out something about an agency before I give to it, and I chose last January when all of this mess happened in Haiti, I chose to give to an organization that I knew had financial integrity to help the people in Haiti because of their track record, because they met certain stringent criteria as such as having an independent board and audits and this and that. Financial integrity.

Don't give to people unless you know what they're doing with your money. How many people have given to stuff to finance the very things they don't believe in? How can a person who is a real Christian and believes in the sanctity of life give money that goes to fund abortion? How about the Race For The Cure? You know, I thought that was great until someone pointed out to me that that particular organization supports Planned Parenthood. So I read was this true and I verified they support Planned Parenthood. Their justification was, "Well, those were the best clinics for women." Oh, but not for women's babies because Planned Parenthood murders babies. So I'm not going to Race For The Cure, I'm going to give money according to integrity where it's transparent and we know how it's spent.

Now I've got the last point here. When I said, in verse 6 of chapter 9, that you through his poverty might become rich, is there a connection between that and material abundance? And the answer to that is, yes. You've got financial trouble? You've got to always ask of any trouble you've got, "What is God trying to say to me?" You've got to ask that. God may not be trying to say anything to you. Some things, as you read the book of Job, simply happen for reasons we will not understand until we get to heaven. But if you've got trouble and I've got trouble, it's always a wake-up call to say, "God, what are You

addressing in my life?" Because I want you to see your connection, let's look at verse 6, 2 Corinthians 9:6, our last point about giving. "But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully." This is in the context of, what? Spirituality and other worldly things? What's this in the context of? I'll take another drink while I wait for the answer.

Giving. You mean it's about money? Money in here? Money in there? Has this got anything to do with money? Yeah, absolutely, hello. "He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly." Is this about giving everything to the local church? No. I do not believe in storehouse tithing. If I don't believe in tithing, I sure don't believe in storehouse tithing. I believe that when you see your neighbor in need and you give them something in the name of Jesus, you're giving to the Lord. But we need your money too. [laughter]

But look what he says, "He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly." Are you reaping sparingly? "And he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully." Let's read on because that's not the only verse here. "So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make," now I want to read this with emphasis. I want you to notice every time in this one verse the Greek word "all" or its derivatives are used. Listen to it because I'm going to pop out the words loudly, "And God is able to make **all** grace abound toward you, that you, **always** having **all** sufficiency in **all** things, may have an abundance for **every** good work." Do y'all all get that? All. All. All. All. All.

What is he saying? Is God able to make you rich, that is the question? Is God able to make you rich? Now I ask is he able to make you poor? Going into debt is able to make you poor. And I've got to correct something. I was accosted after the congregational meeting. While I believe that we should avoid personal debt, I have no scruples at all about corporate debt or business debt if it's prudent, so let me lay that to rest. Someone accosted me and said, "You shot yourself in the foot. You got up there and said that you were opposed to debt as if you were opposed to all debt." And I've got to say that the person that accosted me was right and all the churches in our town that grow, grow by debt. Remember, the American economy in the past few decades is a debt-based economy. It is. Now the chickens are coming home to roost, of course, but I just wanted to say that clarification. I have no moral objection to our church borrowing \$10 million. I didn't say we should do that, okay, and I'm sure we couldn't do it. But anyhow...

Notice what he's able to do. God is able to make all grace abound. What kind of grace? All grace. Does that include grace in heaven in the sweet by and by, you gonna get some pie in the sweet by and by? Does it mean that? Yeah. How about some pie now? How about some ice cream on the pie now? Alright, just make it sugar free. Alright. He's able to make all grace, he says, all grace. That's for every area of life. That's health. That's finances. That's relationship. That's knowledge to be able to do things, wisdom and prudence.

He says that you always, always having, what? All sufficiency. What is prosperity according to the Bible? Having everything you want? No, it's having enough that your

basic needs are met with enough left over to help other folks. But always having all sufficiency in all things, you may have abundance for every good work. You want to have abundance for every good work? Is that abundance to go waste it on this or waste it on that? He wants you to have an abundance so you can plow it into his kingdom. That's what he wants. God wants to bless you financially so that you will plow it into the ministry of the gospel. Not just here but all over the world. God wants to increase your finances and we cannot allow our reaction to the crooks on tv to cause us to be reactionary and to deny that. God wants to increase your finances. Why? So that you will share with other people. So you will take food to your neighbor. So that you will give money to a poor person. So that you will help this ministry or that ministry and so you'll keep the lights on here. Because he's able so that you always have all sufficiency in all things, you may have an abundance for every good work.

"As it is written," he says in verse 9, "He has dispersed abroad, He has given to the poor; His righteousness endures forever." Then he says this, "Now may He who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food, supply and," what? "Multiply the seed you have sown and increase the fruits of your righteousness." Do you understand that when you give money in the name of Jesus to your neighbor who's in need, what if your next door neighbor's utility bill is about to be turned off? Have you ever thought that that person may end up in heaven rather than hell because you went over and paid for her utilities to stay on and you did it in the name of Jesus? Whoa. Wow. You think that would be called fruits of your righteousness? You think God wants to increase the fruits of your righteousness?

Look at verse 11, are you ready for this? Yeah, I believe that there is a form of the prosperity teaching that is false and of the devil but that doesn't mean that everything about it is false. Look at the next verse. If this isn't about financial blessing, tell me and I will confess to being illiterate. What does he say in verse 11? This is all about giving and it's also about receiving. Verse 11, "while you are enriched in," what? "Everything." What is he saying?

["Everything."]

I can hear that. "While you are enriched in everything." Everything. Do you think that includes filthy lucre? Just don't chew it. I won't tell that joke again. It's true.

You are enriched in everything including filthy lucre. Why? Why get enriched in everything? Does this mean being a multimillionaire? No. Does this mean competing with Mubarak? No. It means, what? It means, "while you were enriched in everything for all liberality," share the wealth. Remember Louisiana's worst governor and greatest governor, Huey Pierce Long. Share the wealth, Mr. Rockefeller, Mr. Carnegie. There's enough room at this table for everybody. If God's people gave the way God wants them to give, there would always be enough for everybody. Do you believe that? Coerced giving is of the devil, that's what Karl Marx believed in, the trouble is given total depravity it means that the poor people who get in leadership become people like Hosni

Mubarak. But look at what he says, everything in verse 11 means everything. Gracious sakes, it means everything.

"While you are enriched in everything for," what? "For all liberality." All liberality, think that means giving. How about your will? Wouldn't you like to ruin your children and grandchildren by dumping a lot of money on them and turning them into dopeheads and alcoholics? The first generation makes it, second generation keeps it, third generation spends it. Why not give to the church? Why not give to a Christian college or a Christian school? Hey, we have a Christian school here that's in great need. We've got a deficit of \$230,000. We need to make that deficit up. Why not before you die say, "I'd like to give to Grace Christian School"? Why not give Grace Christian School some beautiful brick buildings? I think it's worthy of you giving. I think it's worthy of you giving. I believe in it. If you plan your estate carefully, the fiends in Washington will not murder more babies with your money. Give your taxes, pay your taxes, every dime you owe, but nothing more.

But what is he saying in verse 11? He's talking about money. He says, "while you are enriched in everything for all liberality," that includes money. And what does it do? When you give to advance the kingdom of God, what do you produce? You produce thanksgiving in the heart of people. I want people in eternity to say, "Praise God for Grace Church!" I want to know that. I want thanksgiving to God that this church made a difference in the lives of people. When we give in the name of Jesus, when we work for the kingdom of God, when we sow our wealth into advancing the kingdom of God, it produces praise and thanksgiving on the part of people.

And we move on, almost done. "For the administration," he says, "of this service not only supplies the needs of the saints, but also is abounding through many thanksgivings to God." Praise the Lord. Praise the Lord. I want you to know that that widow whose utilities are about to be turned off, who's been crying out to God.... Robert, are you the one that's been reading George Mueller?

["Yes."]

Have you been blessed by that?

["Very much."]

Greatly blessed by George Mueller. George Mueller ran an orphanage by faith. He never asked for money. He prayed and people came and brought things in. I want people to praise the Lord, praise the Lord.

And notice it meets the needs of people. As we give to the kingdom of God, people are won to Christ who would not be won to Christ. Verse 13, "while, through the proof of this ministry, they glorify God for the obedience of your confession to the gospel of Christ." You mean when I don't give and I profess to be a Christian, I'm contradicting my

Christian witness? Yeah. "And for your liberal sharing with them and all men." God hates conservatives and loves liberals when it comes to giving. Be liberal.

What does it do to that widow who's been praying and crying out to God for a need and you go over there and you say maybe not with your own money that you've given your money but you've hidden it, maybe you gave it through our fellowship fund and you take a check and say, "Some folks were praying about your need and wanted to share this with you." Do you think that woman is going to be praising God? Do you think she's going to be sharing the blessing you shared?

Verse 14, "and by their prayer for you, who long for you because of the exceeding grace of God in you." Do you need people to pray for you? I guarantee you, you go visit that widow lady and you take money and you dig deep and you help her utilities stay on, you've got a prayer warrior.

"Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!"

That's the end of the sermon. I'm not going to ask you to do a blessed thing, I'm just going to ask you to think about it. I'm going to ask you to think about the money that you're about to lose one way or the other. Wouldn't you rather give that money up voluntarily to God? Am I asking you to give money to this church? No, only if you feel led to do it. Pray about it. Ask God to do it, to guide you. All I'm asking you to do is go think. You see, the problem with the American church is manipulation. Get somebody to sign on the dotted line and then they begrudge it and regret it. Go home and think.

Let's pray.

Lord, help us as we think again of this text that I preached on before on a Sunday when we have presented a budget. Help us, Lord, to reflect on biblical principles of giving as you have blessed us so richly. Give us to give in faith, give us to give with cheerfulness, give us to give modeling after Jesus with sacrifice, and give us to give trusting that you will meet our needs and increase our bank account, as a general rule, as we are engaged in sacrificial giving. In Jesus' name. Amen.