

The Grace of Giving

2 Corinthians 8:1-15

Intro: A few weeks ago we took a Sunday morning to deal with a “house-keeping” matter. Based on 1 Timothy 3:15 we talked about how to “behave in the household of God”, specifically addressing the matter of loving each other well by avoiding unnecessary distractions. I want to thank you for your gracious and evident response to that message. Traffic during worship is significantly down. We are growing in how we love each other.

I’d like to address another growth-area in our body this morning, the grace of giving.

2 Cor 8:7 But as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you—see that you excel in this act of grace also.

I have been convicted again this week, as I’ve studied for this message, that I don’t talk enough about the grace of giving. The Bible has so much to say on the topic and we are so in need of instruction. As Americans Christians we live in the soup of materialism and consumerism. The only possible way we can avoid being conformed to the pattern of this world, in regard to money, is if we are intentionally and consistently being transformed by the renewing of our mind. If we don’t think of money and possessions differently than we did 10 or 15 years ago – something’s wrong. We aren’t growing in this grace.

This matters because how we handle our money is one of the most accurate depictions of our spiritual state.

Richard Halverson, “Money is an exact index to a man’s true character. All through Scripture there is an intimate correlation between the development of a man’s character and how he handles money.”

Randy Alcorn, “There is a powerful relationship between our true spiritual condition and our attitudes and actions concerning money and possessions.” (4)

I am not speaking on this issue because the church is in financial straits. We aren’t in financial straits. I’m speaking on this because God desires to free us from the blindness and bondage of this world’s perspective on money, and to lead us into the light, joy and eternal blessing that comes from a gospel perspective on money.

Our text this morning is one of the best examples in Scripture of grace-filled giving. Paul holds up the Macedonian believers as a model to be emulated.

2 Corinthians 8:1. We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia,

Who is your model when it comes to generosity?? Do you have a model in your life of joyful generosity? God has kindly given us the example of the Christians in Macedonia so that we see what grace-fueled generosity looks like!

Paul had just completed a journey of several months through the churches in Macedonia and down to Corinth, collecting an offering for the suffering church in Jerusalem. This gift was a big deal to Paul. He saw it not only as a necessary aid to the suffering believers in Jerusalem, but as a raised banner in the world of the transforming power of the grace of God. In the context of the age-old tension between Jews and Gentiles, and man's post-fall addiction to himself, what greater sign of the unity of the church and the power of the gospel than to have Gentile believers sacrificially giving to help Jewish brothers and sisters in Christ.

One of the most evident testimonies to the power of the gospel is when it transforms our way of thinking about money. When God's grace goes deep the evident fruit will be joyful generosity. When we become people who *love* to give, who *beg for* opportunities to be generous, then we can know that God is doing a beautiful, precious work of grace in our life.

1. Christian Giving is Fueled by Grace

"We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches in Macedonia."

Paul introduces the topic in such a fascinating way. Imagine if he had begun by saying,

"I want you to know how generous and godly and good those people in Macedonia are. Let me tell you – THOSE people are serious Christians."

How motivating would that be? But that's not what he says. He says, I want you to know about the *grace of God* that has been given to them. This is terrific for several reasons:

- a) **It's Motivating** – Don't you want the grace of God in your life? Isn't the grace of God the most glorious and precious thing in all the world?? When I see the fruits of grace in the lives of other people, it makes me want that grace! When I see people who have the grace of a love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, etc – I see what God can do and I want him to do it in me. Don't you??

Well the same when it comes to the grace of giving. There are Christians who are experiencing the grace of God when it comes to money in ways that we are not. There are churches that are advanced in the grace of generosity and the joy of giving in ways that we are not – not because they have more money. But because they have more grace! Grace is bearing fruit at a wonderful, deep, heart level so that they are defined by joy and generosity in giving. They have experienced the transforming power of God's grace in a powerful way in the area of giving.

- b) **It's Encouraging.** Talk about giving can easily be discouraging because most of us sense that we aren't really getting it yet. We sense that we are failing. How many of us could say that our giving looks like the joyful, eager, sacrificial giving of our Macedonian brothers and sisters? I can't.

Some of you give to the cause of Christ very sporadically, some of you don't give at all. Some of you give begrudgingly, some out of a sense of duty.

Have you ever wondered why it is so easy to spend money on yourselves– even spending our way into debt, and yet find it so hard to give to the Lord? Honestly, do you enjoy giving as much as you enjoy shopping? Isn't that messed up?? What's wrong with us? We love the wrong things and we believe lies.

Our giving problem is not a budget problem – it's a worship problem. It's a sin problem – and no budget or rule can fix it. We can't change ourselves. But where sin abounds – grace abounds all the more!! Guilt can maybe change your behavior for a short while – but grace can transform your heart!

Tripp: “The work of grace is heart change, and since heart change is the only way our behavior changes in a lasting way, Gods' grace offers us the only hope of real change when it comes to our personal finances.” (T, 18)

- c) **It's Clarifying** – it shows us what's on the table. As Paul is writing to the Corinthian believers, he isn't primarily pursuing their money – he's pursuing the transforming power of God's grace revealed in the changed hearts and the generous giving of his people. He wants the Corinthians believes to experience the grace of God in the same way the Macedonian's did – for the glory of Gods' name.

This isn't a small vision for a single project. This is a big vision for a whole-life, kingdom-oriented, perspective on money. (Making budget is great, but we can make budget without transformed hearts. The issue is – has the grace of God run deep in our life so that we joyfully participate in sacrificial giving for the furthering of God's kingdom?)

Paul Tripp, in his new book “*Redeeming Money*”, applies the Lord's Prayer to our finances. Imagine taking all the money that you will make in your lifetime, all that you own, all that you are worth, and all that you will ever own – take the whole portion of it in your hands – and pray this prayer.

Our Father who art in heaven – your money has a source. There is a Father in heaven who has given you everything that you have. He is the Creator – you are the steward. The single greatest error we make when it comes to money is thinking that it is ours. It's not.

Hallowed be thy name – your money has a purpose. The world thinks the purpose of money is to finance our dreams and desires in this life. If the purpose of everything is to glorify the name of God, then the purpose of all your possessions is to glorify God. “The first step in money sanity is surrendering to the glory of one greater than you.” (Tripp, 15)

Your kingdom come, - Your money has a cause, a mission to fulfill here on earth – to promote the coming of the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ.

This fundamental re-orientation is critical for a transformed financial life.

Tripp: “Many of us have more money problems than we realize. We think we're okay because we are able to pay the price of our pleasures, but we're not okay because what shapes our money matters is a spirit of ownership.” (15)

We think it's ours and it's not. We think it's primarily for our comfort and our pleasures – and it isn't. This is what God is after by his grace. To press his grace and glory all the way down to our spending

and giving. And that's precisely what we see in the lives of the Macedonian believers. Their use of money was defined by kingdom realities.

2. Christian Giving is Unfazed by Hardship

:2 for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part.

The Macedonian churches were made up of the churches in Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea. They were in a "severe test of affliction". In short, they were being heavily persecuted. Paul was beaten and imprisoned in Philippi. His life was threatened by a massive riot in Thessalonica. The believers in Macedonia were as persecuted and impoverished as any church at that time. If any believers could have had a reason, an excuse, why they should not be expected to give, it would be the Macedonian Christians. But they begged to be allowed to participate.

We easily use our hardships as excuses. But Christian giving is unhindered by hardship. Christian giving isn't **looking** for excuses not to give. It loves to give, wants to give – regardless of the current circumstances. Why? Because Christian giving is rooted in joy.

3. Christian Giving is an Overflow of Joy

"their abundance of joy has overflowed..."

Joy is hard to restrain. It spills out and splashes over and is hard to keep contained. Isn't that true? One of the greatest evidences of the work of grace in a person's heart is joy – specifically when that joy spills over into glad, eager, sacrificial blessing of other people.

We are by virtue of our sinful nature, selfish and stingy. We are nervous about giving of our resources, our time, our comfort, etc. We are afraid that we might lose out, might suffer loss. That's a deep heart commitment.

But the gospel sets us free from that bondage and welcomes us into joy! Paul had written a powerful promise to these churches, found in Philippians 4:19.

"But my God shall supply all your needs according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus."

Those words are inspired by the Holy Spirit. God will supply every need according to his riches in glory. We don't need to fear any loss – ever. He's already given us his Son – will he not also with him, graciously give us all things.

Christian giving is rooted in the joyful confidence that God is for us, that God will provide all of our needs, that the more we give the richer in grace we become. Someone said the offering should be the most joyful part of the service. We get to give gifts to King Jesus and be used for his cause in the world! That should be a highlight of the week!

4. Christian Giving is Unhindered by Poverty

Their joyful giving took place in the context of "severe poverty." This gift, out of their extreme poverty was a precious gospel jewel in a hard, greedy, selfish world. It is such a marvelous sign of the life-

changing power of God. Some of you are barely making ends meet - and it's possible that you hardly give anything at all. And maybe you feel bad about that – but giving just isn't in the budget.

I think this text would suggest two things:

- a) You are looking at it in precisely the wrong way. Poverty is an opportunity, not an obstacle. It's precisely when giving is sacrificial that it is most pleasing to the Lord. The gifts Jesus most delighted in were the sacrificial gifts from those with little to give. Remember the widow's two pennies? How pleased must Jesus have been with the giving of the Macedonian believers?
- b) Giving is never a budget problem. It's always a heart problem. I challenge you to simply begin giving, regularly, to Christ – praying for joyful dependence on his promises to provide, and just see what God will do for you. Your giving, in your poverty, will be more pleasing to God than any giving you do in your wealth.

5. Christian Giving is Wealthy in Generosity

*“overflowed in a **wealth of generosity** on their part.”*

This is such a great phrase. This is what the Lord delights to see! He isn't looking for a wealth of money. Jesus specifically said of the widow, “She has put in more than all the others for they gave out of their wealth, and she gave all that she had.”

The world applauds large gifts from multi-millionaires and billionaires. And that's ok. The Lord looks at the heart. He's looking for a “wealth of generosity”. That is his delight!

a) Proportional

“For they gave according to their means,”

In other words, they didn't go into debt to give. And the amount they gave wasn't that much. They didn't have much. Whether we have a lot or a little – biblical giving is proportional giving – according to what we have.

1 Corinthians 16:2 On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper,

Giving is to be intentional and regular. This is an area of growth for us. Our offering 's vary widely from week to week and month to month – both in the number of gifts and the amount that is given. That suggests that many are not giving intentionally and regularly – but haphazardly and sporadically. Let's grow in the ‘grace of giving’ as a body.

b) Sacrificial

“and beyond their means,

They sacrificed things, even some necessary things, to give this gift. This is another aspect of giving that pleases the Lord. If it doesn't really cost us anything, if it doesn't impact our lifestyle in some way – then whatever our giving says – it doesn't say much of anything about how much we trust in our

heavenly Father, delight in our Savior, and hunger for the cause of God in the world. Giving that costs us nothing is more likely to be about us than about Him.

c) Eager

of their own accord,” ⁴ *“begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints”*
It was their earnest heart desire. They didn’t see giving as a duty to be performed but a favor to be enjoyed. Isn’t this the crux of the matter.

- Some give little or nothing.
- Some give regularly and generously.
- How many give sacrificially?
- How many of us are so happy and eager to give to Christ that we would beg for the favor?

I just stand in awe of these people. How do we get a heart like that? The answer is in verse 5, isn’t it.

6. Christian Giving is a Matter of Devotion to God

“they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us.”

This is the nub of the matter. And this is why our spending and giving is so revealing – it tells what and whom we are living for. The secret to the Macedonian miracle is they gave themselves to God, in glad response to his grace to them. They gave themselves to God- to his care, to his purposes, to his promises, to his mission. They were applying Paul’s words in 2 Corinthians 5:14, as he speaks of his own life:

2 Cor 5:14 For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; 15 and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.

They gave themselves first to the Lord. Their money. Their poverty. Their future security. They gave themselves to God and their money to his cause.

That’s what the offering should be – the visible, tangible movement of a life devoted to God. The offering is not a tax. It isn’t a membership fee. It’s an act of worship. And of everything you do in a worship service – it may be the act that says the very most about the true state of your heart.

What can you do?

1. Prayerfully consider whether your life is characterized by the grace of giving. This text is here as a mirror we can hold before us.
2. Train yourself for godliness in this area of your life.
 - a. Randy Alcorn, “The Law of Rewards”
 - b. Randy Alcorn, “Money, Possessions, and Eternity”
 - c. Paul Tripp, “Redeeming Money”
3. Carefully plan to give intentionally, generously, consistently throughout this year.

Pray that the Lord will give us this grace.

2 Cor 8:7 But as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you—see that you excel in this act of grace also.