

2 Corinthians 9:6-15
Numbers 18
Psalm 16

“The Cheerful Giver”

June 5, 2016

Introduction: Numbers 18 – Paul’s Principles of Giving in Old Testament Context

When we think of Old Testament financial principles
we tend to think of the *tithe*.

But Numbers 18 tells us about several different financial requirements that God gave to Israel:
there is the tithe,

but there are also the firstfruits, grain offerings, sin offerings, guilt offerings,
wave offerings, and redemption offerings –
and the holy contributions from the peace offerings.

And that’s just one chapter!

So OT financial responsibilities are pretty complicated!

And we can see from Paul’s letters to the Corinthians

that Paul does not simply quote OT requirements to explain how Christians ought to give.

Rather, Paul builds on the *principles* of the Old Testament

and applies those principles to help us understand how we ought to give.

Numbers 18 helps us get at these principles.

The undergirding principle of Numbers 18 is that the priests and Levites
were to be dependent upon their brothers for their support.

The priests and Levites had no portion – no “inheritance” in the land.

The tribe of Levi had a few cities with some farmland,
but generally, they had to depend on their brethren for their support.

This is not what Israel was used to.

Israel came out of Egypt.

Egyptian priests had lots of land and thus lots of earthly power.

But Israel’s priests will be dependent upon the contributions of God’s people.

And because the priests depend on the contributions of the people,
the holiness of the community is expressed in this mutual interdependence.

The people depend on the priests for their religious services.

The priests depend on the people for their financial provision –
and indeed in the OT, the very gifts that the people bring
are part of the way that their sins are atoned for,
and their uncleanness is removed.

Paul says that we should think of these things in terms of church government.

In *1 Corinthians* 9:13-14, he says,

“Do you not know that those who are employed in the temple service
get their food from the temple,
and those who serve at the altar share in the sacrificial offerings?
In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel
should get their living by the gospel.”
He goes on to say that he himself has not made use of that right,
but he lays down the principle that pastors should be paid.

Some people have tried to say
“therefore God’s people in the NT should tithe for the support of the ministry.”
There’s only one problem.
Tithes were *not* the way that the *priests* were paid in the OT!
Remember, in 1 Cor 9, Paul says that those who serve at the altar
share in the sacrificial offerings.

Paul understood Numbers 18!
Verses 8-20 describe the way in which the priests receive their financial support.
The holy things – the part of the offerings that were not burned in the fire –
were the portion of the priests –
together with the firstborn of every animal,
and the “holy contributions” of the people of Israel.
So the firstfruits, the consecrated things,
and other offerings that were brought throughout the year belonged to the priests.

And Paul says in 1 Cor 9 that this is the foundation for paying your pastor!
So what percentage of your income should go to pay your pastor?
Paul doesn’t say.
He just says that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel.
It’s up to the church – led by their pastors, elders, and deacons –
to figure that out!

If you want to know about the *tithe*, look at verses 21-32 of Numbers 18.
If the firstfruits and holy contributions belonged to the priests,
then the tithe belonged to the Levites.
Or, at least, part of it does!

The use of the tithe in Israel is a curious study.
Here we are simply told that God has given the tithe to the Levites –
and that the Levites are supposed to give a “tithe of the tithe” to the priests (v26).
But Deuteronomy 14 says that the tithe was to be used at the great harvest festival,
the Feast of Booths.
When you go up to celebrate the great redemption of Israel –
God said in Deut 14:25-26 to turn the tithe into money,
and then you shall “spend the money for whatever you desire –
oxen or sheep or wine or strong drink, whatever your appetite craves.
And you shall eat there before the LORD your God and rejoice,

you and your household.
And you shall not neglect the Levite who is within your towns,
for he has no portion or inheritance with you.”

And then Dt 14:28-29 specifies that in the third year was it to be laid up in storehouses
for the poor and the Levites (14:22-29).

But here it appears that the whole tithe is supposed to go to the Levites.

God wants us to see Deuteronomy 14 and Numbers 18 together.

When you go up to the sanctuary to celebrate the Feast of Booths after the harvest
you should bring the tithe (or its equivalent in cash),

and you should celebrate before the Lord – together with the Levites.

They should be the beneficiaries of your prosperity.

In our language, think of it this way:

if you made \$50,000 last year, then you would bring \$5,000 –

you would probably spend \$400-500 on food for the family at the feast,

and the rest would go to the Levites.

The Levites would then give 10% of that to the priests.

And then every third year, the tithe would be put in storehouses for the poor
(not neglecting the Levites).

Now, there are a lot of differences between the ancient Israelite economic world and ours.

For instance, the tithe was a “tax” on agricultural production.

If you grew 100 bushels of grain, you would tithe 10 bushels.

If your flock added 50 goats, you would tithe 5 goats.

But what would your herdsman tithe?

Nothing.

He was your servant.

You did not tithe on “wages.”

Servants and day laborers did not tithe.

Only landowners!

The whole Israelite economy was based on land – *the Promised Land* –
the land that the priests and Levites had *no portion* of –
in order to make them interdependent with their brothers.

Verse 20 is the key to the whole chapter:

God says to the priests and Levites:

“I am your portion and your inheritance among the people of Israel.”

God is our portion and inheritance.

God is teaching his people that there is something better than Land!

Psalm 16:5-6 takes this theme into the mouth of the Son of David –

“The LORD is my chosen portion and my cup.

The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places;

indeed, I have a beautiful inheritance.”
We have a beautiful inheritance in Jesus.
So let’s sing about it in him!

Sing Psalm 16
Read 2 Corinthians 9

So how do you think about money?

Do you view money as a way to control the world?
Such people may not spend much – they may live very modestly.
They want to feel secure against the vicissitudes of life.
Or do you view money as a means to make yourself happy?
Such people spend money to get what they want,
and to make others like them.
They want pleasure – and so they spend money to get it.
Or do you view money as a way to gain power over others?
Such people spend money as a means of control.
Their spending is calculated to manipulate.

These are all fundamentally idolatrous uses of money.

This is why Paul doesn’t talk about percentages or strategies.

Paul focuses on the heart.
We should be generous – open-hearted and open-handed –
to our brothers and sisters who are in need.
We should follow the pattern of Christ –
the pattern of the gospel –
just as Jesus became poor so that we might become rich,
even so, we should give generously to bind together the body of Christ,
knowing that our generosity will produce thanksgiving to God,
and knowing that it will also knit us together more thoroughly in Jesus.

So how do we think about these biblical principles of giving?

The principle of the “firstfruits” is useful (Ex 23:16-19; 34:22-26; Lev 23:10-20;
Num 28:26; Dt 18:4, 26:1; 2 Chron 3; Neh 10:35; 12:44; Prov 3:9; Ezek 44:30)
God required Israel to bring the first part of the harvest to the LORD
in order to express the truth that all the harvest belongs to God.
The application of that principle today
is what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 16 –
when he urges the Corinthians to set aside something
on the first day of every week.
In other words, our giving should not be “leftovers” –
but the *first thing* that we do.
Rather than make up our budget and then see what’s left over for God,
we should decide up front what we will do for his kingdom.

Likewise, the principle of the “holy contributions” is useful (Num 18:19).

The spiritual service rendered by those who preach the gospel
is of great value to the people of God.

As we’ve seen, Paul uses that principle to say in 1 Cor 9 that
“those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel.”

In the same way, the OT required farmers to leave gleanings of grain and fruit,
to make sure that the poor could come and glean for themselves.

In other words, God was teaching his people that “your land”
was not just for *you*. (Lev 19:9; 23:22)

You are required to provide some of *your produce* for the poor.

You should do it *willingly* – but that doesn’t make it *optional*.

Giving to the poor is as optional as being faithful to your wife.

It is something *commanded* by God – but you should still do it willingly!

If you say to your wife, “the only reason why I’m being faithful
is because God commanded me to” –
that’s not exactly what she wants to hear!

You should be faithful to your wife – but you should do it willingly!

And with all that background, perhaps we can see how we should think about the tithe.

The tithe, in the OT, does three things:

- 1) it provides for the Levites – and through them, the priests;
- 2) it provides for the poor (especially every third year);
- 3) in the other two years, a portion of it is consumed at the feast –
together with your family, friends, the Levites, *and the poor!*

(Lv 27:30-32; Dt 12:6-17; 14:22-28; 26; 2 Chron 31; Neh 10:37-38; Am 4:4; Mal 3:8-10)

By now you can see that a faithful Israelite landowner would be spending 15-20%
of his increase on the Levites, the priests, the poor – and the *feast!*

And that’s important for how we think about how to apply the tithe in the NT.

Why does Paul say that God loves the cheerful giver?

Dt 14 said that one purpose of the tithe was to feast together
with God’s people in Jerusalem!

I don’t think that it’s a stretch at all to say that Paul’s discussion of the gift for the saints
is connected to this OT principle of the tithe!

After all, Paul clearly includes the *Corinthians* among the beneficiaries of this gift!

To put it simply,

the principle of the tithe provides a useful benchmark (10%) –

but to translate it into NT language,

the purpose of the tithe was for pastors, other religious workers, the poor, *and feasting*.

If you insist on thinking about the tithe woodenly,

part of your taxes go for poor relief –
and thus would have been considered part of your “tithe” in the OT –
along with whatever you spend on hospitality
and part of what you give to the church for my salary,
and whatever you give separately to missionaries.
But Paul doesn’t go there.
In the NT, we do not woodenly apply OT rules.
We learn the principles – and then we apply the principles to our context.

Now I realize that was a much longer introduction than usual!
But I think it will help us see what Paul is doing with greater clarity!
And Paul gets us right to our point in verse 6!

1. The Point: You Will Reap According to What You Sow (v6-7)

⁶ *The point is this (Paul says in verse 6): whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully^[d] will also reap bountifully*

Paul is not saying that if you sow *money* you will reap *more money*.
This is not some sort of prosperity gospel scheme!
It’s a bigger picture that Paul is painting.

Paul uses the picture of planting and harvesting.
If you are afraid that it will be a bad summer,
then you will sow sparingly – holding back extra seed grain for next year.
But if you are confident that it will be a good summer,
then you will sow bountifully – expecting to reap a bountiful harvest.

Paul is convinced that Jesus is Lord –
that the Holy Spirit has been poured out upon the church –
and so therefore, God’s purposes in history are going to be fulfilled.
In other words, *it’s going to be a very good summer!*

And so, until our Lord Jesus returns, we should be busy sowing bountifully!

So what does Paul mean by “bountiful.”

We saw last time that Paul says in verse 5 that he wants the gift to be ready
“as a blessing, not as an exaction.”

This is the same word – the word translated “bountifully” is actually the word “blessings.”
Just like Jacob gave to Esau a “blessing” by giving him gifts.

Whoever sows blessings will also reap blessings.
You will reap according to what you sow –
but it may come back in ways that you do not expect!

How do you want God to deal with you?

If you sow sparingly – if you are tightfisted and miserly in your giving –
(not just financially – but the way that you give of yourself in the body of Christ),
then you can expect God to deal with you accordingly.

But if you sow blessings – if you bless others in your giving of yourself –
then you can expect God to deal with you accordingly!

Again – it may *not* be financial blessings that God gives you!

It may be that God gives you the grace of contentment –
to be content with a lower standard of living!

But think about it!

If you are content with a lower standard of living
and you have blessed other Christians with sufficient food and clothing –
then truly there is blessing all around!

But Paul wants to make sure that his exhortation to give
does not come across as *compulsion*:

⁷ *Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.*

Paul is concerned about your motivation.

The construction in Greek emphasizes motive,
so perhaps it would be better to translate it
“not motivated by sad feelings or pressure.”

In other words, don't give just because you feel sad for people.

The word translated “reluctantly” is a word that Paul has used repeatedly in 2 Cor.
In chapter 2, verses 1, 3, and 7 it describes Paul's “painful” or “sorrowful” visit.
In chapter 7, verse 10,

Paul used this word to talk about two different kinds of grief.

So we *should not* translate this ‘reluctantly.’

Paul says do not give “from grief” – do not give “from sorrow.”

You can see what the ESV translators are doing.

They are interpreting “sorrow” to mean “sorrow over giving money away.”

But I don't think that is where Paul is going with this.

Given that Paul is focusing on the question,
what sort of harvest should we expect?

I think that Paul is saying “don't be motivated by sadness and sorrow”
in the way that you give to the saints in need.

In the same way, “don't be motivated by pressure – compulsion – guilt trips.”

Don't give because you feel sorry for people.

Don't give because you feel guilty – as so many fund-raisers try to do!

Sorrow and pressure are worldly motives for giving.

Paul is following very closely what Moses had said in Deuteronomy 15:10
Moses had said that when you approach the Sabbath year –
 when debts would be forgiven,
 and your brother asks you for a loan –
 and it's tempting to say "wait until after the Sabbath year!",
Moses says, "you shall lend him a loan whatever he needs,
 and you shall not be grieved in your heart when you give to him,
 because through this thing the Lord your God will bless you
 in all your works and in all to which you may put your hand."

Give as you have determined in your heart –
 because God loves a cheerful giver.

The LXX of Proverbs 22:8 says
 "He who sows what is cheap will reap what is bad
 and will complete the impact of his deeds.
 God blesses a cheerful and generous man."
Paul paraphrases this to say simply "God loves a cheerful giver."

Why does God love a cheerful giver?
 Because God himself is a cheerful giver.
 He who did not spare his own son but gladly gave him up for us all...

And this is at the heart of Paul's three reasons why you should be a cheerful giver.
 You should be a cheerful giver because:

2. Three Reasons for You to Be a Cheerful Giver (v8-15)

a. God Will Supply All That You Need through Jesus Christ (v8-10)

⁸ *And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency^[e] in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.*

In verse 8, the word "all" is the focus.
 God is able to make *all* grace abound to you,
 so that in *all* things
 at *all* times
 having *all* sufficiency
 you may abound in *all* good works.

You should be a cheerful giver because God is the giver of all grace.
 In every situation you face
 God is able to make all grace abound to you
 so that you may abound in all good works.
 Do you believe that God is who he says he is?
 Do you believe that God will do what he promises?

Then cheerfully do what God puts in front of you to do!

After all, *what is the purpose* of God's gifts?
Why has God given you abundant resources?

Last week we sang Psalm 112 – about the blessed man who gives to the poor.
In verse 9, Paul quotes Psalm 112:9

⁹ *As it is written,*
“*He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor;*
his righteousness endures forever.”

Who is the “he” in verse 9?
It is tempting at first to think that it is “God.”
But in Psalm 112, it is plainly the *blessed man*
who distributes freely, and gives to the poor.

And Paul will speak in verse 10 of the “harvest of *your* righteousness.”
So Paul clearly remembers that Psalm 112 is speaking of *us*.

“His righteousness endures forever” – is referring to you!
Your righteousness endures forever!

That may sound a little surprising at first – coming from the apostle Paul!

But remember, verse 8 shows that this is *all* of grace.
God's grace lies at the root of our righteousness.

But because God is the cheerful giver who gave his own Son –
therefore he graciously gives us the ability to do every good work.
And thus we become – in and with Jesus –
the blessed man of Psalm 112.

And so when we distribute freely – when we give to the poor –
Paul says that *our* righteousness endures forever.

Caring for the poor – providing for the saints in need –
is at the heart of what *righteousness* is all about.

Righteousness has to do with how you order your community.
How do you structure your society?
In your family – how do you make sure that the strong do not oppress the weak?
In your neighborhood – in your workplaces –
how do you look out for those who need help?

Paul says that the *church* should be the preeminent place where *righteousness* is found.

And Paul says that you should be a cheerful giver because (v10):

¹⁰ He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness.

When we talk about the sovereignty of God in salvation –
we need to remember that he is Lord not only of our justification,
whereby he declares us righteous in his sight forever;
but he is also Lord of our sanctification,
wherein he makes us righteous – a righteousness that also endures forever!

The church of Jesus Christ should always be a place where the harvest of righteousness abounds.
After all, if Jesus *is* the blessed man of Psalm 112 –
if *he* has established *righteousness* in his community –
then you should be able to see that righteousness at work in his community!
In us.

I asked you a couple weeks ago to keep track of how much you spend on yourselves –
beyond the necessities.

How much do you spend on going out to eat? computer games? entertainment?
John Chrysostom urged his congregation in Constantinople
to spend *half as much* on Christ as they did on their entertainments.
One Reformed pastor urged his church to do more:
he said that for every penny spent on their own conveniences and entertainments
they should spend a penny on the poor.

What are you spending – in terms of your time, your money, your resources –
what are you spending on the saints in need?

Okay – but how do we do this?
In the OT, you brought your gifts to the temple.
That's not the way we do things in the NT!

And so in verses 11-12, Paul gives the second reason why you should be a cheerful giver:

**b. The Liturgy of Supplying the Needs of the Saints Will Overflow in
Thanksgiving to God (v11-12)**

¹¹ You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. ¹² For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God.

I refer to this as the “liturgy of supplying the needs of the saints”
because Paul speaks in verse 12 of the ministry of this service –
or the diakonia of this leitourgias.

Diakonia means “service” or “ministry” – in the sense of administration.
Leitourgia means “service” either in terms of public service to the city,
or public service to the gods.

In the OT the term was generally used to refer to the priests’ service in the temple –
which is why the term “liturgy” in English has to do with worship.

Paul has been talking about the *administration* (diakonia) of the gift –
but here he goes a step further and says that supplying the needs of the saints
is a *liturgical* act – it is a public service to God and his people.
(Given that Paul views the *church* – the *saints* – as the *temple* of God –
we should not be surprised that he views this as a liturgical act!)

Deuteronomy 26 even provides a liturgy for the tithes and firstfruits
when the people of God bring their offerings to the sanctuary.
When they bring the firstfruits to the priest, they are to summarize the history of redemption,
and then they are give to God the first portion of the harvest.
Then at the feast of booths, when they bring their tithe to God, they are to say,
“I have removed the sacred portion out of my house,
and moreover I have given it to the Levite, the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow,
according to all your commandment that you have commanded me.” (26:13)

We sang this last night at the installation service.

Giving to the priests, the Levites, the poor, and the orphan and widow is a public act of worship.
It is a liturgical act!
That’s why we include it in the worship service.

Obviously, much has changed since the OT.
We do not have a central sanctuary on earth.
But we *do* have a central sanctuary – where Jesus sits at the right hand of God!
And that is where we come as we worship him.

And we need to remember that our local congregation is connected to the rest of the body!
The early church had a stronger sense of the “city church” –
all the elders of the city church formed a single eldership.
And the early fathers divided gifts given to the church into four parts:
1) one quarter was given to the bishop and his household
(assuming that he would be caring for many strangers);
2) one quarter was given for the support of the clergy;
3) one quarter was used for the maintenance of church property;
4) one quarter was given to the poor.
The percentages could vary according to need –
but the principle is that the contributions for the church
should be used for the support of the ministry –
and provision for the poor.

And that is why Paul does not encourage the Corinthians to simply “do their own thing” in sending the gift to Jerusalem.

Look at verse 11.

How will the Corinthians’ gift produce thanksgiving to God?

Through us.

With these words “through us” Paul gently reminds us of the importance of coordination in administering these gifts.

The coordination of the gifts expresses the unity of the church – the unity of the gospel – that in Jesus, there is *one* new man uniting Jew and Gentile.

Through us, Paul says, your generosity will produce thanksgiving to God.

This liturgy – this public act of worship to God and service to the saints – will overflow in many thanksgivings to God.

You should be a cheerful giver because you know that your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.

And finally, you should be a cheerful giver because:

c. They Will Pray for You Because You Obeyed the Gospel (v13-15)

¹³ *By their approval of this service, they^[1] will glorify God because of your submission that comes from your confession of the gospel of Christ, and the generosity of your contribution for them and for all others,* ¹⁴ *while they long for you and pray for you, because of the surpassing grace of God upon you.* ¹⁵ *Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!*

The Jerusalem Christians – the needy saints in Judea – will glorify God because of your submission that comes from your confession of the gospel of Christ; and they will glorify God because of the generosity of your contribution for them and for all others.

Again, Paul grounds *everything* in the gospel of Christ.

Because Jesus submitted in everything to the Father – therefore Paul and his traveling presbytery submit to the gospel – and so therefore the Corinthians now submit to the gospel.

Your submission comes from your confession of the gospel of Christ.

Because you confess the gospel of Jesus, you recognize that the Christian life has a cross-shaped pattern – from Christ, to us, to you.

And that cross-shaped pattern – the suffering and affliction of the Christian life – is oriented towards *the joy set before him*.

Yes, you are laying down your life in giving to others –
you are impoverishing yourself in order to enrich others!

But that is what God did in Jesus!

He became all that we are by nature, so that we might become all that he is by grace!
And so therefore we see the same glory – we see the same joy – set before us,
and so we cannot help but give ourselves freely for others!

And when you see someone else looking like Jesus –
when you see someone giving and spending themselves on behalf of others –
you long for them – you pray for them –
because you see the surpassing grace of God upon them!

And when others see that grace in you – they long for you and pray for you!

And so, yes, you should be a cheerful giver
because you *know* that those who receive your gifts
will ever pray for you –
longing for – and looking forward – to the day when they will see you face-to-face.

You see, the Jerusalem Christians will never see their Corinthian brethren face-to-face.
But they will long for that day.

So, be a cheerful giver –
because God *will* supply all that you need in Christ Jesus;
because the liturgy of supplying the needs of the saints will overflow
in thanksgiving to God;
and because they will pray for you – and long for you – because you obeyed the gospel!

And in this way the kingdom of God will come – the will of God will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.