



St. Paul Evangelical Community Church (SPECC)

Worship Address : Cerritos High School Auditorium
12500 E. 183rd St., Cerritos, CA 90703
(Enter at Bloomfield, across Heritage Park)

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April 11, 2010

Theme: Be A Hedonistic Giver!

Text: 2 Corinthians 8:1-9; 9:6-7

You may be asking—"What in the world is that?" I must confess that the idea is not my own. It belongs to Pastor John Piper. He teaches that the Christian faith is a faith that has pure pleasure as its goal. Since this is the case, he argues that the proper motivation for financial giving is pure pleasure. That's what a hedonist does: He/she lives life in order to experience pleasure. Hedonism is a philosophical word that refers to the pursuit of pleasure as the main goal of life.

Something about connecting pleasure with the Christian faith may seem wrong to us. We think of the faith as involving self-sacrifice. We think of this self-sacrifice as sacrificing pleasure. But think about a few passages from the Bible. Psalm 1 speaks about the man who rejects the way of life that sinners live. Instead, he "delights" in the Law of the Lord. He meditates on that Law day and night. This speaks about a good form of pleasure. It speaks about spiritual and intellectual pleasure that a person takes in the Word of God. In Psalm 16 King David speaks about finding pleasure in God. He writes in verse 11: "You have made known to me the way of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand." David speaks about eternal pleasures. Have you ever thought about what everlasting life will be like? It will be a life of pure pleasure. Take the most intense pleasure you have ever experienced and multiply that times billions and billions. That will give you some sense of what God's eternal pleasures will be like. Finally, David also says in Psalm 37:4: "Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart." This is an unbelievable promise. It may well be that when we delight ourselves in God, the desires of our hearts will change; but nevertheless, God promises to grant them.

Jesus' teaching in the NT also makes it clear that an element of the Christian faith is the pursuit of pleasure. In John 10:10 He said: "The thief does not come except to steal, kill and destroy; I have come that they might have life and have it in an overflowing way." In John 7:37-39, Jesus promises to satisfy the deepest spiritual thirst that a person may have. Have you ever been really hot and tired and thirsty? Isn't a glass of cold water the closest thing to pure pleasure that you can imagine at such a moment? Jesus promises the living water of the Holy Spirit to those who have that profound spiritual thirst. To receive the Holy Spirit is a spiritually pleasant experience to say the least. For many people it is intensely pleasurable.

So let's turn to 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 as an example of people who gave because of their experience of the pure pleasure of grace. Paul writes about Christians from a region called, "Macedonia." He writes that they were being tested by affliction and that they



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were extremely poor. Still, they experienced overflowing joy and a generosity that overflowed into the grace of giving. Paul writes the overflowing joy and generosity of these people was the result of the work of the grace of God in their lives. It is interesting that the word that is translated, "overflowing," is related to the word that Jesus used in John 10:10. "Overflowing," is one of Paul's favorite words to describe the Gospel. For Paul, salvation is something that is rich in blessing and that brings spiritual pleasure to those who receive it. So, an important part of their giving came from the pleasure they received from the Gospel.

The context of their giving was a collection that Paul was taking for poor Christians at Jerusalem. Perhaps these Jewish Christians were part of a general recession. Perhaps they were being deprived of opportunities for employment because they were believers. Whatever the case, Paul was taking up a financial collection for them. He thought like this: Since the spiritual treasure of salvation had come from the Jews to the Gentiles, now in their financial need, material treasure should flow from the Gentiles to the Jewish Church.

Given that background, we learn some further things about these giving Christians that are remarkable. These Christians are remarkable for these reasons: (1) They gave themselves to the Lord first. They realized that they were God's possessions and that their lives belonged to Him first. (2) Once they gave themselves to God with their whole heart, they also gave themselves to God's servant, Paul with their whole hearts. (3) Once they had done this, they gave themselves to the collection with their whole hearts. In fact, Paul did not have to persuade them to give. They actually begged Paul passionately for the privilege of being involved in the collection. Paul does not say how much they gave; but he does say that they gave "beyond their power."

These were indeed remarkable people. We must remember that an important part of their motivation to give was the pure pleasure that they experienced because of the overflowing joy of God in their lives. This gives us a clue as to why they were able to give so generously—they found their primary joy in God rather than things. Finally, Paul gives the Corinthians instructions, which tell us that he wanted them to give for the pure pleasure of the joy of giving. First at chapter 9:6, Paul writes that the one who plants only a little will harvest only a little; but the one who plants a lot will harvest a lot. Paul clearly promises that God will bless those who give financially. If we want to receive a great blessing from God, one thing we can do is to give generously to His work. This is not a promise that God will make generous givers rich as some teach—but it is a promise that God will richly bless those who are generous givers.

Finally, Paul does not attempt to manipulate the Corinthians into giving by making them feel guilty. In fact, he instructs them that their giving must be free will giving. Literally, he says that there should be no feelings of grief involved. There should be no feelings



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that they are giving because they "have to give." Paul makes his famous statement that God loves "cheerful" givers. The word, "cheerful," is an understatement of the Greek text. The word there gives us the English word, "hilarious." One of the greatest good forms of pleasure is laughter. Paul writes that our attitude should be one of deep and profound laughter when we hear the invitation to give.

So what do we do when laughter is not our attitude toward giving? We should ask God to do a deep work of grace in our hearts that would miraculously transform our hearts so that they would overflow with joy because of the spiritual blessings that we have received. That joy must become our deepest motivation for giving. We will then be hedonistic givers.