

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 (Part 3) **2 Corinthians 8:7-24**

If you would please open your Bibles to 2 Corinthians 8 as we look this morning at verses 7-24. As most you know, we have set aside the month of February to consider this subject of the Christian's giving. This morning I wish to finish up 2 Corinthians 8 and have us consider carefully the difference between the ideas of merely giving out of duty and learning how to give with delight. For all the blessings that have come to us by God, our salvation, our fellowship with Jesus and His saints, the ministry of the Holy Spirit in our lives, for our families, our homes, our friends, and our possessions; let us never forget that each and everyone one of these things are but gifts from the Lord, given to us for our good; given to us as a blessing, and given to us that we might use all that we have and all that we are to bring glory to God. How do we move ourselves out of the trappings of giving out of duty rather than delight; of giving as an intentional act of worship rather than an afterthought spurred on by guilt; of giving as a part of godly planning rather than a haphazard practice? And perhaps an even more important question we might ask and answer, why is any of this important? What difference does it make to my spiritual well-being if I give or what I give? Beloved, let us remember that Biblically speaking, giving is not optional for the believer but rather is to be a way of life and an indicator of the working of the Holy Spirit within. One who professes to follow Christ and yet is not intentional in his or her giving to needs of the saints, to the ministry of the Word and to the care of the ministers it like someone proclaiming himself to be the star athlete of the team and yet he never enters the game.

John Piper, the well known pastor of Bethlehem Baptist Church of Minneapolis relates an interesting experience he had while studying at the University of Munich in Germany in 1970. While there and attending church, John heard the word, "Kirchensteuer" – which translated means "church tax". He learned that most Germans paid about 8% of their income to either the Lutheran or Catholic churches since the vast majority of people had been baptized into these respective churches as infants. If you recall, the average giving among American Christians is only about 2.5% so on paper the Germans look pretty good. But this was a "church tax" – a duty, an obligation. The freewill offerings to these churches was virtually zero working out to be about sixty cents per person per year.

But what Piper noted was that because of the Kirchensteuer, the German churches were more than able to fully support ministry staffs, keep up their gorgeous church facilities and even underwrite many kinds of outreaches to the communities. With 8% of the people's income flowing to the churches by mandate, there was little that the churches lacked. But because it was a duty, because there was no delighting in Christ and gratitude for the grace of God, the churches were dead. Piper noted that in the church they attended for a time there were 10,000 members on the rolls and yet on any given Sunday, there were only about sixty older women, a half dozen older men and virtually no young people at all. Piper commented, "*There is no correlation between the presence of the Spirit and the presence of the Deutschmark; there is no correlation between spiritual vitality and material solvency.*" In other words, if grace does not move the heart to give, spiritual vitality does not exist.

But when you consider what the Bible teaches about believers giving, we never see giving as being some oppressive duty, but a delight; never as a tax but as a tangible expression of

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gratitude for the grace of God. In Exodus, when the Tabernacle was to be built, there was no shortage of gold, silver, gems and fine fabrics. In fact, where did the Israelites get these things? From the Egyptians on their way out of Egypt. But they did not hoard but gave freely. When David took up his collection for the building of the Temple, the generous given was so bountiful that David actually had to tell the people to stop giving! And David himself set the example, giving generously out of his own resources.

The point is that there are two fundamental ways to give to the Lord; we can give because of grace or we can give because of guilt; as a result of love to God or out of legalism. I would much rather learn to be a grace giver than a guilt giver! And may I remind you, that according to the overwhelming testimony of Scripture, each believer is called to be a grace giver. It is not to be the practice of a few; the practice of the seemingly more financially blessed, but the delightful duty of each one who has comprehended the lavish grace of Jesus Christ in his or her life.

From our text then, let us answer three questions regarding grace giving. First, what is the manifestation of grace giving in the believer's life? Second, what is the motivation for grace giving in the believer's life? And third, what are the methods of grace giving in the believer's life? Looking back at verse 7 then, let us understand and answer this first question:

I. What is the manifestation of grace giving in the believer's life? (vs. 7-8)

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.

If you know anything about the church at Corinth, you know that it was a church of problems. There were all sorts of issues and sins addressed by the Apostle Paul in his letters to the Corinthians. But one problem they did not have as inactivity. The church at Corinth was a busy place and the church openly pursued involvement in the things of the Lord. The problem however is that these people often went overboard in certain areas to the neglect of more important things. As they pursued less important things, they neglected the unity of the body, personal relationships with one another and as we see in 2 Corinthians 8, they failed to be grace givers and were in danger of becoming guilt givers. And let us not forget, that because God has included this in His Word to us, it indicated that this is an issue that every generation and every believer must examine.

As we have already learned from verses 1-6, Paul uses the example of the generosity of the fiscally challenged Macedonian believers to speak to the hearts of the Corinthians to consider whether they were learning to be grace givers. And beginning in verse seven, Paul reveals what is manifested by true grace givers. Let me point out two such manifestation and have you ask yourself, "Are these things true of me?"

First, **grace giving is a spiritual discipline.** Just as we would be correct in saying that a true believer is one who expresses love to God; gratitude to God; who seeks to communicate to God in prayer and to learn of God by means of the Word (all of which takes discipline, time and effort to develop); so too does the true believer long to give back to God by means of and for the benefit of the body of Christ. If someone says to you, "I am a believer" and then says or purposely demonstrates hatred or ingratitude toward God, wouldn't we question his profession? If that person says, "I do not pray and do not care to pray;" or "I do not read the Word of God and

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care not to learn of the Word of God;” would we not be puzzled and wonder if God is at work in him? In the same way, the heart that says, giving is not important or that because he or she does not want to be guilted into giving and therefore gives little or nothing is betraying the working of the grace of God his or her life. Giving is not an optional “add on” to our Christianity. Giving is our Christianity. We should learn to give more and more because our God and our Savior have given everything to us. We must follow our Savior’s example.

The first seven verses of this chapter emphasize the grace of God at work in the believer, showing us that it is this grace that moves us to give rather than in mere duty. It is the grace of God that motivates, and guides and provides what is needed for the Christian to generously give for the Lord’s work. And so, what does Paul call the Corinthians to at the end of verse seven? He calls them to [look at the end of verse seven] **“abound in this gracious work.”** In the Greek text the word “work” is not there. We supply it to give a better understanding of what Paul means, but literally it reads this way, “in this grace [this work of grace] be continually abounding or overflowing.” It is to be both the natural outcome of the believer as well as the practice, the spiritual discipline of every believer. Notice that Paul says, at the beginning of verse seven, “But just as you abound in ‘everything’ [its all be graciously given to you for your benefit, for your blessing and as an example] so now, the inevitable result, the natural (or supernatural) outcome is that you abound in your practice, in the spiritual discipline, of grace giving.

Now, when we hear the word discipline, don’t we want to cringe? Disciplines – those are burdensome duties that rob us of joy, right? The discipline of getting up at 4 in the morning to run in order to stay physically fit; or the discipline of setting aside a portion of time everyday to read the Word. But the person who runs does so for the benefit and blessing of physical fitness and the one who reads does so for the benefit and blessing of being drawn closer to the Lord. In other words, a true spiritual discipline is not simply a duty but it becomes a delight because by it we are more intimate with the Lord, we long to worship the Lord more, we learn to love the Lord more, it causes us to express the glory of the Lord. In other words, the duty becomes a delight.

Paul reveals that these Corinthian believers knew something about spiritual disciplines and had experienced some of the delightful results of them. Again, in verse seven we read, **“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.”** They had a **“faith”** that grew that cause them to know the gospel better. They had **“utterance”** that is the growing ability to more effectively speak the gospel to others. And they had increased in **“knowledge”** which means they were not simply knowing truth, but applying and living out that truth in their lives. Paul says they had an **“earnestness”** a zeal for Christ and living for him. And finally they had been growing in the discipline of **“love”** – this care and concern for others. These all imply discipline, effort, practice. They had done well in these things, but there was one area they were failing in, in which they were lacking, **“this gracious work”** of God’s grace in giving. And so the call to abound in grace giving. Where are you in this? Grace giving is listed on the same level with faith, with witnessing, with knowledge of God, with zeal and with love. Will you pursue grace giving with the same desire?

The second manifestation of **grace giving is that it is an expression of genuine, godly love.** Love was alluded to in verse seven, but verse eight expands this idea 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.”**

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It is interesting that Paul does not "command" giving. There is not law here; no tithe, no giving of ten percent, no Kirchensteuer – why? Because when the grace of God is working in our hearts, giving becomes so "natural" to the believer that no command is needed. And so Paul simply reminds the Corinthians that grace giving is an evidence of our love for Christ. When we delight to take of our material and monetary blessings that are recognized as having come to us only by God's grace and so in gratitude return a portion of them back to the Lord for His use in and through the church, we are expressing our love for God. How big is your love for God?

As we noted a few weeks back, the Macedonian's had given to God with "**abundance of joy**" and even in a time of "**a great ordeal of affliction.**" Their love to God destroyed any reservations or selfishness or stinginess they might have otherwise had. Do you see the grace of God in the Macedonians as they are said in verse 3 to have given willingly and "**beyond their ability.**" By this then they expressed their love to Christ and His people. This is the "**earnestness of others**" in verse eight., that the zeal shown by the Macedonian believers in the grace of giving put the ball now into the court of Corinthians. Would "**the sincerity of [their] love also**" now abound through the grace giving exemplified by the Macedonians? And will such sincerity or genuineness of love abound in us? Or to ask it another way, does your practice in giving offer amply and abounding evidence of your love for Christ? As we give week by week, let us remember that such giving our love for Christ and is an act of worshipping of Him as Lord of all.

II. What is the motivation for grace giving in the believer's life? (v. 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 Apostle Paul never leaves his readers without drawing them back to the example and source of any aspect of Christian living. The person of Jesus Christ is to constantly be our focus. What did He do? How did He act? What did He say with regard to grace giving? Here in verse nine I would have you notice that there is a direct correlation between the person of Christ [our doctrine of Christ] and the practice of giving. And so, from verse nine we learn that the motivation of grace giving in the believer's life is Christ Himself. The motivation to be a grace giver is knowing the person of Christ. The result of knowing the person of Christ is being a grace giver. Let us look at the person of Christ here in our verse.

[slide 05] If we are to be grace givers, we must be motivated by the person and example of Christ. Let us note that Biblically speaking, there is a difference between godly motivation and ungodly manipulation. Manipulation can be used to "motivate" a person, right? But a person who is manipulated does not do, or in this case give out of love for the person of Christ. What is the godly motivator for giving then? Is it manipulating people to give out of guilt or that it will make them feel better about themselves? No, the godly motivation for giving is growing in one's understanding of the person of Christ. Are you ready for this insight, this challenge? The more a person comes to know and grow in his knowledge and love for Christ, the more that person will long to give to ministry of the Word and of the saints.

And so Paul lays out some doctrine, some knowledge of the person of Jesus Christ, speaking in verse nine of the doctrine of the incarnation [God becoming man] and humiliation [God in the flesh dying for our sin] of Christ as a proper motivation for grace giving. Listen again

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to verse nine: **"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."**

What is this **"grace of our Lord Jesus Christ"**? The grace of Jesus is that Christ the Creator becomes part of the human race so that He might redeem us. It was His grace that brought this about since there was nothing in anyone of us that motivated the Father to send His Son as Redeemer. For the demonstration of God's glory, the Father graciously sends the Son to redeem sinful humanity. And the Son graciously comes to us in the flesh to redeem us, to save us from our sins to the glory of God. The "grace" of the Lord Jesus Christ speaks to us of His richness for He was resplendent in His glory, magnificent in His majesty, undiminished in His holiness, dazzling in His righteousness, and the perfect display of the full love and mercy of God come to us. And so Paul says rightly **"He was rich"** – wealthy, abounding in all things. He lacked nothing and needed nothing but was in every way God, Creator, Son, Sovereign and Lord. **"He was rich, yet for your sake He became....poor."** By becoming poor we are to note that gave up the glorious position and presence of being at the Father side, He left the honor, the privilege, the glorious worship as God in heaven all for the sake of those describe in the Bible as His enemies, as rebels, as sinners, as helpless, hostile and alienated from God.

This is condescension of Christ. He became poor, giving up His rights and privileges as God. Let us never forget that as He came to us, there was and is nothing we could ever do to improve Him, to add to His glory, to make Him feel better. It was not for His sake that He gave all this up, it was for our sake. Doesn't that just blow your mind? God became man. Why? What does Jesus gain by becoming human? What's in it for Him? What motivated him to become poor? Look at it again. Here is the gospel. Here is the good news! God became man, deity took on humanity in Christ **"for your sake."** For you who is not only a sinner by nature, a sinner because you are a child of the first sinner Adam, but for you who is also a sinner by practice, a sinner even after being shown the saving grace of God for we all continue to sin even after we come to Christ and yet in spite of all of this, Christ became poor so that through His poverty, through His humiliation as a man on this earth, you and I might what? That you and I **"might become rich"** through His grace. That you and I might partake now of Christ divine nature, might be clothed in His righteousness, so that all the blessings He experienced in glory with the Father might become our blessing – for even as Jesus was and now again is at the right hand of the Father, in the presence of the Father, enjoying the fellowship of the Father; this is the richness of His position, for all those who believe that He came to be their Savior and their Lord, such is the rich inheritance that belongs to them, the eternal bliss and blessing of being in the presence of the Father. That is the gospel!

But in our text, what does this have to do with grace giving? Beloved, do you consider Christ's condescension and humiliation before you decide the kind of gift you offer for the ministry of the Lord? Do you pause and wonder how eternally rich you are because of what Christ has accomplished for us by means of His death on the cross for your sins and His resurrection from the dead for your life? Does the person of Christ motivate you to be a grace giver?

Here is the pointed truth of verse nine – that as we contemplate the person of our Lord Jesus Christ, as we consider the grace of Jesus in His incarnation and in His humiliation for us the result should be a change in our priorities. Our priorities are now to be geared toward faithfulness to Him. Our practice is to be affected and even as He gave to us, so we ought to long to give back to Him. By become poor, that is man, Jesus has made us eternally rich. This

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richness we possess in Christ is to cause us to see more and more that all we possess belongs to Him. It is His to be used for His glory and purpose. If we are rightly experiencing the grace of God in us, we will desire less and less of the material things of this world, knowing that they do not result in infinite happiness and so our hearts turn to Christ alone. I see this truth expressed in Titus 2:11-14:

11 For the grace of God [the richness of God] has appeared [in the person of Jesus Christ], bringing salvation to all men, 12 instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires [deny thinking like earth-dwellers and for material possessions] and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, 13 looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, 14 who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds [our richness in Christ].

III. What are the methods of grace giving in the believer's life? (vs. 10-24)

In the remaining verses of our text, we find Paul outlining for the Corinthians some basic methods by which grace giving is to be accomplished. There are four such methods for us to see and apply.

First, **grace giving is to be intentional.** Grace giving is not to be based on emotionalism or impulsiveness but is to be purposeful, planned and intentional. WE must intend to give. Look at verses 10-11

I give my opinion in this matter for this is to your advantage, who were the first to begin a year ago not only to do this, but also to desire to do it. But now finish doing it also, so that just as there was the readiness to desire it, so there may be the completion of it by your ability."

Notice that Paul was not catching the Corinthians off-guard with the need to give. He is reminding them of what they said they intended to do a year earlier. They had prepared themselves to give and made appropriate plans to give. It would appear that they had set some kind of goal for this giving. But whatever they had started, they had evidently also started to wane. They lacked follow-through and so Paul exhorts them and reminds them of their rightful intentions.

If we are to be grace givers, we must also be intentional, we must intend, purpose, plan and then execute that plan to give so that we stay focused and on track. The church, the congregation, does this each year by means of the budget. It is the goal, it is the need for accomplishing the ministry of our church. And on a side, I can tell you that there is nothing extravagant about our budget...it is facilities and compensation. I recently heard of a church that routinely puts on luncheons for its members and community sometimes ranging up to \$45 a person with a hundred or more people served. That is an extravagant budget, but week by week, as you see what we need in the bulletin, are you being intentional to plan accordingly. Are you making personal or family goals for the year can help to channel resources in the right direction so that we might reach our corporate goal? Notice that for Paul intentional giving is also follow-

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through giving because good intentions to give without planning on giving is of little help to you or the congregation.

A second method to be employed in **grace giving is that it must also be realistic giving.** I just mentioned a church that puts on \$45 per person luncheons regularly. It would be unrealistic for us to budget such extravagance given the fiscal make up of our church (and I might say it seems that I might always consider something like that unrealistic).

But understand that in grace giving, we are not being asked to give what we do not have but rather to give as God provides for the purpose of giving. Let us look at verse 12: **“For if the readiness is present, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have.”**

Grace giving does take into account changing and unforeseen circumstances. Sometimes jobs are lost, sometimes there comes unexpected and costly bills that put a financial strain on people. There is no condemnation in grace giving as no one is expected to give **“what he does not have.”** But what grace giving does demand is that we are seeking the Lord, praying, asking for His provisions and making sure that we are using everything He gives us in ways that bring Him glory. Sometimes, as funds shrink, you might have to “give less” – sometimes you might have to cut something else out, but be realistic. And remember, sometimes God gives increases and as those increases come we must realistically give some back to the Lord and His work.

A third method of **grace giving is that it is to be equitable.** There might well have been some in church at Corinth that thought their giving to the ministry of the saints in Jerusalem, strangers that they had never met, would be used frivolously by the Jerusalem church. Let us remember that what Paul is appealing for in our text is not some form of Christian communism that sought to make sure all believers live according to the same socio-economic level. What Paul is appealing for is for those who at current are being blessed with an abundance, that is over and above what is necessary for living to aid those without adequate resource. Why? Because a time may come when the roles are reversed, and the formerly needy become those with abundance helping the very ones that had earlier helped them. Look at verses 13-14 - **“For this is not for the ease of others and for your affliction, but by way of equality-at this present time your abundance being a supply for their need, so that their abundance also may become a supply for your need, that there may be equality.”**

Paul then quotes from Exodus 16:18 which establishes the principle that those who have more are to share with those in need. **“As it is written, ‘He who gathered much did not have too much, and he who gathered little had no lack.’”** Remember when the children of Israel were gathering manna in the wilderness? Some gathered more than they needed while other had gathered too little. Those who gathered more than they needed but did not share, what happened. Their manna rotted. But when it was shared, all the needs were met.

The final method of **grace giving is that it is to be seen as glory giving.** All giving is to glorify God. In verses 16-24, Paul carefully details how the gift would be collected and delivered to Jerusalem. Paul mentions both Titus, his companion and an other unnamed brother whose fame in the things of the gospel had spread through all the churches who had been appointed by the churches to work with him in this work. But notice verse 19 which reveals to us the very reason or purpose that is to be behind all grace giving. We read, **“in this gracious work, which is being administered by us for the glory of the Lord Himself.”**

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To be sure, there are always details involved in preparing and planning to give, but the one overriding detail that must consume us in grace giving is this - the glory of our Lord. A foundational principle in grace giving is the realization that when we plan and follow through on our regular, routine giving, we are doing so for the glory of the Lord. Let us never forget that the act of giving is to express our delight in the glory of the Lord and it reveals our deepest satisfaction in honoring Him and acknowledging Him in our giving.

And then, as the grace gifts of given, the church, through its budget, its Elders and Deacons and Treasurer, seek to disburse the giving in a manner that glorifies the Lord. And so, as individuals and as a church we must ask ourselves, Is the Lord glorified by what I am giving and the manner in which I am giving it?

Notice how Paul concludes this instruction on giving to the Corinthians down in verse 24 saying, **"Therefore openly before the churches, shown them the proof of your love and of our reason for boasting about you."** We must never forget that grace giving is a manifestation of our love for Christ as well as our love for one another and the body of Christ. Grace giving is to be motivated by our consideration of the person of Christ in His incarnation and humiliation and the result of this consideration is to be properly practicing the methods of grace giving, giving that is intentional, realistic, equitable and God-glorifying!

Soli Deo Gloria

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