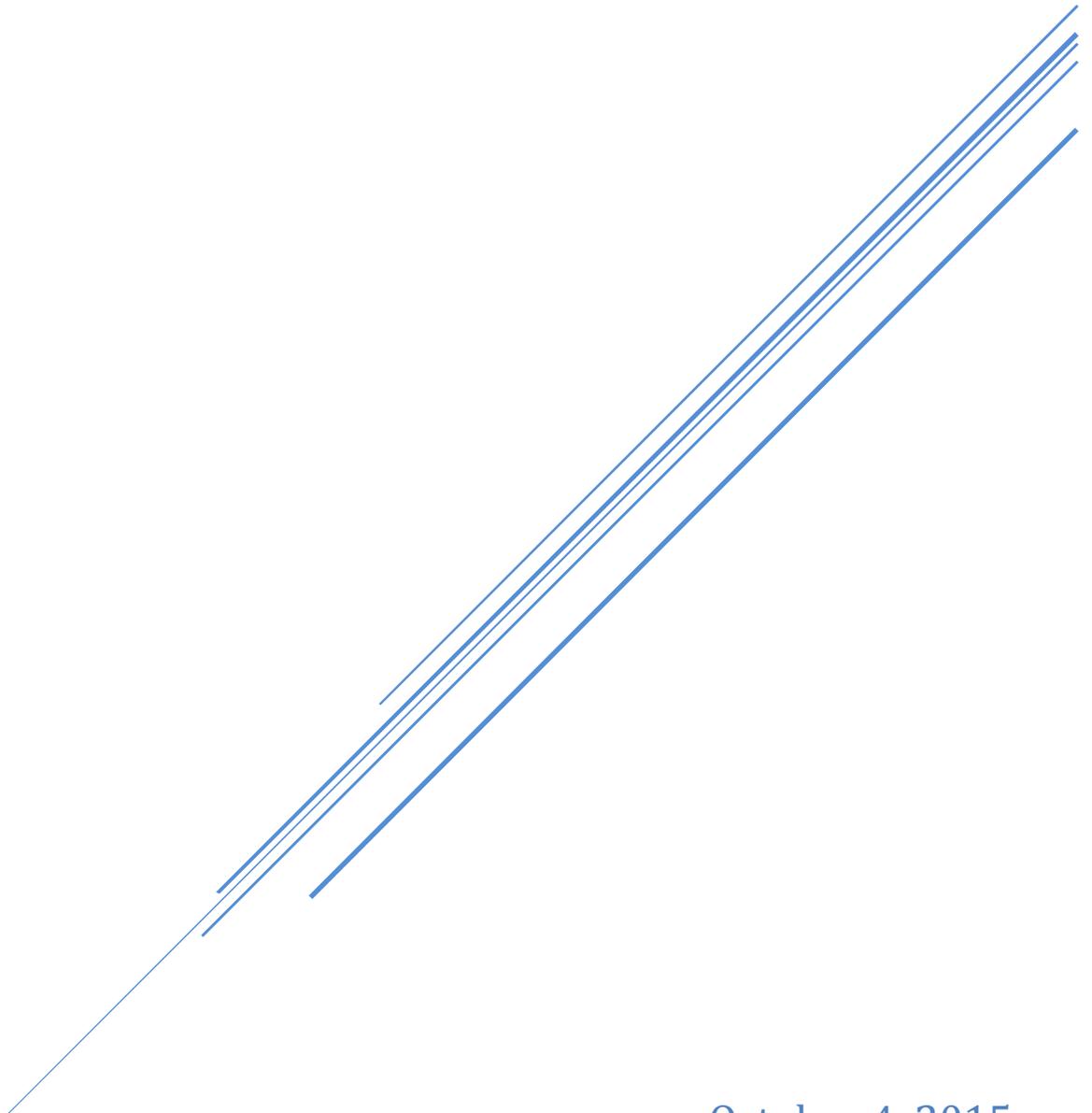


# RUFFLES OR DORITOS?

2 Corinthians 9:1-15



October 4, 2015  
Pastor Brad

Every day, it seems, I get another email or letter from a school I attended, or the Children's Home, or the Salvation Army, or Public Radio, or the Human Rights Campaign, or any of a host of organizations fighting a host of illnesses – it never stops, does it?

Well, today we heard part of one of the first fundraising letters in recorded history: Paul's 2<sup>nd</sup> letter to the church in Corinth. Paul seems to be a pretty shrewd salesman – in the previous chapter he compares the Christian church in Corinth to the church in Macedonia who, Paul writes, "...voluntarily gave beyond their means, begging us earnestly for the privilege of sharing their ministry." (Every pastor's dream!)

Then he urges the congregation at Corinth to be generous in return, remembering the "generous act of Jesus Christ." In fact, as much as we might dislike these constant appeals to our generosity, the Bible is full of them, isn't it?

In Deuteronomy 15:7-8 – "If there is among you anyone in need, a member of your community in any of your towns... do not be hard-hearted or tight-fisted toward your needy neighbor. <sup>8</sup>You should rather open your hand, willingly lending enough to meet the need, whatever it may be."

In the Psalms: "Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord his God, ...who executes justice for the oppressed, who gives food to the hungry."

Throughout the Hebrew Bible AND New Testament, we are charged with the responsibility of remembering those in need and opening our hearts and wallets. So why do we struggle so with this message? Where does that vague feeling of being put upon come from? Why is it like pulling teeth just to drag a dollar bill out of my pocket for that guy on the corner? – One lousy dollar!

A few years back there was an ad on TV for Ruffles potato chips. In it, we see two Eskimos; one has a bag of Ruffles and the other one is looking longingly at his friend – well, at his friend's Ruffles. He asks for a chip and his friend replies, "But if I gave one to you I would have to give one to everybody." The

camera pulls back and we see the two of them – quite alone in the vast, uninhabited, Arctic wasteland.

“If I gave one to you, I’d have to give one to everybody.”

Around that same time, there was a Doritos commercial with Jay Leno – I don’t know if you remember it. After exalting the great flavor of Nacho chips’ and their ‘radical crunch’ Jay gives the audience free reign to, “Crunch all you want – we’ll make more!” Did you hear it?

“Crunch all you want – we’ll make more.”

Our Christian theology of abundance – Remember Jesus came so that we might have life and have it abundantly? Our theology of abundance is much more Dorito’s than Ruffles. Share all you have! God will provide! We live in abundance. We just have to open our eyes and realize it – open our hands and our hearts and share it.

I led a youth lock-in back when I was in Florida, and I got to play Monopoly for the first time since I was a kid (not as much fun as I remember). The goal I seemed to have forgotten is not just to accumulate great wealth and property, but also to drive all the other players into bankruptcy – what fun! It’s a ‘zero sum’ game. That is, a situation in which one or more participants’ gain equals the loss of the other participants. One person is the winner and the other players are all losers.

As we played, we were all affected by the game. Lighthearted fun morphed into something more serious as we all got into the ‘spirit of competition.’ It wasn’t pretty, and I have to admit, I’m very glad I didn’t go into business – I was the first one bankrupted!

It reminds me of that Survivor game on TV that I mentioned last week. It’s one of the most watched shows in America. There’s only one ‘survivor’ that gets the entire million dollars. The catch? Teams have to cooperate to survive, all the while knowing full well that the others will vote them off the island as soon as they have the chance.

This show beautifully symbolizes the scarcity mentality dominating our world: get what you can, use other people to do it, and get rid of them when they

get in your way. There's not enough to go around so I'd better get mine while the getting is good!

This scarcity mindset is usually masquerading as something else completely: 'hard-headed realism,' giving us all kinds of reasonable, rational, sensible, logical reasons NOT to be generous.

- That organization has plenty of money – they don't need mine
- Giving them money just makes them dependent
- I need to save this for rainy day
- Throwing money at it won't solve the problem
- It's mine – I worked hard for it

You get the idea. These rationalizations – 'cuz that's all they are – are the voice of scarcity whispering in our ears. It's the voice of the snake in the Garden whispering to Eve, "Go ahead, eat the fruit, don't trust God, get what you can while you can." the serpent is still whispering, telling us the same old lies; and we're still listening – still eating the terrible fruit.

We think that we're in control of our own lives and destiny. If we just work harder, save more, manage our lives better; we'll achieve true happiness – by our own doing! God is suddenly out of the picture. We have no need for other people. We have succumbed to the myth of self-sufficiency – I am the center and the ruler of my own universe. Nothing and nobody had better get in the way of my self-fulfillment. I've got my Ruffles – you get your own.

But you know there's a different way, right? A better way than the way of scarcity? Because the truth is that the serpent – or the apple – has never brought happiness, only the ravenous desire for more and more.

The winner of the Survivor game will end up with a million dollars, sure, but ultimately they'll be alone and friendless on the island. Scripture consistently teaches us that we don't worship a God of scarcity, but a God of abundance. God's love and mercy are endless. Our cup isn't just full – it's running over!

That generosity becomes evident in the life of Jesus. Paul tells us, "... though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich." During his earthly ministry, Jesus lived and taught the

way of abundance – we’ve talked about it before. His first miracle at the wedding in Cana was to provide wine for the reception – really good wine, it says. The story of the paralyzed man is another example. He would have given anything to walk again, but he can’t buy a cure. Only the generosity of Jesus Christ can heal him.

Now, I ‘m sorry to say that these stories don’t guarantee that whenever we need wine or a miraculous healing that Jesus will provide it. But they do remind us that this is God’s world, not ours. As my mom was fond of saying, “There is a God – and I ain’t it!” It’s only when we get that through our heads – and hearts -- that generosity becomes possible. We cannot be truly generous by our own merit or efforts. Our selfishness is just too deeply embedded.

But we can learn generosity by remembering god’s abundance– by focusing on God’s gifts to us and being grateful. With Jesus at the center of our lives, we can know abundance, think abundance, expect abundance. We can tune out the voice of the serpent, the voice of scarcity, and remember that we live in God’s world – a Doritos world – crunch all you want, there’s always more than we expect, imagine, or deserve. With Jesus at the center of our lives even death is just a momentary pause –a transition to something greater. And the one who said to the paralytic, “Pick up your bed and walk,” will say the same thing to you. God’s abundance is no place for holding back, there’s no room for fear, for selfishness, or for hesitation.

In the not too distant future, we will face a crucial test – a test of survival, if you will. Our survival depends on the road we choose and the choice we make – a choice between scarcity and abundance, between competition and cooperation.

Having cracked the genetic code, will we use our newfound powers for good? Will we use this knowledge to cooperatively cure a host of illnesses? Or will we instead create “designer” or “super” kids who can scramble and fight their way to the top of the heap?

Will we, in the richest nation on the planet, a “first-world country,” continue to hoard natural resources? Or will we eventually figure out that we need to work together to ensure the well-being of all people, finding, as Paul says, “...a fair balance between our abundance and their need.”

These critical questions will only be answered when we have decided which world we want to live in – the serpent’s world of scarcity, suspicion and hostility, or God’s world of overflowing abundance, generosity and love.

I pray that as we celebrate World Communion today, that we truly appreciate the incredible liberties and abundance that we enjoy as Americans, and that we will be inspired to live lives of generosity and gratitude. ...Amen.