

† Giving Ourselves to the Lord

"... we wish to make known to you the grace of God given in the churches..."(2 Corinthians 8:1)

Giving Ourselves to the Lord 2 Corinthians 8-9; and selected texts

There are some topics of the Bible that people are naturally inclined toward. People love to hear about and consider the study of future things; what the Bible has to say about end times and the like. Of course there are also the basic Bible stories that we love to hear, the story of Creation, the Flood, of the Exodus out of Egypt, and Daniel in the lion's den. There is the account of the birth of Jesus, the parable of the prodigal son and of the rich man and Lazarus along with the greatest miracle, the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

Then there are other topics that we tolerate, we are interested in them but they seem a bit more detached from us. Lessons on heaven, hell or the eternal state, while they may give hope, sometimes seem so out there, and perhaps feel as though they are unrelated to every day life. I don't agree with such an assessments, but it is the general response to such topics.

But then there are topics that not only hit close to home, but they are so applicable that to discuss them almost seems like an invasion of our privacy and therefore we almost prefer that they not be talked about at all; perhaps topics like sexual intimacy or struggles with personal sins. In this list of seemingly off-limits topics is the subject of money and giving to the church. As soon as the word "giving" comes up, we can be tempted to feel as though we are about to brow-beat and hit up for more of our precious earned income. By bringing up the matter at all suggests in the mind of some that the church is nothing more than a fund-raising machine seeking to fulfill the desires and pleasures of the leadership rather than necessarily being a building tool in the kingdom of God.

But let me remind you, that as surely as Jesus teaches us to pray, to fast, to love God, to be a disciple of His; He also speaks upon the subject of giving. In Matthew 6:2 Jesus says, "**and when you give...**" and again in Matthew 6:21 He says, "**for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also**" after calling His disciples to invest in eternal things, storing up treasures in heaven. And as surely as I can say that according to 1 Thessalonians 5:17 we are to pray how? "**Without ceasing**" – and as surely as I can say that according to 2 Timothy 2:15 that we are to present ourselves approved to God as workmen who do not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the what? "**the Word of Truth**" – the word of God; and as I should be able to ask you that you are to rejoice when? "**always**" (Philippians 4:4) and according to our message a couple weeks back that our gratitude to God should be characterized how" as "**overflowing**"; so then I should be able to ask you and you should be able to answer that the believer in Jesus Christ is to give how? [pause] Cheerfully? Joyfully? Yes, but we are not as quick with these answers are we?

Beloved, I wish to address with you this morning the topic of the Christian's giving and encourage you that as surely as the Christian is to pray, to read the Word of God, to rejoice always and the like; he must surely be apt to give to God and to give to God specifically through the means of the local church. I have never, in my 12 years of preaching in this pulpit, purposely sought to preach on this subject of giving. I have preached on it as it was the subject on our series in the Parables of Jesus and again in our study of the Sermon on the Mount. But to just teach on this matter I have not done. And so perhaps some explanation is needed.

The year 2009 was a most interesting and exciting year, both for our Nation as well as for our Church. As a nation, we have endured one of the deepest recessions since the Great Depression. There have been cut backs, job losses and financial setbacks for many. Without

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anything changing at all at the church, our church would surely have experienced some setbacks due to some of the personal setback of those in the church. But in addition to all this, our church has experienced a unique time in its life in that 2009 saw many beloved families of the church either move out of the area or move on from this ministries. And so we have experienced a kind of double whammy. In many ways, if we had not leased our back building to the Hispanic Church, we would have been sunk financially quite some time ago. And let me tell you, that our brothers and sisters in the church in the back have also experienced hard times financially as many of the attenders there are in construction and as you can well imagine with the weather, business has been slow. So slow in fact that we have temporarily reduced their monthly rent until they can get caught up. And so, in light of all these factors, I stand here this morning and tell you that things are not only tight for the church, they are going in the wrong direction.

In light of these things, the leadership and several of the men of the church felt it would be prudent to remind the congregation of the great and joyful opportunity this affords us and to be reminded of our responsibility to give. I know that some of you have been faithful to give and to give even above and beyond what you are seemingly able and so to you I say not only thank you, but also excel still more. And to those of you that may have been struggling with giving, I say to you, hear the word of the Lord and be encouraged by the blessings that come with obedience to God's Word. We all need to be reminded not only of why we are to give, but also, and most importantly, how we are to give. For if we, as a local body of Jesus Christ, who are fellowshiping with one another around the Word, are giving as we ought in obedience to God's Word, then we will have everything we need to carry out the work of this ministry.

And so, I want to take some time to address this issue of giving and present to you the Biblical truths that govern giving. I honestly can not tell you how long we will consider these things, I am planning on two or three weeks, but please don't see this as brow-beating, but rather as Bible-teaching. What does God want each of us to know and act upon with regard to giving and then, in light of these things, how will we respond to such things? I am excited to be reminded not only why we give, but also then of the great blessings that come from giving. I am praying that you find this time equally practical and inspirational.

Let us begin by considering this question, the most basic question that we can ask, "what is true Christian giving?" How would you answer this question? Let me share with you some of the more common responses:

1. True Christian giving is tithing, that is giving ten percent of your income to the church.
2. True Christian giving is personal sacrifice, a choosing not to spend money on yourself so that you can give it to help someone else
3. True Christian giving is an act of love toward others.

We might come up with some others as well, but those represent the most basic ideas and I would say to you that while there is truth found in each of these, these are essentially wrong. If we are to understand what true Christian giving is, then we must let the Word of God direct us in the matter and no passage of Scripture offers us more direction on this matter of giving than that of 2 Corinthians 8 and 9. These two chapters present us with the most detailed information on this subject and so it is here I wish to spend our time. And while time does not permit me to read both of the chapters to you in whole this morning, let me tell you, and you can confirm this by your

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own reading of the passage later, that Paul **does not** lay down for us here a list of rules and formulas by which to govern our giving. We do not find Paul saying for example:

If you are to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, my beloved Corinthian believers, then you shall most assuredly tithe ten percent of your adjusted gross income to the local church. And lest you be found miserly, you shall also surely give another five percent to individuals found in dire circumstances along with another three percent to any other Christian organization you deem worthy.

It would be simpler perhaps to have such a clear cut directive; but then our giving would become nothing more than thoughtless legalism, a mere obligation to fulfill out of duty rather than what giving ought to be, *a great delight to participate with God by giving to His causes.*

So then, how do we find Paul addressing this topic of giving in these passages? I want you to realize that while Paul will be very practical in this, he is also very theological. In other words, we are to see that in the matter of giving, we are also to observe wonderful truths [**every time we give, we are to recognize truths** like] who God is, who man is, what God has done for man and how man is to respond to such action as well as man's relationship to God. Let me say this another way – and please listen carefully for this is missed by so many in the church today; **the way we view and spend our money is nothing more than a reflection upon our relationship to God.** I have heard one preacher say it this way, "Show me your bank statement and I will tell you what is most important in your life."

Let me remind you again that I am not in a hurry to present to you this matter of giving. I feel that if I were to rush through the truths and principles without carefully considering the whys and hows behind them it would seem as though the leadership of the church is just wanting to get everyone to give without really understanding how this is an act of worship, an act that pleases God; and therefore an act of faithful, thoughtful obedience to God.

If we are to rightly learn and then apply the Biblical principles of giving, then let us take a moment here as we begin to dispel some common misconceptions about money itself. Yes, we can have some bad thinking about money. To this end, turn with me to 1 Timothy 6:5-11 as we see what God's Word has to say about money rather than assume that we already know these things. And if you do know these things, then let them be reminders by which to strengthen your resolve to give Biblically rather than emotionally, culturally or flat-out wrongly.

5...men [false teachers] of depraved mind and deprived of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. 6 But godliness actually is a means of great gain when accompanied by contentment. 7 For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either. 8 If we have food and covering, with these we shall be content. 9 But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. 10 For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. 11 But flee from these things, you man of God, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance and gentleness.

What are some common misconceptions about money that are corrected by these verses?

First, for all our talk otherwise, are we not often tempted to think that money brings happiness and therefore the more money we have, the happier we will be? What does 1 Timothy

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6:5-11 teach us. Well, it teaches us that we are eternal and money is not, for we brought nothing into this world and we will take nothing out. It also teaches us that money is not necessary for happiness or, to use Paul's word, "contentment" – completely satisfied and at peace with what one has. How can we be so completely satisfied? Our happiness or joy has been and is to be realized in Jesus. When we are content with Jesus, we find ourselves content with whatever it is He had given us, be it little or be it much. We also learn that the pursuit of riches is actually a trap or snare that more often than not leads to the ruin of a life. Money indeed cannot buy happiness.

A second misconception about money that is corrected by these verses is that any money or material possession I have is deserved. Anything we have is because God has given it to us.

The final misconception we must correct is that the possession of money is what brings us security. I would like to know who thought this up for how many people are in fiscal ruin and distress because their accounts were decimated by the recession of last year. Money can indeed disappear overnight. From a worldly point of view the only things that are certain are death and taxes. We can't avoid these and therefore we should be seeking security in something better than money. And this is why Paul urges Timothy in verse 11 to what? He urges Timothy and anyone who professes Christ to **flee from these things, you man of God, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance and gentleness**. In other words, true contentment is not found in riches and wealth but in living right with and before God, by faith, spending love, enduring in this pursuit with gentleness.

With these thoughts in mind, let us now turn to 2 Corinthians 8 as we set the stage for understanding and applying God's principles to the matter of our giving. As you turn there, let me fill you in on what is going on at Corinth. The apostle Paul, as he was making his journeys through Asia Minor and Greece, establishing and teaching in the churches, was also collecting money from these churches to help the believers back in Jerusalem as hard economic times had hit them. We will visit this verse again, but back in 1 Corinthians 16, we see that Paul exhorted the Corinthian church to set aside money weekly not only for their own church needs, but also for the needs of other poor or persecuted believers. Let us read 2 Corinthians 8:1-8:

8 Now, brethren, we wish to make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia, 2 that in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality. 3 For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability, they gave of their own accord, 4 begging us with much urging for the favor of participation in the support of the saints, 5 and this, not as we had expected, but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God. 6 So we urged Titus that as he had previously made a beginning, so he would also complete in you this gracious work as well. 7 But just as you abound in everything, in faith and utterance and knowledge and in all earnestness and in the love we inspired in you, see that you abound in this gracious work also. 8 I am not speaking this as a command, but as proving through the earnestness of others the sincerity of your love also.

It is clear from the context that the subject matter is concerning the principles of Christian giving and to rightly understand and apply these principles I believe it helpful to first notice what it does not say about giving, again trying to dispel some of the myths that are often associated with

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giving. After we look at what this giving is not; then we can look at what is to be understood at applied about giving.

Myth One: Christian giving is a tithe:

If you read though this passage you will never see Paul say/ anything about a tithe, the giving of a tenth. Paul never tells the Corinthians, "You need to give your tithe even as the Macedonian churches did!" In fact, as we will come to see, the Macedonian churches did far more than any tithe or ten percent. I will talk about this more in the future as to this concept of tithing, but for now understand that Christian giving is not about tithing at all.

Myth Two: Christian giving is sacrifice:

How many of you have heard this, that Christian giving is sacrifice? Well, it is a sacrifice, but it not essentially or merely sacrifice. We know from reading our text that the Macedonian churches gave out of the "deep poverty" – no doubt it did hurt them in other areas to give. No doubt they did have to give up other things in order to give their monies to Paul. But may I remind you of what Paul also taught the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 13:3:

And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing.

In other words, it would be possible to give [to sacrifice] everything you have and still not be an example of Christian giving. So then, Christian giving includes sacrifice, but sacrifice is not the essence of it. So, if Christian giving is not tithing and it is not merely sacrifice, what is it? Let's quickly walk through five general principles of giving is that we must keep in mind if we are to practice this grace according to the will of God to the glory of God. These will serve us well as we work through the rest of the passage.

What then are the characteristics of true Christian giving?

I. Godly giving begins with God

To begin with, godly giving begins with God. Think about the most common "motivations" for which we tend to give. Sometimes we give because we have something extra and think we should "share the wealth." Sometimes a person or situation will tug on our heartstrings and we give because we feel sorry or bad for someone else. Many are giving to Haiti for this reason. Sometimes we are motivated to give out of guilt, being made to feel or thinking ourselves to be bad people if we don't give. And sometimes we give out of a mere sense of duty because we are "supposed" to. I would imagine that at one time or another one or more of these motivations have been true for us. But what does the Scripture teach?

As we look at 2 Corinthians 8, we find that godly giving does not arise out of surplus, or from an emotional appeal or sense of duty. Look at what Paul noted in verse one.

Now, brethren, we wish to make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia

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It is very clear that giving is a grace of God. When Christians give Biblically, they do so because the grace of God is at work in their hearts. Therefore we see that all true godly giving begins with God working in His people and God's people give because God first gave to them; His Son, eternal life, holiness. The general idea of this principle is found in 1 John 4:19 which says, "**We love, because He first loved us.**" What we learn here in 2 Corinthians 8:1 could be summed up as follows: "We give because He first gave to us!" [see John 3:16].

II. Godly giving is a joy

Let us look at verse two now and note that godly giving is also a joy. We read:

...that in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality.

As the Macedonian believers gave, what do we read that overflowed for them? It was not their money, for our text says that they were in "**deep poverty**". What overflowed and super abounded in these believers was their joy, in fact an "**abundance of joy**"! These believers were so engrossed in the grace of God that their joy overflowed to the point of wanting to share anything and everything they had with others. How is your joy in God? Do you know that joy in the Lord does not come naturally? We tend to grumble and complain. That is our nature. We, therefore, must purpose to consider God and all that He has done for us by grace. Then we experience joy and that joy becomes our motivation to give to God and for His purposes.

III. Godly giving is giving yourself to God

The third principle I would have you note is that godly giving is actually a giving of yourself, your body, soul and spirit, to God. We read in verses 3-5:

3 For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability, they gave of their own accord, 4 begging us with much urging for the favor of participation in the support of the saints, 5 and this, not as we had expected, but they...

Now, if you were writing the rest of this passage, what might you put next? Maybe something like, "but they give over and above what we expected?" Or, "but they gave half a year's wages." Or maybe, "but they, like the early church, sold their possessions and gave them to give to anyone who had need" (Acts 4:33-35). That is what we might expect, but notice what Paul says, "**...but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God.**"

What is the point? We can miss this if we are not careful and if we miss this we miss out on not only the Biblical principle of giving, but also on the blessing of God. Before we can rightly give anything else, we must first give ourselves to the Lord. Our giving of monies is secondary to the greater giving our lives to the Lord. [when we appear short, this must be our first question] When we start with the Lord, our attitude is directed by the truth that all that we are and all that we have is the Lord's. Everything belongs to Him, my life, my money, my job, everything. I begin to see myself more and more as a steward, a manager of what God has given me and He has given me all that I have for one purpose, **to glorify Him**. We are to become agents of God's grace and the key facet of God's grace is that it gives and gives abundantly of all that it has. Is this not the very idea behind those perhaps too familiar verse of Romans 12:1

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Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.

We cannot rightly give any monies to the church, which the Macedonians indeed did and all believers are called to do, until we first give ourselves fully to the Lord. What might you be holding back from God today?

IV. Godly giving is lovingly considerate of others

The fourth principle is that godly giving is that it is lovingly considerate of others. Not only are we to give ourselves to God before and as we give, but when we give we are also to have others in mind. Let us look at verse 2 again:

that in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality.

The word translated "liberality" or "generosity" in some translations literally has the idea of a copious bestowal out of a sincere concern for others. The point is, people can give without a true or specific concern, but that is not what Paul says here. These believers gave because of a loving consideration of others – they knew there was need and sought their best by giving of themselves to help in the ministry.

Notice the contrast between wealth and poverty that Paul makes in this verse. Their poverty, which was a deep, reaching down to the very bottom of the barrel kind of poverty is contrasted with the abundance of joy they had in the Lord which translated into a loving consideration for others that was willing to whatever it took to provide for the needs. Remember, it wasn't the money that overflowed in the Macedonian churches, it was their liberality, their generous outpouring of love and concern. In other words, **every bit of money they gave was amplified by the joyful love with which it was given.** This is what Paul challenges the Corinthian church with in verse 8 where we read:

I am not speaking this as a command, but as proving through the earnestness of others the sincerity of your love also.

Remember that the Corinthian church was much wealthier, monetarily speaking, but his motivator toward them is not high pressure tactics of reaching some artificial goal, but to remind them that a loving consideration of others is the grace of God working in their lives which results in generous giving for the purposes of God. Do you want know if the grace of God is working in you? Are you giving, giving in this manner?

V. Godly giving is Godlike

The final principle I would have you note with me is that godly giving is indeed to be Godlike. Let us read verse four:

begging us with much urging for the favor of participation in the support of the saints

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It is interesting to me that it was not Paul appealing to the Macedonian believers to give, but rather what was it? It was the Macedonian believers begging, pleading, appealing with Paul to give to the needs of the church.

These believers recognized that by giving to the needs of the Jerusalem church, they were getting to experience more fully the "**favor of participation**" that is a deeper fellowship in the support or ministry of the saints. When we give to the church, we are engaging in a deeper fellowship; this is a favor, a grace of God. And so, when we give to the needs of the church, we become more like God, sharing in the grace of giving. Paul speaks of this principle of receiving from God for the purpose of giving what was received to others back in 2 Corinthians 1:3-4:

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, 4 who comforts us in all our affliction so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted [have received] by God.

When we seek to give according to this principle, we recognize ourselves as being tools or agents in the hands of God, extensions through which He ministers to the needs of others. When you give to the church, do you recognize that you are ministering to the needs of others. Why do we have a building? So we meet and worship God, and study His word, and participate in fellowship. We provided for the financial needs of a pastor and missionaries enabling them to carry out such work. We provide place and opportunities for our children to be brought up in the fear and admonition of the Lord. You see, genuine grace giving consists in these principles, giving because God first gave to us, giving that is a joy, giving that is truly of ourselves to God, giving that is lovingly considerate of others, and giving that reflects God. Such a giving could never be measured in terms of some static amount given to the church weekly, monthly or whenever the mode happens to strike you. Such giving becomes an expression of the power of God at work in us. In other words, if God is working in our hearts, then we will be an abundantly giving church. And lest you leave here thinking I have preached to you about giving more money to the church, let me remind you that this passage has not been about amounts of money, but about what is it that brings you joy. If you are not looking to give because of the joy of the Lord in your life, then you are missing out.

Let us pray for God to do the same thing for us here at Hope CBC that He did for the Macedonians, to open our eyes to see how abundantly he has poured out His grace upon us so that we might be increasingly giving ourselves to Him and to His purposes and even begging to participate in any and every way we can in the favor of participation or fellowship in the support and ministry of the saints.

Soli Deo Gloria

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