

“The Grace of Giving”
II Corinthians 8:1-15
Mililani Community Church
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OUTLINE

When the subject of stewardship is mentioned, some people immediately think of tithing. There is nothing wrong with tithing. Tithing was the Old Testament way of giving. However, in the New Testament there is a much higher standard of giving.

I. The First Essential in Giving (1-7)

First essential in giving is the giving of OURSELVES to the Lord.

“Grace has symptoms: People who have genuinely experienced God’s grace will demonstrate liberality in their giving.” (Joel Belz – “Giving Less, believing less?”, World, Dec. 27, 1997)

II. Supreme Example of Giving (8-9)

1. The Extent of His Grace (9a)

2. The Results of His Poverty (9b)

III. Guidelines for Christian Giving (10-12)

1. The principle of personal willingness (11)

The acceptability of the gift depends not on the amount but the personal WILLINGNESS of the giver.

2. The principle of proportionate giving (12)

The one who has more will be able to give not only a greater amount but a greater PROPORTION.

MESSAGE

Please open your Bibles this morning to the book of II Corinthians 8.

We are in a message series this month on the topic of biblical giving. II Corinthians 8-9 is the longest passage in the NT on the subject of giving. And it is the central passage on the subject.

It is also a very exciting passage of Scripture. I believe that when we discover the principles that God gives us here and begin to apply them in our lives it will result in "overflowing joy" in giving.

For the next two weeks we are going to discover these wonderful principles – in a two part series, "The Grace of Giving"

When the subject of Christian giving is mentioned – many people immediately think of tithing. And there is nothing wrong with tithing.

But we are going to find that in the NT there is a much higher standard of giving than the tithe.

Under the Law of Moses the children of Israel acknowledged God's ownership of their lives and property by payment of the tithe.

The tithe was not an offering in the strict sense of the term. It was an obligation placed on everyone under the law. An Israelite did not decide whether he should pay the tithe or not. He had to pay the tithe or become a lawbreaker.

Actually there were three tithes commanded by the law:

- 1) First, Israel was commanded to pay **tithes to the Levites** for their service on behalf of God in the Tabernacle (Lev. 27:30-32; Num. 18:21).
- 2) Second, there was a **tithe for the feasts and sacrifices**, which the offerer himself and his family were to eat in the presence of the LORD at the tabernacle (Deut. 14:22-26).
- 3) Third, there was a **tithe every third year for the poor** – aliens fatherless and widows (Deut. 14:28-29).

So the tithe was an obligation on every Israelite. But in addition to the tithes, godly Israelites also gave offerings to God (Deuteronomy 12:11).

In the OT we find that many Israelites disobeyed God and did not bring the tithe as they had been commanded.

Malachi delivered a message to the people of Israel that they had robbed God (Malachi 3:8-10). READ.

Many seek to apply these passages directly to the Christian today.

We can definitely glean principles from these OT teachings, but in the dispensation of grace our giving is not based on a legal obligation as it was for Israel in the OT.

There is no commandment in the NT from Jesus or the Apostles that says the Christian must tithe. We live in the dispensation of grace not the dispensation of the law. Paul says in Romans 6:14: ***“You are not under law but under grace.”***

If a believer decides in his heart out of love for the Lord Jesus Christ that he will give a tenth of his earnings to the Lord, he is at liberty to do so and God will bless him. But we should not do it as though it is a legal obligation.

Many believers use the tithe as a convenient measuring stick – believing that we ought to be willing under **grace** to do at least as much as an Israelite was **required** to do under the **law**.

J. Vernon McGee: “I can’t believe that any Christian today who has a good income should give less than a tenth.”

The big question then is: What is the standard for Christian giving under grace?

Let’s turn now to II Corinthians 8 for ...

I. THE FIRST ESSENTIAL IN GIVING (Let’s read the first seven verses).

HERE WE LEARN THAT THE FIRST ESSENTIAL OF CHRISTIAN GIVING IS GIVING OF OURSELVES TO THE LORD.

When Paul was on his third missionary journey one of his main projects was a collection for the poverty-stricken saints in Jerusalem.

We don't know for sure why they were so poor. Perhaps because of famine or persecution – or for a combination of reasons. But we know they were in extreme need.

Paul was visiting the Gentile churches in Macedonia and Southern Greece (Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea – and Corinth) to ask them to support these fellow-believers in Jerusalem.

Paul is writing to the Corinthians to urge them to complete their collection which they had begun a year earlier. Various problems had come up that caused them to delay. Now Paul is saying it is time to complete what they started (6).

In chapter 8, he starts by using the Macedonians Christians as an example that can encourage the believers at Corinth to give generously. *“And now, brothers, we want you to know about **the grace that God has given** the Macedonian churches ...”*

Even though these believers were poor in material things, they excelled in generosity and liberality.

A key word in these two chapters is **grace**. It occurs 10 times.

Paul did not say that they gave so generously because they had merely a **warm-hearted concern or because they had the aloha spirit**.

Paul said it was because of the **grace** that God had given them.

The credit belonged to God's grace – not simply their superior responsiveness.

Their generous giving to the Lord's work was evidence that God had been working in their hearts.

The thing that made the contribution so impressive was the **circumstances** in which they gave ... *“Out of the most severe trial...”*

They were hated and attacked by unbelievers. They were in serious economic need. But this did not deter them.

They were overflowing with joy that suffering could not take away.

They gave out of their poverty, they gave out of their affliction, and they gave with great joy.

They gave as much as they were able – and beyond their ability.

They gave entirely on their own. Not threatened. Not brow-beaten. Not pressured.

When they hear that Paul is going to send a gift to the saints in Jerusalem, they are there begging, "Please, please let us give!"

(In spite of persecution and poverty) they did not want to miss out on the grace of giving – the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints.

They had learned **THE FIRST ESSENTIAL OF CHRISTIAN GIVING.**

"They gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us."

In the Macedonian Christians, we see **Romans 12:1 exemplified:**

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service of worship (NKJV).

After giving them the gospel, Paul calls the Romans to put themselves on the altar, so to speak, presenting their bodies as a living sacrifice, which he says is "your reasonable service of worship."

- If you understand the great gift that God has given us in His Son.
- If you understand that Jesus was born to die in order that you and I who were dead in our trespasses and sins might have the gift of eternal life.
- If you understand that Jesus who knew no sin was made to be sin for us ...

Then what can you do but respond in worship and "present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service of worship"

Scholars believe that Paul is alluding to the **burnt offering**. In the

burnt offering (the animal) was cut and flayed, and everything was put on the altar. Then it was consumed by fire, and it went up to God.

In this passage, God is saying, "I am asking you to do this."

In Greek this is in the **aorist** tense, which means that it is once for all action in past time. In other words this sacrifice is a one-time presentation. It is a once-for-all offering.

The Macedonians had put themselves at God's disposal FIRST.

Now they were eager to give to this project because it was part of a DEEPER DEDICATION to God Himself.

Someone has said that "the pocketbook or the wallet is a sort of acid test of the reality of our surrender to the Lord Jesus Christ."

In a World Magazine article entitled "Giving Less, believing less?" Joel Belz writes: "Grace has symptoms. If one does not have the symptoms, does one have the condition? Or less obliquely: **People who have genuinely experienced God's grace will demonstrate liberality in their giving.** If liberality in giving is not in evidence, have those people genuinely experienced God's grace?"

Giving ourselves to God makes the difference.

It changes our perspective on money and material things.

In verses 6-7 Paul applies this to the Corinthians. He challenges them to "bring to completion this act of grace on your part."

You excel in so many ways: I want to see you excel in the grace of giving too!

- You excel in faith: a continuing attitude of trust in Him for guidance and the supply of your needs.
- You excel in speech: ability to give expression to their faith – to share their faith effectively with others.
- You excel in knowledge: understanding of spiritual truth.
- You excel in complete earnestness: earnestness with which they pursued their Christian lives.

- You excel in your love for us.

Round all these qualities out by excelling in the GRACE of GIVING.

He says he is not **COMMANDING** them. He is **ENCOURAGING** them to prove the sincerity of their love for the Lord.

Paul now moves on to present the Lord Jesus Christ as ...

II. THE SUPREME EXAMPLE OF GIVING (8-9)

OUR SUPREME EXAMPLE OF GIVING IS THE LORD JESUS HIMSELF: *“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor so that you through his poverty might become rich.”*

Grace is God’s favor shown to those who deserve only His condemnation.

Grace cannot be deserved or merited.

It can not be earned. It can’t be paid for.

Grace is freely bestowed by God.

The *“grace of our Lord Jesus Christ”* is seen in the fact that *“though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that you through his poverty might become rich.”*

How rich was the Lord Jesus? To ask how rich Jesus was **is in effect** to ask how rich God is, because Jesus Christ is God. He is one of the persons of the Trinity: John 1:1

He is the creator and sustainer of the whole universe: Col. 1:15-17

The universe came into being at His word. So it all belongs to Him.

Since he is God, all that exists owes its existence to Him and is under His control.

He is the center of attention and the object of worship of all the holy angels which he also created. Isaiah had a vision of the throne of God and he saw the seraphim around God’s throne calling out to one

another – *“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!”* (Isaiah 6:3).

The Apostle John quoted this passage and referred it to Christ. He said: “These things Isaiah said when he saw **His glory** and spoke of Him” (John 12:41).

How poor did he become?

When he came into this world and became a man, he was not born to prestige and power and wealth. He was born in the midst of poverty.

Mary and Joseph came from the royal line of David, but they were poor people.

In Luke 2:24 when Mary presented the infant Jesus in the temple she offered “a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.” Luke says this was in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord. But the usual offering designated in the Law of the Lord was “a lamb of the first year as a burnt offering.” The offering Mary brought was provided for in the Law of Moses for the mother who could not afford a lamb (Lev. 12:8).

But the physical and material poverty was just a minor part of the poverty Paul is referring to in II Corinthians 8:9. The contrast the Bible makes is between the glory Jesus had from all eternity with the Father and His earthly condition. He was the object of the worship of angels. Then he came into the world of woe to endure rejection, misunderstanding and hostility from sinners.

From all eternity he experienced perfect unbroken fellowship with the triune Godhead as the object of the Father’s love. Then he became on the cross an object of God’s wrath for our sakes.

This is the heart of the gospel.

“He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in him” (II Corinthians 5:21).

Philippians 2:5 explains what this is really talking about. **Read Philippians 2:5ff.**

In Philippians 2 Paul uses the incarnation as the pattern for how we should treat one another.

Now in II Corinthians 8 he uses the same great pater to inspire and encourage us to be generous givers.

This becomes the divine basis and standard of our giving as Christians.

As that great hymn puts it:

O Jesus, Lord and Savior,
I give myself to Thee,
For Thou, in Thy atonement,
Didst give Thyself for me; I own no other Master,
My heart shall be Thy throne;
My life I give, henceforth to live,
O Christ, for Thee alone.

He was rich and became poor so that we through his poverty might become rich.

How rich are we now?

God has not promised earthly riches. But he has promised to supply our needs.

“And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:19).

Our salvation in Christ is more valuable than all the treasures of this world: “What will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?” (Mark 8:36).

If you know Jesus you are rich with the only riches that ultimately count:

1. Forgiveness of sins:

Ephesians 1:7 – “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace.”

2. The gift of righteousness:

How righteous do you have to be to get to heaven? The only valid answer is that you need to be as righteous as Jesus Christ.

That is the gift God gives when we receive Him by faith. In God's eyes God sees the righteousness of Jesus Christ as belonging to us.

"He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (II Cor. 5:21).

This is known theologically as the **doctrine of double imputation**: Our sin has been imputed or charged to Christ. His righteousness is imputed or charged to our account when we place our trust in Him.

This salvation that we have in Christ also includes

3. The Gift of Eternal life:

John 3:16 – that whosoever believes in him shall not perish but have everlasting life.

So Paul has used the example of the Macedonian Christians and above all the example of the Lord Jesus giving Himself for us.

Paul exhorted the Corinthians to follow these examples. That is our responsibility also.

Christ's sacrifice on the cross is the **model** of Christian generosity and the **motivation** for Christian generosity.

Now we come to the third point in this passage...

III. GUIDELINES FOR GENEROUS GIVING (10-12)

Verse 10: ***"And here is my advice about what is best for you in this matter: Last year you were the first not only to give but also to have the desire to do so. Now finish the work, so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it, according to your means."***

Notice the emphasis on willingness. Paul does not present giving as a matter of **compulsion**. He talks about the fact that they had a desire to give and they had a eager willingness.

- 1. The first guideline for Christian giving is a willing mind. Personal willingness.**

He blesses us by permitting us to have a part in His work **of our own free will**.

If Paul thought of the tithe as binding on Christians as a legal **obligation** he would not have used this kind of language.

The Corinthians were initially willing to give. They were the first to have a desire to give and the first to give.

Now he says, complete the work. Bring to completion this act of grace on your part

We see here in the area of money the same approach God uses in relation to our entire life.

God has a double claim on our lives. He created us. He also bought us with a price.

But he does not coerce or compel.

He prefers that we respond willingly.

Verse 12: *“For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what he does not have.”*

God looks on our heart. The acceptability of the gift does not depend on the amount. It depends on the personal willingness of the giver. If someone says, I don't have much so I won't give anything – has not learned ***the principle of the willing mind***. God does not keep books like we do. Remember what Jesus said about the poor widow – she gave more than all the rest.

Secondly there is

2. The principle of proportionate giving

Verse 11-12: “Now finish the work, so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it, according to your means. For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what he does not have.”

This principle is not merely a certain set percentage for all alike.

It implies that the one who has more will be able to give not only a greater amount, but also a greater PROPORTION. Give as God has prospered you.

CONCLUSION

There is a famous story about a businessman named R. G. Letourneau. He was the founder of the Letourneau Westinghouse Corporation. He made a commitment as a young man to give his business to God. Eventually he was giving away 90% of his income and living on 10%. As his business prospered he used to say, I keep shoveling it out and God keeps shoveling it in, but He has a bigger shovel.

The story is told by J. Vernon McGee about one of the men in his church who owned several Coca-Cola plants during the depression. He also owned a ranch where they used to go out to hunt and fish. He asked McGee why he never taught on tithing (This man appeared to be proud that he tithed). McGee said, I believe in what the Bible teaches about proportionate giving. For some who have experienced God's blessing financially a tithe would be too little – They might well be able to give fifty percent or more of their income to the Lord. This man never again asked McGee to preach on tithing!! (**see p. 128 – JVM exposition of II Corinthians**).

May the Lord give us a willing mind to give generously to His work as He has prospered us, out of gratitude for the grace of God which we have experienced in Christ.

Amen.

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