

You Can't Out-Give God (2 Corinthians 9-11)

From the Theology of Work Bible Commentary on 2 Corinthians

In urging the Corinthian believers to give generously, Paul is aware that he must address a very human concern in a world of limited resources. Some of his hearers must have been thinking, “If I give as altruistically as Paul is urging me to give, there may not be enough to meet my own needs.”

Making use of an extended agricultural metaphor, Paul assures them that in God's economy things work differently. He has already alluded to a principle from the book of Proverbs, for example Proverbs 11:24–25, noting that the “one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully” (2 Corinthians 9:6). He followed this up by quoting an aphorism from the Greek version of Proverbs 22:8, that “God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Corinthians 9:7). From this he infers a promise that for the one who gives generously, God can and will cause all sorts of blessings to abound.

Paul, therefore, assures the Corinthians that their generosity does not come at the risk of future poverty. On the contrary, generosity is the route to prevent future deprivation. “God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work” (2 Corinthians 9:8). He underscores this when he says, “You will be enriched in every way for your great

generosity, which will produce thanksgiving to God through us” (2 Corinthians 9:11).

This has obvious applications in giving away the fruits of our labor, that is, in donating money and other resources. But it applies equally well in giving of ourselves during our labor. We need not fear that by helping others succeed at work we will compromise our own well-being. God has promised to give us all that we need. We can help others look good at work without fearing it will make us look lackluster by comparison. We can compete fairly in the marketplace without worrying that it takes a few dirty tricks to make a living in a competitive business. We can pray for, encourage, support, and even assist our rivals because we know that God, not our competitive advantage, is the source of our provision. We must be careful not to distort this promise into the false gospel of health and wealth, as many have done. God does not promise true believers a big house and an expensive car. But he does assure us that if we look to the needs of others, he will make sure that our needs will be met in the process.