

Well, let's take our Bibles and turn to 2nd Corinthians chapter 8 verses 1 to 7. Last week, I announced that we were preaching part one of a two part sermon. Well, this morning I'd like to announce we're preaching part two of a three part sermon. These things evolve.

Last week, we started a message called Happy to Give. Now, I know we're just a week out from Christmas, and people might be asking, "What's this got to do with Christmas?" Well, in some ways nothing directly, but in many ways very much indirectly. Because in this passage where Paul is arguing that the Christians need to give graciously, he gives one of the motivations for that. "For we know that through the grace of God that though our Lord Jesus was rich, yet for our sake he became poor that we through his poverty might be made rich." Tell me that's about Christmas. It is. He's using that event of the poverty, the incarnation, the humility of Jesus Christ to motivate them to give. We're not that far away from a Christmas message.

We're in a series called Total Grace, and this is the grace I've called sacrificing grace or grace giving. Let's stand in honor of God's Word. 2nd Corinthians 8. We're looking at actually chapter 8 and 9. We're hop, skipping, and jumping across two chapters, but I want to just get our bearing by reading the first seven verses. Paul's writing to the Corinthians. He says this.

"Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia, that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality. For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing, imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints. Not only as we had hoped, but they first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God. So we urged Titus, that as he had begun, so he would also complete this grace in you as well. But as you abound in everything, in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all diligence, and in your love for us, see that you abound in this grace also."

Question, what grace? The grace of giving. You may be seated.

Several years ago, I heard the great Baptist preacher and my favorite preacher, Adrian Rogers, tells the story of a traveling circus. As part of the evening show, a strong man would appear and do astonishing feats of physical strength. In fact, as the concluding part of his act he would often crush an orange to the point that there was no juice left, and he would crush it dry. Then at the end of his act, he would also challenge anyone in the audience to come forward and see if they could squeeze one more drop from the crushed fruit.

Well, it had gone on in many, many places, and no one had ever taken up his challenge. But he gets to a particular town, and that evening a skinny, scrawny old man comes forward at the end of his act. As people look at this skinny, scrawny old man, they begin to laugh, and snickers begin to ripple across the circus crowd. But undaunted, he marched forward, he grabs that piece of fruit, he puts it in his right hand, and he proceeds to squeeze one more drop of orange juice from it.

The crowd goes wild, cheering and clapping. The strong man can't believe what his eyes have just seen, flabbergasted. As the old man's about to turn and return to his seat, the strong man asked him, "Before you go, who are you and what do you do?" to which he replies, "My name is Fred, and I'm the treasurer from the local Baptist church."

You've got to hear Adrian Rogers tell that story. But joking aside, it is a sad fact, is it not, that God's people when it comes to giving often need to be squeezed, goaded, even manipulated into giving to God's work? That ought not to be the case. Our giving ought to be free, not forced. It ought to be a matter of grace, not guilt. It ought to be something desired by us, not something demanded from us. That ought to be the case.

As we come back to 2nd Corinthians 8 and 9, we're going to be helped to that end, because here Paul encourages the grace of giving, giving that's free, not forced; giving that's desired by us, not demanded from us. Because here, Paul extols the grace of giving.

If you'll look at verse 1, he talks about the grace of God that was bestowed upon the churches of Macedonia. High in their poverty, they gave liberally. Their giving was the result of God's grace at work in their life. In fact, Paul encourages the Corinthians to follow the Macedonians example, and he says in verse 6 that indeed they would complete this grace. That is that they would complete the promise they had made to give to the collection to the poor saints in Jerusalem. He wants them to excel in this grace of giving, that they might abound in this grace, verse 7.

the motivation for their grace giving is the grace giving of God. "For we know," verse 9, "The grace of the Lord Jesus, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that we through his poverty might be made rich." In fact, he'll say in chapter 9 and verse 8 that the grace of God can produce this good work of grace giving, because he says the grace of God is able to abound towards you and it's able to make all grace abound towards you in all things having all sufficiency that you may abound in every good work. Just as he signs off in verses 14 and 15, he'll talk about the exceeding grace of God in them.

Giving ought not to be a matter of guilt. It ought to be a matter of grace. It ought to be free, not forced. It ought to be something we desire to do rather than be demanded from us, because God has been gracious to us. The grace of God through Jesus Christ and the grace of God in us because of Jesus Christ produces this generous expression of giving to God's work.

That's where we were last week. We saw that our giving is a reflex to God's giving. We started to look at this wonderful passage, and we said that we're going to move along under four headings, the motivates of grace giving, the manner of grace giving, the multiplication of grace giving, and the message of grace giving. Remember, we're in a series on the grace of God, Total Grace. That's how one ought to describe the Christian life. We're saved by grace. We're empowered by grace. We're supplied by grace. We're prompted by grace to give graciously. The graceful Lamb is in heaven, and grace will continue to bless us through all of eternity.

We've looked at saving grace, strengthening grace, serving, grace, speaking grace, sharing grace, singing grace. Now we're looking at sacrificing grace, the ability to give sacrificially to God's work. That will be prompted by grace.

The manner of it we started to look at last week. Now, we say the motivates for it, God's glory, the gospel, and a love for God's people, but what about the manner of it? Having answered why we ought to give, we started to answer how we ought to give. I'll just regurgitate the first thought, and then we'll get going this morning. Grace giving is costly. That's what we said last week. That's the first thing that comes out of these passages. Grace giving is costly. We saw that in verses 1 to 4, how out of a great trial

of affliction, and out of an abundance of joy, and out of deep poverty the Macedonians gave liberally, and richly, and generously at a cost for the collection of the saints in Jerusalem.

Remember, the backdrop to this is 1st Corinthians 16:1 to 4 where Paul had encouraged them to gather a collection for the poor saints in Jerusalem and Judea who were facing famine and persecution. Many had been disinherited by their families because of their faith in Christ. The Macedonians rise to the challenge. In the light of that, Paul encourages the Corinthians to do the same. He wants to see this same grace at work in them. He wants to see them give generously. He wants to see them reach down deep and give liberally.

Now, we noticed didn't we this little phrase in verse 3? "For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing, imploring us with much urgency to receive the gift." We saw that there were three levels of giving. There's giving that's beneath your ability, there's giving that's according to your ability, and there's giving that's beyond your ability.

You'll see that the Macedonians fell into the second and third category. They didn't give beneath their ability. They weren't chintzy. They weren't cheap. No, they dug down deep. They gave the most when they had the least. They gave according to their ability. What they gave represented what they were able to give, and there was a marked generosity with it. In fact, Paul says not only did they give to their ability, notice verse 3, "Yes, and beyond." They gave till it hurt, or as we quoted Adrian Rogers last week again, "Don't give till it hurts. Give till it feels good." They felt good about helping the saints in Jerusalem and they gave generously.

Yet, you know what? The statistics today show that the average Protestant Evangelical gives only 3% of their giving. That's pitiful. That's beneath our ability. We're not close to matching what's going on here in the early church. We're giving beneath our ability when they gave according to their ability and, yes, beyond their ability. We're making contributions, but we're not making sacrifices.

Reminds me of the debate between the chicken and the pig as to who served man the most. When it came to breakfast, the chicken argued, "You know what? I make man happy. I give him two eggs every morning for his breakfast." The pig says, "Well, you might give him some eggs, but I give him a nice slice of bacon, hearty, heartwarming." The pig then takes the chicken down with this statement. "what you give him is a contribution. What I give him is a sacrifice." All right, because you can give an egg and still stay alive in you're a chicken. You can't give a piece of bacon and remain a pig.

I wonder how many times could we say that about Christians? They make a contribution, but they don't make a sacrifice. Not true of the Macedonians, and Paul prays it's not true of the Corinthians.

We're caught up. Let's move on. Here's the second aspect of the manner of grace giving. Grace giving is consecrated. Don't miss this. Grace giving is consecrated. I want you to understand this, that the act of giving money to the church or finances to missions, the act of giving is always predicated by another act of giving. That's Paul's argument in verse 5. Look at chapter 8 and verse 5. "And not only as we had hoped, but they first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God."

Paul's taken a step back. He's celebrating the fact that they gave out of their poverty with joy liberally to the saints at Jerusalem, but he now takes a step back. You need to understand that before they gave themselves to us and before they gave a collection to the saints, they first gave themselves to the Lord,

and that's the secret of their giving. Grace giving is not only costly, it's consecrated. Grace giving is always the byproduct of a consecrated life given in full surrender to Jesus Christ. They first gave themselves to the Lord. It would be Romans 12:1 and 2. They present their body as a living sacrifice.

See, generous giving is always the outworking of a life submitted to the lordship of Jesus Christ, because a life submitted to the lordship of Jesus Christ is a life that has surrendered to Jesus Christ all that they are and all that they have. All that they are and all that they have. When you're surrendered in that manner, spontaneous sacrificial giving is easy. It's not a fight. It's not a debate. Because if you've first given yourself to the Lord and everything you have is his, then you'll give what is his to those he asks you to give to.

I think when it comes to this idea of Christian stewardship, we have tended to limit to the idea of raising money or giving money. You've heard of stewardship campaigns. But you need to understand the idea of being a steward, a manager, someone that looks after something for another, that Christian stewardship takes in all of life. Old preachers have said it and I'm going to repeat it. God owns all of our time, and all of our treasure, and all of our talents. We've got to dedicate that all to the Lord, how we spend our days, how we spend our money, and how we spend our energy and our gifts.

If stewardship encompasses all of life, if you're submitted to Jesus Christ head to toe, then your pocket's included. That's what Paul's arguing here. They first gave themselves to the Lord. See, money is merely an extension of ourselves. If we have first given ourselves to the Lord, the giving of money as an extension of ourselves is easy.

I like what James Carter says. "Dedication to God is the key to Christian stewardship. This assures that the decision for giving has already been made. If one has dedicated his life to Christ, some decisions do not have to be made anew each time when issues arise. The decision has already been made. The Christian should not have to fight the battle over whether he will cheat, gamble, be unfaithful to his spouse, lie, steal, or live without personal integrity. These decisions should have already been made when we gave our lives to Jesus Christ."

His point, when you make the one decision submitted to Christ, then the other decisions are easy. Submission to Christ means you'll be faithful to your wife. You'll be honest in your dealings. Your life will be marked by integrity, and you'll be generous in your giving. Because, "Though he was rich, yet for our sake he became poor that we though his poverty might be made rich." If that's what he is to us and he's in us making us like him, that stuff comes naturally. The one decision leads to the other decisions, which are not really that hard a decision.

Let me illustrate this and move on. I remember years ago reading the story of James Culvert who was a missionary to the cannibals in the Fiji Islands. God called him to go there. The whole enterprise was fraught with danger as you can imagine. He pays passage on a ship. There are several people with him. They've just come off the coast of the Fiji Islands and the captain tries to talk them out of it. He says, "This is nuts. This is a suicide mission. You step off this boat onto that beach, you're probably going to die."

Here's what James Culvert said to that captain. "We died before we came here." "We died before we came here." He died to self. He took up his cross. When you make that decision back in the UK, you can make the decision to step onto the beach of hostile territory, because that decision helps you with that

decision. "We died before we came here." When giving comes around and you have to decide how much and in what manner, that's not a hard decision for someone that's first given themselves to the Lord.

Let's move on. Thirdly, grace giving is complete. Grace giving is complete. It's a promise made and it's a promise kept. That's one of the themes that comes out of 2nd Corinthians 8 and verse 9. As I said, we're painting the background. About a year earlier, promises had been made. Prompted by Paul or perhaps Titus's visit, a collection was to be taken to relieve the emergency and stress on the poor believers in Jerusalem and Judea. A year early, they had indicated that it was their intention to indeed jump in both feet and help the saints out.

Now, Paul writes and says, "Yes, we need to complete this. We need to do what we said we would do." Let me show you his thinking here. Look at verse 6 of chapter 8. "We urged Titus, that as he had begun, so he would also complete this grace in you as well." Collection had been taken among the churches in Macedonia and they gave liberally out of their poverty. Now, Titus is with the Corinthians and it's their opportunity to complete what was begun a year earlier. It's now time to give, to follow through on the good intention.

You see that again elsewhere in the passage. Look at chapter 9 and verse 2 where he talks about how a year ago they were zealous and wishing and willing to give, and now it's time for that gift to be taken, and to be carefully handled, and brought to Jerusalem. Look at verse 5 especially of chapter 9.

"Therefore I thought it necessary to exhort the brethren to go to you ahead of time, and prepare your generous gift beforehand, which you had previously promised, that may be ready as a matter of generosity."

Look at chapter 8 and verse 10 and 11. You'll see this word complete appear once again. It appears in verse 6, and then we read in verse 11, "But now you also must complete the doing of it." That is the doing of what you promised a year ago, "That as there was a readiness to desire it, so there also may be a completion of it." I know you were moved. I know that you desire. I know that's your intention, but now your good intentions have to become concrete actions and complete what you promised.

Look, folks. it's a very simple thought, but we don't want to miss it. When it comes to giving, we've got to follow through on our intentions. When we're moved, when we're stirred, and it's of God, and we know there's a need to be met and we can meet that need because God has met our need abundantly, then follow through.

You know what Ecclesiastes 5:1 to 5 warn us? When you make a vow to God, make sure you pay it. It's better not to vow, not to promise, than not follow through. That's what we've got here. Actions need to speak louder than words. The collection's got to be taken and the promise has got to be made and fulfilled.

We've got to walk the talk, folks. We've got to do what we say when it comes to giving, because time will go by, feelings will fade, resolve will collapse, things will get in the way, and we will fail to fulfill our promises to God. Whether it's a pledge to church or a ministry or missions, good intentions achieve nothing by themselves. That's why it's been well said God save us from people who mean well. Make sure that you follow through, that you complete what you promised. Don't make a half-hearted commitment. Make a wholehearted commitment and make sure you wholly fulfill it.

I like the story I came across in a book, *The American Spirit*, written by David McCullough, a great writer, has written several bios on great Americans. This was a compilation of essays and lectures that he gave at the Naval Academy, at the Congress, at the Senate, and the Library of Congress, great lectures on America's history, America's beginnings, America's founding fathers. In this particular chapter I was reading, he talked about how the presidency kind of comes of age under Theodore Roosevelt, where America kind of in ways that it had never done before steps onto the world stage and embraces its role among the nations. The president is seen in some ways for the first time as a world leader.

Roosevelt kind of reinforces that. He's the driving force behind the Panama Canal. He's a larger than life figure. He's the one that officially calls the White House the White House. He was the first president to get on an airplane. He was the first president to go down in a submarine.

One of the stories I like the most about him in this promoting of the presidency and this displaying of American power comes from that he decides to show America's power on the sea and he wants to send the Navy around the world, just to go from city to city and country to country showing America's power and its naval might. He had enough money to get them halfway there, but not enough money to bring them back. But being the kind of man that he was, he decided, given the fact that Congress indicated they were unwilling to give him the rest of the money, he just launched the ships anyway. He figured if he could get them halfway around the world, the Congress would have to bring them the other half. We're not going to leave the American Navy in Constantinople. We're going to bring the boys home.

He kind of forced their hand. "I'm going to get them halfway around and you guys are going to get them the other half." He kind of forced the hand of the Congress. Theodore Roosevelt is becoming to me one of the most interesting of the American presidents. But the point of my story taking his story is the Navy's got to come home. "You can't leave them halfway around the world. We've got to complete this tour. I financed half of it, and you guys are going to finance the other half whether you like it or not. Complete it."

That's kind of Paul's argument here. We're halfway into this. You've been moved to help the saints in Jerusalem. You've made pledges and promises. Titus has come, and now it's time to complete this thing. It's now time to come full circle.

Here's another thought about grace giving. Grace giving is considered. It's thoughtful. It's reflected upon. Grace giving is considered. It's not just thorough and it's complete, it's thoughtful and it's considered. It's not a spur of the moment thing. It's not an emotional thing. It's calculated. It's considered. It's planned. It's thought out. Grace giving is not left to chance. It's not left to feelings. It's not left to circumstances. No, grace giving is the product of prayer and meditation and thought.

Let me show you this. Look at chapter 9 and verse 7. As I said, we're skipping and jumping across this passage. Here's what Paul says. "So let each one give as," notice these words, "He purposes in his heart." The giving is purposeful. It's thoughtful. It's planned. It's thought out. "As he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity, for God loves a cheerful giver."

In fact, let's go back to the passage that launches these two passages, back in the first letter in chapter 16. "Now concerning the collection for the saints (in Jerusalem), as I have given orders to the churches in Galatia, so you must do also. On the first day of the week, let each one of you lay aside something, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collection when I come." Again, it sounds like a

deliberate act, doesn't it? "As the weekend approaches, you folks in Corinth, I want you to think about how much you're going to set aside and store up for the collection."

We see in both those verses this idea of premeditation and purpose. Premeditation and purpose. Not whim, not emotion, not the moment. Premeditation and purpose.

In fact, this passage in 1st Corinthians 16:1 to 4 is kind of an echo of the Old Testament in the sense if you study the Old Testament, the believer under the old covenant gave systematically and regularly, because giving in the Old Testament was attached to holidays and festivals, whether Passover where they celebrated their deliverance from Egypt in the Exodus, or the Feast of the Tabernacles, or the Feast of First Fruits. At different times of the year, the Jewish believer went up with their tithes and offerings to God's house. It wasn't left to chance. There was a date, there was a day, and there was an amount. You went up to Jerusalem and you celebrated with the nation.

Now, we're going to see in a moment that tithing is not commanded in the New Testament, and there's kind of this decentralizing of faith in the New Testament where instead of God having a temple for his people he has a people for his temple and they're spread out all over the world. It's not located. It's not even confined to one nation. But it doesn't mean there's nothing systematic about the church. I think even here Paul's going, "Hey, you know what? The Jewish believer had a set time where they gave, and they did it in the light of God's redemption and work in their life. I suggest on the first day of the week, Christians should set aside an amount to support the gospel or relieve the saints. They ought to do it I'd say the first day of the week's the best day, why? Because that's the day Jesus rose from the dead. That will remind you of the gospel and the liberty that you have. In the light of God's grace, in the light of the liberty you have in Christ you, you ought to give graciously and liberally to God's work."

I'm just saying, folks, that grace giving is considered. It's thoughtful. It's planned. It's not left to whim. It's laid aside purposefully. That's why I'd say this to you, don't wait to give until your begged to do so. Don't wait to give until you've paid all your bills and you see what's left to give to the Lord. Don't wait till the end of the year to do all your giving, because you generally will give less than you would if you gave every week or every month.

Don't wait until others give and they prompt you to give. Don't wait till the church's budget gets behind. Don't wait until you have enough money. No, give in a considered, thoughtful, systematic, regularly planned manner. That's the biblical way. That's what you do with grace giving.

Wasn't it Benjamin Franklin who said, "If you fail to plan, you plan to fail"? You need to plan your giving. Be considerate. Left to whim and intuition, very few things in life get done and get done well. It's the same in the Christian life, and it's the same with giving.

Grace giving is costly, consecrated, complete, considered. A couple more and we'll wrap this up. Here's another thought. Grace giving is collective. Grace giving is collective. What do I mean by that? We're kind of picking up on the point I made last week. What are the motivates? The prayers of God, the poverty of God in Jesus, and the people of God. I want to return to this idea that giving to God's work is an expression of a sense of family and solidarity with the saints. We saw that especially when Paul is celebrating and bearing witness to the generosity of the Macedonians, and he wants us to know, "You know what? They were begging us to take the collection, begging us to take the collection."

Look at verse 4, "Imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift." That's the gift for the collection for the saints in Jerusalem. Now, notice what he says, the gift. Here's another motive, "And the fellowship of the ministering of the saints." They didn't give in a detached manner. They gave out of a heart that was bursting for love for God's people, with a sense of ownership of the church and the importance of the church in the life of God's people. Although they were separated by miles and they were faces they had never seen and saints they had never met, they had such a love for the church, they had such a big view of God's kingdom that the saints in Macedonia said, "Paul, we're begging you, take the gift. Take the gift. We want you to take the gift, because it's a demonstration of the fellowship, the partnership, the koinonia, the oneness that we feel with the saints of God."

You and I when we give, when we write a check, when we swipe our card, or we drop something in the boxes on the way out this morning, you must never see that as something that you're doing in isolation from others. In fact, your motive ought to be that this gift will bless others, and support others, and bring the gospel to others. We all cannot give the same, but we all must give, and we all must give out of a sense of solidarity with the saints of God.

Giving is an individual act in a sense, but it's a corporate act also. There's two little aspects to this I'll just drill down into quickly. It requires full participation. It is collective. It's by the saints for the saints, by the saints for the saints. I want you to notice that everybody should be involved. Look at chapter 9 and verse 7 again where Paul says this, "So let each one of you," "So let each one of you give as he purposes in his heart."

Again, if you go back to 1st Corinthians 16 and verse 2, you get a similar thought. "On the first day of the week let each one of you lay aside." That means mothers and fathers, husbands and wives, parents and children, young and old, those who have just come to faith and are new in the faith and those who are many years along the path of the discipleship and are mature in the faith. That means the married. That means the single. That means those who have much and those who have little. "Let each of you purpose in his heart, not grudgingly, not out of necessity, for God loves a cheerful giver."

There's another thing here. Not only is this universal obligation, this privilege of full participation, there's an aspect of reciprocity. There's this sense that we belong to each other. You know what? At this moment in history, the believers, the Greek believers, the Gentile believers in Macedonia and Corinth and giving to the poor believers in Jerusalem, mostly Jewish. There's this sense of unity. The one part of the body is helping another part of the body, not just locally, but globally.

Paul is saying, "You know what? That's where we're at now, but I can envision a day, just say the tables turn and there comes a point where the Jewish believers get through this and the church in Jerusalem begins to prosper. Then the ill wind of change comes, and something happens, and the believers in Macedonia struggle in a future day. I'd like to believe that the tables can be turned and someday the believers who are now being helped in Jerusalem from Macedonia will help the believers in Macedonia from Jerusalem."

Paul actually argues that. I'll give you the verses, verses 13 through 15. Notice what he says, chapter 8, "For I do not mean that others should be eased and you be burdened, but by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may supply their lack or their need, and that (someday) that their abundance may supply your lack, that there may be equality." The body looking after itself, that Christians across the world think about Christians across the world and give generously.

You know what? In God's providence you'll find that when you invest in others, there's a sweetness that someday they just turn around and invest in you. There's this reciprocity. There's this equality. There's this unity that marks the people of God.

I was fascinated and struck to learn that stories emerged out of the Holocaust that those who survived in the Nazi death camps had an attitude of determined giving. Let me explain as someone explained to me. Those who survived were more likely to be the kind of prisoner who on the verge of starvation still gave a crust of bread to a fellow prisoner, gave a sip of water to a fellow prisoner, gave a scrap of potato to a fellow prisoner. As that unfolded, the person that did that was more likely psychologically and spiritually to survive, because they were a giver, and often that giving also came back to them.

A survivor of Treblinka described it this way. "In our group, we shared everything. The moment one of the group ate something without sharing it, we knew it was the beginning of the end for him." There's that thought of reciprocity. It's a principle in life and it's a principle of giving also.

Okay, two more. Grace giving is commensurate. Grace giving is commensurate. This is again under the manner of grace giving. What do I mean by that? It's commensurate to your income. It's commensurate to your income. Now, here's something I want you to think about. In the New Testament, when it relates to giving, we move from percentage to proportion. It's very important you get this. We move from percentage to proportion.

What do I mean by that? Well, when you go back to the Old Testament under the old covenant, the Jewish believer, their giving was tithe based. You know that, tithe based. A tithe was one-tenth of their income. It's interesting. When you go to Malachi chapter 3, they didn't just give one tithe. They give several tithes. That's why Malachi says, "Bring your tithes," plural, "and offerings into the storehouse and see if God won't open the window of heaven and pour you out a blessing."

In fact, commentators and New Testament scholars tell us that when you combine several of the tithes that we find in the New Testament that on average the Jewish believer on an annual basis gave 33% of their income. Now remember, they weren't just giving to the temple, but they were giving to the administration of the government, to kings, to the upkeep of the military. In a sense, back in the Old Testament it was a combination of what we would call kind of taxes to the government and giving to the Lord's work.

That aside, the point I want you to realize is that in the Old Testament, their giving was defined, although beyond that they could give freewill offerings that would go beyond that. It's not like that was it. It could be more than it. But when we get to the New Testament, there is not a command anywhere in the New Testament that you and I need to tithe.

Now, some would argue it's just assumed and grace doesn't produce anything less than the Law. I can embrace that. I'm not saying you have to. June and I have always kind of operated on the basis that a tithe's a good place to start. It's the floor rather than the ceiling as Steven Alford says.

But the point is this, in the New Testament it's freer than that. It's give according to as the Lord has prospered you or according to your ability. It's not a percentage, it's a proportion. God expects you to give a proportion of every wage packet to him in the light of the cross, in the light of his goodness and mercy, in the light of his lavish love. Now that's challenging. That's challenging.

You ever get the impression from people that grace makes it easier? No, I think grace makes it more responsible and more responsive. The point is, "Okay, I'm not going to give you a percentage," says God, "But you're going to come up with that percentage in the light of my prospering you." That's a challenge.

Let me root it in the text and make an application. Look at chapter 8 and verse 3 concerning the Macedonians. Notice, they gave according to their ability. Nothing there about a percentage. Nothing there about a designated amount. They gave according to their ability. In fact, they just didn't stop there. They gave beyond their ability. They gave when it didn't make sense. They gave when the numbers didn't add up. Powerful.

Scroll down to verses 11 and 12 and you'll pick up this idea, verse 12 especially, that they are to give according to what one has. Again, it's according to. It's in the light of your ability. It's in the light of what God has given you. Again, similar thought in chapter 9 verses 8 through 11 where again they're to give as God has prospered them and as they have been enriched. In everything they're to give liberally, verse 11.

Giving is to be commensurate. It's not to be a percentage. It's to be a proportion. You get a similar thought actually, just to take us outside the Corinthian letters, in Acts chapter 11 and verse 29 we read of a relief again for the brothers in Jerusalem and in Judea. "Then the disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren." It's according to one's ability.

But I want to tell you this before we go any further, generosity is the outcome. Generosity is the outcome. Whatever that amount is that you decide, it will always work out to be generous, not stingy, not calculating and miserly, because that's what happens here. I mean the Macedonians gave liberally out of their poverty according to their ability.

A similar thought in chapter 9 verse 5 where Paul expects that whatever the Corinthians are going to give is going to be a matter of generosity. Whatever the amount is, it will be a matter of generosity, because that gift will be given in the light of God's generosity, and how can God's generosity not prompt our generosity? You getting the logic?

Because I think some people think since there is no percentage that they can use that as a back door to escape financial obligations. As I said, grace doesn't produce anything less than the Law. God's prospering of us will lead us to indeed be generous, to not be in slave to our stuff, not allow our souls to be knit to this old world. In fact, you know from 1st Timothy 6 verse 18, Paul says, "To those who are rich, you need to be rich in good works." When God enriches us, it's not to feather our nest. It's not for you and I to live in luxury, although the Bible is not against material prospering.

I think there's a rhythm in the Bible between feasting and fasting. We can enjoy material things at some points in our life. We're not called to austerity anywhere that I see in the Bible. But at the same time, you've got to be careful that that prospering, that material wealth doesn't lead to me, my, and mine only, where we so spend our money and we lose sight of the eternal and the spiritual. There ought to be not only times of feasting, but fasting, when we not only give according to our ability but beyond our ability. If we're going to give beyond our ability, we're not going to buy some stuff that's nice but not necessary.

You know what? You're going to have to be mature about that. Don't get all monastical where all your furniture are cardboard boxes. But on the other hand, while you embrace God's kindness, be wary of materialism and make sure you're giving according to how God has prospered you. Yes, he has given you all things to enjoy, but he has also given you money to be rich in good words. By the way, I think every one of us this morning, given what we have and the way we live, would be considered rich in the New Testament.

In fact, I think C.S. Lewis is helpful here, probably answers best the question for us. What is the question? Just how much should I give? Because, Pastor, you haven't given me a percentage. That would be easy. I'd know what to shoot for. No, you see, it's to be a heart issue. It's to be an expression of what God's doing in your life through the gospel. That's what we're going to find out in your giving.

How much is enough or how much should it be? Let's listen to C.S. Lewis in Mere Christianity. This is good. "I do not believe one should settle how much we ought to give. I am afraid the only safe way is to give more than we can spare. In other words, if our expenditure on comforts, luxuries, amusements is up to the standard common among those with the same income as ours, we are probably giving away too little. If our charities do not at all pinch or hamper us, I should say they are expenditures are too small. There ought to be things we should like to do and cannot do because our charity's expenditure excludes them."

That's good. That's helpful. He's being practical. He's just saying, "Hey, I'm not going to give you an amount. I'm not even sure what that amount is, but here's what I'm going to do. I'm going to err on the side of generosity. I want to make sure as I look back on the year that has passed, were there things I was going to do that I didn't do because I wanted to give not only according to my ability but beyond my ability? Have I ever felt the pinch of giving by grace? Because if I haven't felt the pinch and if I haven't given some things up, I'm probably not giving what I ought to in the light of God's prospering of me." That's a good word.

Because you see, our giving ought to be cheerful. That's the last thought this morning. Grace giving is cheerful, commensurate and cheerful. Life touched and transformed by the grace of God is a life that find giving a happy experience. When you find the check, when you swipe the card, when you put something in the box, is it a happy experience, or are you having second thoughts? "I'm not sure I can afford that, but here it goes. It's what Christians do," or is it, "Hey, I'm so blessed. This is a happy experience. It is a way for me to just show in tangible ways God's goodness and mercy to me. I know this is going to support the gospel, going to help our pastors, going to support our missionaries, going to be the upkeep of the building so that we're not embarrassed to bring people on the property, all of that"?

Go to chapter 9 and verse 7. We read it earlier, but this is where my thought comes from. "So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly nor out of necessity, for God loves a cheerful giver." The Greek there gives us our English word hilarious. God loves a hilarious giver, a happy giver. That's why, by the way, throughout this chapter the words freely and willingly will come up again and again. Because if you're a happy giver, you're going to give willingly and freely.

Let me give you a couple of verses as we move towards a close. Verse 12, he talks about first a willing mind concerning the Corinthians. Again, verse 19, he talks a ready mind that's willing to give to this collection to the glory of the Lord himself. In verse 2, he talks, "For I know your willingness," of chapter 9. Verse 5 of chapter 9, again he talks about their giving is a matter of generosity and something that

they were willing to do. It's not going to be something that is a grudging obligation. Then finally verse 7, be cheerful. The Lord loves that.

You realize there's three types of givers according to verse 7 of chapter 9? The tearful giver, the fearful giver, and the cheerful giver. The tearful giver gives begrudging, can hardly part with his money. The fearful giver gives out of necessity, out of compulsion, out of a fear of God. "If I don't do this, God'll curse me." They're working from the wrong end of the equation. There's the tearful, fearful, and then there's the cheerful giver who gladly parts with their gift according to God's prosperity, because according to verse 8 God's grace enables them to abound in every good work. They give out of grace, a celebration of grace, an experience of grace.

Or as someone else put it, if you were to put these three givers, the tearful, fearful, cheerful giver into other categories, some have said that there are three kind of givers in the church, the flint, the sponge, and the honeycomb. To get anything out of a flint, you've got to hammer it. to get anything out of a sponge, you've got to squeeze it. But the honeycomb just overflows with its own sweetness. We need honeycomb givers. We need cheerful givers.

As we wrap up, I just wrote down a few things that will help you and I to become cheerful givers, reasons for cheerful giving. Because remember, Acts 20 verse 35, "It's more blessed to give than to receive."

Number one, cheerful giving is something you and I should want because in giving we become an answer to someone's prayer. Is that not a happy thought? Someone right now on the mission field, in our church, somewhere nearby us a ministry or whatever is in need, and people in that ministry or people in that situation are praying. Then God moves you to give, and that gift meets the need, and they become happy, and you become happy that they're happy. You become happy that you're an answer to their prayers.

I'll give you another reason, because you're investing in eternity and souls. Someday in heaven you're going to meet someone who said, "Thank you for supporting that missionary that brought the gospel to my village for the first time and I heard the gospel."

Number three, you're participating in something big. There's a joy to being part of something big beyond yourself, feeling that you belong to something marvelous. It's like going to a sports stadium and watching a game. It's one thing to watch what's going on on the field, but part of the experience, part of the joy of going to like a football game is the experience of you're part of something big.

God willing, Santa coming, I'm going to the Rose Bowl to watch my beloved Buckeyes. I can tell you, I'm going to love everything I see, I hope, on the field. But I'll tell you, I'll be there a couple of hours before the game. I'll be mixing up with some families in our church who are going to it also. I'll be meeting with friends. We'll be visiting vendors. We'll be eating hot dogs. We'll be buying some shirts. We'll be just rubbing shoulders with what we call the Buckeye nation. We'll be doing our O-H and I-O thing. Then you'll get into the stadium, and you'll look across, and half the stadium will be a sea of scarlet, and gray, and white. There's a joy to it. I love it. Part of something big.

Same in the church, that when you give to the church, you're giving to something big. God's missionaries and servants all across the world, you're financing them. Little congregations dotted in villages, in the

plains of Africa and the jungles of South America, and the cities of Asia, the gospel's going forth with our help. Thrilling. It makes you a cheerful giver.

Another reason to be a cheerful giver, because it helps grow you. It helps mature you. It helps you work out in your life the warning that Jesus gives. You can't love God and love money. As you work out and manage your finances in a god glorifying way, the Spirit of God blesses that and empowers you. There's something joyful about that.

It's been well said that giving is God's way not of raising money, but of raising Christians. It brings pleasure to God, doesn't it? He loves a cheerful giver. I don't know. Do you not like to bring pleasure to God? If he loves cheerful givers, then you'll love being one because it means he find pleasure in it, because he sees in your life and my life a reflection of the grace of his Son being worked out in gracious giving.

As the team comes up, you've heard the lines haven't you of the hymn, "Take my silver and my gold, not a mite would I withhold"? You've sang it a whole lot of times. Frances Ridley Havergal, she wrote a song about dedication, consecration, Take My Life and Let it Be. I want to tell you, she lived those lines. Those aren't just poetic flourish. This woman did what she described. In fact, when she was writing that hymn, she also at that time in her life gathered up all her gold and all her silver, all her jewelry, and she packed it off to a missionary society in England as an expression of her love for the gospel.

In fact, she said that one of her jewelry boxes was fit for a countess. There was that much silver and gold in it. But she said this, "I don't need to tell you that I never packed a box with such pleasure." She happily said, "Lord, take my silver and my gold. Not a mite will I withhold."

Lord, we thank you for us Son, who although rich yet for our sakes he became poor, that we through his poverty might be made rich. We thank you he made himself of no reputation, he clothed himself in humanity to the degree that walking down the street people didn't realize it was the very Son of God. He set aside the independent use of his prerogatives. All the glory, all the rich worship of the angels were all suspended and set aside so that we might be saved, enriched by the grace of God, and made the children of God.

God, in the light of that, may we be generous givers. May we be honeycombs that just sweetly exude a spirit of giving out of grace. Help us to remember what the apostle said in those early days, "Silver and gold have I none, but such as I have, give I thee. In the name of Jesus, rise up and walk." Lord, we're richer than they were, but I'm not sure we're more powerful. Perhaps prosperity has knit our souls to this old world. We're making contributions but not sacrifices. We're giving beneath our ability, not according to our ability, because we're living for ourselves, we're living for creaturely comforts while the work of God lacks, where preachers beginning, where it's giving that's begrudging and out of necessity rather than cheerful and free. Continue to work in our hearts through this passage, for we ask it in Jesus' name, amen.