

2 Corinthians 9: How to Become a Rich Christian

"God loves a cheerful giver" (v7)

Frances Ridley Havergal wrote the lines:

Take my silver and my gold
Not a mite would I withhold.

In her writings we find this personal testimony:

'Take my silver and my gold' now means shipping off all my ornaments - including a jewel cabinet which is really fit for a countess - to the Church Missionary Society... I don't think I need to tell you I never packed a box with such pleasure.

Frances Ridley Havergal was a cheerful giver.

Not many people are cheerful givers, enthusiastic to serve other people. It has been quipped: *"In giving till it hurts, some people are extremely sensitive to pain."*

In fact, most of us, if we are honest, are more concerned with another question: *What's in it for me?* Interestingly enough, in verses 9-15 Paul explains what's in it for the person who sows generously, who gives cheerfully, who serves enthusiastically. There are four things which should motivate us to be cheerful givers:

1. Getting rich
2. Having even more to invest
3. Investing in a bullish share market
4. Receiving great dividends

1. Getting rich

Paul begins by telling us how we can Get Rich (vv6-11). So, for example, in verse 11 he tells the cheerful giver: *"You will be made rich in every way"* (v11). According to verses 6-11, in thinking about getting true wealth, there are two things to think about:

- (1) How to get rich
- (2) The riches which really satisfy

Some people think that winning the lottery is about the best thing that could ever happen to them. Many people want to be rich. A good friend became a top business executive. But a tragic thing happened. As he and his wife got wealthier their social circle changed. Both my friend and his wife had been committed Christians. But his wife became addicted to shopping and going out with rich friends. My friend was also sucked into this same whirlpool. They are no longer walking with the Lord. But they are rich.

Are you standing in the right position to catch a lift from God? Many people are living lives so alien to God's plan and purpose that they might as well be standing on a meteor trying to thumb a ride. If you want to be a truly rich person then your life has to be positioned properly.

As we think about Getting Rich do note that Paul tells each one of us how we can get rich. The key is *"Reap what you sow"* (v6). You know what the definition of a farmer is: A man outstanding in his field. Well, as you look at verse 6, visualise a farmer standing out in his field with a huge bag of seed in his hand. What does verse 6 say?

"Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously."

But don't misunderstand this principle. Yes, we do reap what we sow. John Bunyan wrote:

There was a man, though some did count him mad,
The more he cast away the more he had.

But for the Christian this does not mean that the more *money* you give the more *money* you will get. That is a wrong understanding of Paul's key to getting rich.

Remember it is the person who sows *generously* who will reap *generously*. Remember "God loves, and therefore abundantly blesses, a *cheerful* giver." In other words, it's **not *how much* you give but *how* you give**. Look with Jesus' eyes at the people putting money into the Temple treasury. Rich people put in quite a bit of money. It looked impressive to most people. But Jesus was impressed by the poor widow who put in only a mite. It is not the size of the gift which matters, but the spirit with which it is given. But if our spirits are generous then that will radically affect how much we give. With Frances Ridley Havergal we too will sing: "Not a mite would I withhold."

Who gets the riches? The cheerful giver, not the Christian who merely says, "God will provide!"

A fellow named Bruce has a daughter who is engaged to marry a 21-year old fellow called Alex. Bruce took Alex out to a coffee shop one day for a chat. Alex is a committed Christian and spends a lot of time studying his Bible. Apart from that Bruce didn't know anything about Alex. So he asked him, "Alex, tell me, what do you do?" "I study the Bible," replied Alex.

"But, Alex," responded Bruce. "You are going to marry my daughter. How will you feed her and where will you live?"

"Oh, that's no problem," said Alex. "The Bible says God will provide."

"Well, that's fine," ventured Bruce. "But when you have kids how will you educate them?"

"Oh, that's no problem either," said Alex. "As I said, the Bible promises that God will provide."

Bruce got the same basic answer to all his questions. When he returned home his wife anxiously asked him, "What's Alex like?"

Bruce said, "Alex is a fine young man. I've only just met him and he already thinks I'm God."

Who gets the riches? The cheerful giver, the enthusiastic servant. Not the passive, laid-back Christian. Nor the grudging Christian. "Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly" (v6a).

In verses 6-11 Paul has a lot to say about **Getting Rich**. We have seen how to get true riches: by learning to give cheerfully, generously. But what are the true riches, the riches which satisfy?

Are the riches of which Paul speaks the same as what the people of this world think of? Are lots of money and the things money can buy **the riches which truly satisfy**? A rich

man once heard one of his servants say, "If only I had fifty dollars, then I'd be happy." He gave her fifty dollars. As she walked away spoke to herself in an undertone, wrongly assuming the rich man couldn't hear her. He heard her say: "Why didn't I say a hundred dollars?"

Someone asked John D. Rockefeller, Snr: "How much money does it take to satisfy a man?" He replied, "Just a little bit more than he has."

In verse 8 Paul describes what God wants to do for us. The NIV speaks of God as a cheerful giver who pours out his grace on you so that you have "all that you need." A sharper translation is "having all sufficiency." Paul is deliberately using this word "sufficiency" because it was the same word used by certain philosophers in Paul's day called Stoics and Cynics. They believed that a real man does not depend on anything - not on human relationships, and not on material resources. Like Christians they too believed that true riches were not to be found in money and the things money can buy. However, they believed that the truly rich person was the person who found his or her sufficiency in himself or herself. They believed in being completely independent and self-sufficient. Against this, Paul explains that it is the experience of God's abundant grace which really makes us fully sufficient; that makes us full, complete and thoroughly satisfied human beings.

What are the riches which satisfy? Remember, "God loves the cheerful giver" (v7). This means that the cheerful giver experiences God's love. And, as verse 8 teaches, it is the experience of God's abounding, overflowing, limitless, lavish, extravagant grace which gives us "all sufficiency", all we could ever want to have and to be.

As verse 8 puts it: "God is able to make all grace abound to you." Or as John said it in John 1:16: "From the fullness of his grace we have received blessing upon blessing." The image is of grace upon grace coming at us, like waves upon waves of the sea. God's grace is even more relentless than the sea. His love and grace never let us go, but lap around us, filling us to the full with the richness of the goodness of God. Now that's true wealth.

Our giving is all about grace. Indeed, in 8:7 Paul urges us to "excel in this grace of giving". He also reminds us of what was achieved by the supreme example of cheerful 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 through his poverty you might become rich" (8:9). Clearly, Paul is saying here that all Christians have indeed become rich because of Christ's giving of himself, whether they have material wealth or not. But notice that word "grace" again. Christlike giving is an expression of grace.

Why should we be generous and cheerful in our giving and service? What's in it for me? On top of getting true riches when we give cheerfully we end up with yet more to invest in the Lord's business.

2. More to invest (vv8b, 10, 11)

Verse 8 teaches us that God gives the cheerful giver even more to invest. We read: *"And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all sufficiency, you will abound in every good work."*

Similarly, in verse 10 we are informed that God, who *"supplies seed to the sower and bread for food"* *"will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of righteousness."* That is, God will increase our capacity to sow (by increasing our store of seed). But remember, we reap what we sow. So if we sow more seed then we will reap a greater harvest. As verse 9 has told us, when we generously scatter abroad our gifts to the poor then this is an act of righteousness, an act of righteousness which has eternal value. Doing good works (v8), being righteous people who perform acts of righteousness (v9), is what Paul has in mind when he speaks of sowing. When we sow generously by giving cheerfully God increases our capacity to sow and therefore also increases the harvest we reap through doing what's right.

Robert A. Laidlaw was a well-known businessman of Auckland, New Zealand and author of a famous and much-used evangelistic tract called *The Reason Why*. As a young man of 18 he made a covenant with God that he would give a tenth of all his earnings to the Lord's work. Later, at the age of twenty-five, he decided to change that amount to fifty percent of all his earnings. God continued to multiply his resources until he was giving even more to the work of the Lord.

But be careful in applying this. This isn't a formula for Christians in the third world to escape the cycle of poverty. Paul didn't say to the poor Christians in Jerusalem for whom he was collecting money from churches like the church in Corinth, that if they operated on this principle God would get them out of the state of poverty in which they were trapped. Remember, the rain falls on the just and the unjust. Generally speaking, when Christians get a terminal illness they die from it just like everybody else. Yes, God sometimes heals those who so suffer. In the same way while God is able to bless people in the way he blessed Laidlaw, this is not his usual practice. 2 Corinthians 9 does not provide a way for all Christians to acquire material wealth. As we have seen, the true riches are the experience of God's love and grace.

What's in it for me? Not only do we become rich as people fully sufficient in the love and grace of God. Not only do we end up with even more to give and invest in the lives of people. But we find that we are investing in a **bullish share market**. A bear market is when prices are going down. A bull market is when share prices are going up.

3. A bullish share market

"This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of God's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God" (v12).

This money won't only put food in the bellies of impoverished Christians in Jerusalem. It will enrich the lives of God's people. They too will receive true riches, the experience of God's grace. And so, with full hearts their faces will rise in praise and thanks to God. You see what I mean - it's a bullish market. The "market" in which we invest is not characterized by rising prices but by rising thanksgiving to God.

"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 your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else" (v13)

There it is again. By giving generously to God's people we enter the share market. We are sharing with them and also with all non-Christians to whom we give. And their hearts rise in praise and worship to God. It's a bullish share market indeed!

Did you notice that word “service” in verse 12 and again in verse 13? **Giving is really servanthood.**

- “this *service* to the saints” (v1)
- “you will abound in every *good work*” (v8)
- “the *service* that you perform” (v12)
- “Because of the *service* by which you have proved yourselves” (v13)

What’s in it for me? We get rich, we get even more to give and invest and we find ourselves investing in a bullish share market. On top of this we receive **great dividends**

4. Great dividends

“And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you.” (v14).

When people buy shares in a company they expect to get a return on their investment, a share in the company’s profits, that is, dividends. Paul says that the Corinthian Christians will receive dividends when they give their money. These dividends are the prayers of those to whom they are giving.

Who are these people to whom they are giving? They are Christians in Jerusalem, suffering during a time of famine. Paul has been involved in a project to collect money from Gentile churches to give to these suffering Jewish Christians. This project would not have seemed so unusual to Christians in the first century world. For it was already an established practice for Jews to pay an annual two-drachma tax to help support the Jerusalem Temple, to which they added some supplementary gifts. Indeed the Temple tax was carefully monitored and protected by the Roman authorities. Of course, Gentile Christians had no interest in paying the Temple tax. However, it was quite natural for all Christians to act in a manner which paralleled the established Jewish practice of paying the Temple tax. What matters to Christians is not the upkeep of the Temple building in Jerusalem but the wellbeing of God’s true people in Jerusalem, that is, the Christian community.

There is an application here for us. We need to get our priorities right, giving of our money and ourselves to people rather than to buildings and other things. Our aim is to invest our lives in people, whether we are giving of our money and other material resources or giving of our time and gifts. When we do this we ourselves will be blessed and one of the key reasons for this is that there will be Christians who benefit from our giving who will pray that God will bless us and God will answer their prayer.

Let’s end with the words with which we began: “God loves a cheerful giver.” Give. Generously. Cheerfully.