

The Grace of Giving

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

The Grace of Giving 2 Corinthians 8-9; and selected texts

[Opening illustration – young, dynamic preacher, much hype, powerful message; preached three Sundays in a row; “until we get this right there is no need to move on].

For those who are walking with the Lord there is generally a desire to want to improve upon the practice of spiritual graces. We want to know how to study and understand the Word more. We want to know and be taught the will of God in and for our lives. The disciples themselves asked Jesus to teach them to pray (Luke 11:1) and how many of us cry out in our spirits, “Lord, teach us to pray!” Many in the early churches practiced true love and fellowship among one another and yet Paul both prayed and instructed them that their love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and discernment (Philippians 1:9). And how many times have we sought of the Lord, “Lord, teach us to love – to love one another and to love the lost.”? We ask the Lord to teach us to be done with sin; to teach us to be better husbands or wives; to teach us how we might better teach our children the fear and admonition of the Lord. *Thoughtful believers long to be taught.* But with that, how many of us have actually ask the Lord, “Lord, teach me to give. Lord, teach me how to be a godly, cheerful, generous giver.” Teach me how to give; teach me why to give.” From the youngest that a child can get around, we have to teach them to share, to give because by nature, we are takers. And so we need to pray, “Lord, teach me to give.” That is the kind of prayer that hits us right where we live, that makes us evaluate what it is that is most important to us, is it not?

Last week we found ourselves in 2 Corinthians 8:1-8 and looking at what are the principles of godly giving. What does God’s Word say are to be the motivators for biblical giving? Remember that according to 1 Corinthians 13:3 it would be possible to give everything you have away and yet if that giving is not governed by godly love, it profits you absolutely nothing.

And so we considered the first three of five principles for godly giving as outlined in verse 1-8. It is my desire to recap and expand upon those three and then give you the final two principles for godly giving. So then, let us turn to the text, 2 Corinthians 8:1-8 and get right back into the principles of godly giving. Remember that context here is that the apostle had been making his journeys through Asia Minor and Greece, establishing and teaching in the churches; and now he was encouraging believers to give to the needs of the saints who were suffering hard economic times back in Jerusalem. 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

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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. 9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich.

The context is clearly concerning proper Christian giving and as I said there are five principles or characteristics of Christian giving in this passage, the first three of which we have already looked at.

What then are the characteristics of true Christian giving?

I. Godly giving begins with God (8:1)

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

To begin with, godly giving begins with God. 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]. Notice that this grace, this divine favor, this privilege "has been given" – meaning it was poured out upon these churches, not because they earned it or deserved it, but because God determined to grace them in the past; and this grace continues into the present and will continually enable them to service and keep them in the power of God. As the hymn writer said, *"Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far and grace will lead me home."* For by grace – by divinely given favor - these believers have been saved, through faith, and this not of themselves, it is the gift of God, not as a result of works, so that no one may boast (Ephesians 2:8-9). The first great act of giving is God giving His Son to be the sacrifice and Savior of all who receive Him by faith. And this given grace of God transforms lives.

It is very clear that giving then is a grace of God. When Christians give Biblically, they do so because the grace of God has been and is at work in their hearts – the first work being that of salvation. 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 righteousness of His Son and all spiritual blessings.

II. Godly giving is a joy (8:2)

...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, their giving was an overflow; but not an overflow of money, but an overflow of the combination of an abundance of joy and deep poverty. In other words, these believers were so engrossed, so captivated by the grace of God given to them as seen in verse one, a grace that saved their soul, that gave them peace with God, that helped them see all that they had belonged to God, that regardless of how deep their poverty might be [they were as beggars], they were still wanting and willing to share anything and everything they

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had with others. [Three ways to live – 1) to live *above* your means; spending more than you actually have; 2) to live *within* your means; that is spending as much as you have; 3) to live *under* your means; that is spending less than you bring in – this last one ought to be our goal so that we might have a bounty from which to joyfully give back to God]. And from this we must ask ourselves, are we so engrossed and captivated by the greatness of God's grace in our lives that we have such a joyful and giving spirit that gives regardless of the circumstances, regardless of the poverty? If our giving is godly, it will also be joyful regardless of our own circumstances.

III. Godly giving is giving yourself to God (8:3-5)

The third we noted 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 [they gave according to their plan, their purpose, they were intentional – and then something else happened because of the grace of God], and beyond their ability – [something supernatural], they gave of their own accord [because of the supernatural power within them – this resulted in...], 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.

We must be careful not to miss this point. Before we can rightly give anything else or anything of ourselves, we must *first* give ourselves to the Lord. Our giving of monies is secondary to the greater giving our lives to the Lord. Notice that this is the will of God, to give ourselves to Him and then to whom, to others, specifically, to spiritual leaders. We give ourselves to the Lord by making ourselves available to other believers, particularly, spiritual leaders, asking, "What are the needs, how can we help!" 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, my time, everything. We begin to see ourselves more and more as stewards, or managers of what God has given us and what He has given us is all for one purpose, **to glorify Him**. [Illustration – Luke wanting to take the orders out in drive through at Chick-fila]. We are to see ourselves as agents of God's grace and the key facet of God's grace is that it gives and it gives abundantly of all that it has; and for grace to be grace, it is given when and where it is not deserved.

Let us see this in Romans 12:3-6 – for as God has given grace to Paul, Paul wants to grace the Christians at Rome and spur them on to what, to exercise their God given graces, or spiritual gifts!

3 For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted [given] to each a measure of faith. [a stewardship of grace – believing God has called you to use it up] 4 For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, 5 so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. 6 Since we have gifts that differ according to the

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grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith...

Let us give ourselves then to the Lord, the One who has graced us; and to our spiritual leaders, helping guide and direct the use of our spiritual graces and then to one another even as we read in 1 Peter 4:10 –

As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.

Notice that in all of this there is no mention of money, of fiscal resources, and yet such is very much included for it costs money, it costs time, it costs energy to minister to others. Let us understand that to give ourselves to the Lord is to give ourselves to one another; this is the will of God and it will cost us; but the benefits and the blessings are well worth the price – an abundance of joy.

IV. Godly giving is lovingly considerate of others (8:2)

This brings us to the fourth principle of godly giving and that principle is that such giving is lovingly considerate of others. You can see how this is related to our previous point. 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 of something that flows out of a sincere concern or love for others. The point is, people can give without a true or specific concern, right? I can write a check to the Red Cross for Haiti and never think about a specific individual or group, but just give to the cause, right? 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 minister, to help serve and aid them.

Notice here in verse 2 the contrast between wealth and poverty. 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 – a generosity for others that was willing to do 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 [this is not the law – this is not a tithe], but as proving [test yourselves to see if you are in the faith] through the earnestness of others the sincerity [the genuineness, the realness] of your love also.

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How do you know if you are experiencing the grace of God unless you also engage and **"abound in this gracious work..."** (8:7) – this work of grace. 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 – when you find it a joy and desire to give to the needs of the saints – this grace of God working in their lives results in generous giving for the purposes of God. [Paul is setting up the principle of proportional giving – 2 Corinthians 8:12; 1 Corinthians 16:2 – not percentage giving] Do you want know if the grace of God is working in you? Do you give to the work of God as proof of your sincere concern and love for the saints? Are you giving, giving in this manner?

V. Godly giving is Godlike (8:4)

The final principle I would have you note with me is that godly giving is indeed to be Godlike – consistent with His character and attributes when we give like this. Let us read verse four:

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

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 for the known needs of the church. [Beloved, every week there is a little graph in your bulletin that lets you know 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 – starting right here with the local 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. God gives to us as an expression of grace as a favor to us and then we take that and give to the needs of the ministry as a similar expression of grace. Paul speaks of this principle of receiving from God for the purpose of giving what was received to others at the outset of this letter, back in 2 Corinthians 1:3-4. Paul set the Corinthians up:

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. To make this practical - when you give to the church to Hope CBC, do you recognize that you are ministering, you are serving, you are aiding, you are comforting, you are meeting the needs of other saints? Why do we have a building? So we meet and worship God, and study His word, and participate in fellowship. Where those who are hurting can come and receive counsel from

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the Pastor or other believers. 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 – remember verse 3, that this giving was “beyond” or contrary, inconsistent with their ability or power. That is because this kind of giving is supernatural. 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 it is you that is missing out. If you are not giving because it is an expression of giving yourself wholly to the Lord and to the saints as an expression of love, 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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