

## When Preaching on Money, Don't Be More “Spiritual” than God



**A literal and non-biased reading of the following passage, in which Paul motivates people to give generously, leads one to believe he promises financial rewards for giving.**

*Now this I say, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.<sup>7</sup> Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.<sup>8</sup> And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed;<sup>9</sup> as it is written,*

*“He scattered abroad, he gave to the poor,  
His righteousness endures forever.”*

*<sup>10</sup> Now 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;<sup>11</sup> you will be enriched in everything for all liberality, which through us is producing thanksgiving to God. (2 Corinthians 9:6-11)*

**Although God makes the above clear promises of financial rewards for generous giving, many church leaders are too “spiritual” to preach them.**

They grow visibly agitated when these promises are mentioned and are quick to qualify them. For example, in *10 Principles of Giving*, an otherwise outstanding exposition of 2 Corinthians 8 and 9, Dr. John Stott writes,

Two harvest principles are here applied to Christian giving.

First, we reap what we sow. Whoever sows sparingly reaps sparingly, and whoever sows generously reaps generously (v.6). ‘Sowing’ is an obvious picture of giving. What then can we expect to ‘reap’? We should not interpret Paul’s point with excessive literalism, as if he were saying that the more we give the more we will get, and that our income will keep pace with our expenditure.

**Why *shouldn’t* we interpret Paul’s point as “saying that the more we give the more we will get, and that our income will keep pace with our expenditure”?**

That’s exactly what he *does* say. The context leaves us with no other defensible interpretation. If we reap what we sow, and what we sow is money, then what we reap will also be money. Any other conclusion does violence to the text. Yet this gifted, godly expositor is so uncomfortable with the plain meaning of Paul’s promise that he

dismisses it without any exegetical support (labeling an interpretation as “excessive literalism” is *not* an exegetical argument).

A few sentences later Stott falls into the same hermeneutical trap:

If then we give in this spirit, what will happen? What harvest can we expect to reap? Answer: ‘God is able to make all grace abound to you’ so that ‘in all things’ (not necessarily in material things) on the one hand you may have all you need, and on the other you may ‘abound in every good work’ because your opportunities for further service will increase (v.8).

Why the qualification, “(not necessarily in material things)”? “Material things” is precisely the subject of Paul’s discussion. Paul knows there are other rewards for giving than monetary blessing. But his purpose *here* is to encourage the Corinthians to give by assuring them that if they give *financially*, God will bless them *financially*. Denying this in the face of overwhelming contextual evidence makes us guilty of what I call “emotional exegesis”—allowing our personal discomfort with a divine truth to distort the text that reveals it.

**God understands that a primary reason we do not give sacrificially is that we are afraid we can't afford to—that it will bankrupt us.**

That is why so many Scriptures that challenge us to give, or to live contrary to conventional fiscal wisdom, emphasize God’s promises of financial reward. Here are just a couple of examples:

- *“Honor the LORD from your wealth, And from the first of all your produce, 10 So your barns will be filled with plenty, And your vats will overflow with new wine.” (Prov. 3:9, 10)*
- *“Give, and it will be given to you. They will pour into your lap a good measure—pressed down, shaken together, and running over. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return.” (Luke 6:38).*

**So, along with spiritual and eternal blessings, God *Himself* promises us financial rewards for giving.**

Obviously, *He* does not consider them to be crass or unspiritual. If we use emotional exegesis to spiritualize them, we become guilty of trying to be more “spiritual” than God. “What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy” (Acts 10:15b).

**When you preach on giving, be sure to include God’s promises of financial rewards. *That is the truly spiritual thing to do.***