

The Grace of Giving

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[0:00] Because of what we're going to be doing tonight, eventually, and I'm going to try not to take too long in the sermon portion of it, but because of what we're going to be doing as a church tonight as we look at the budget and discuss that, I'm going to deviate from Romans.

And so, take your Bibles and turn to 2 Corinthians chapter 8. 2 Corinthians chapter 8, and I'm going to read here in just a minute.

I'm going to take verses 1 through 15, though the focus is really going to begin with verse 6 through 15. It's a marvelous text. On giving, that's the subject tonight.

Imagine that. Here we are, you know, going to be discussing a budget and the pastor's talking about giving. And I hope that I will not turn anybody off here tonight.

It has, I think, almost become a joke, really, though it's not funny, that when preachers get on the subject of money, you know, or the giving of money to the church, then, you know, typically, a lot of God's people, and you exclude it.

[1:35] All right. All right. But a lot of God's people kind of turn that off, you know, kind of tune out when the subject gets on to giving. Am I right about that?

No. No. Right. Now, it's not, however, as if we don't like to think about money.

Because we do. We do like to think about it and talk about it. And as a matter of fact, studies have shown that the average American... Now, hold on.

I mean, get this. The average American spends 50% of his or her time thinking about money. 50%. I don't know if those, you know, statistics are correct. You know, the... I don't know what survey was done or what kind of research was done to generate that.

[2:31] So, I really kind of doubt that it's 50%, don't you? It's probably more like 80%. Just thinking about money, you know.

And so, I think it's safe to make this conclusion. Whether it's 50% or something greater than that, which I suspect that it is. It's safe to conclude that most Americans are obsessed with money.

Obsessed about it. Either the fear of losing it or, and or, both, the fantasy of making more of it.

And, and points in between there. And, uh, that's just, uh, kind of where we are. I heard a preacher say that in our country, uh, there are really three classes of people.

There are the haves, and there are the have-nots, and there are the have-not paid for what the haves. Yet. Sherry and I, uh, used to, uh, when we could find it on TV, used to watch old reruns of the Jack Benny show.

[3:38] You said, you're old enough to see the original shows. No, really not. Uh, but we'd watch the old reruns. Or sometimes we would rent them, you know, or check them out at the library.

And I just, I enjoy that. Uh, the old Jack Benny shows. Even like to listen to some of the old Jack Benny radio programs. But anyway. You know one of the famous routines.

Jack Benny. I guess there are several of them. But here's Jack walking along. And out jumps a robber, and he sticks a gun in his back. And he says, your money or your life?

And there's a pause. And the robber gets a little impatient. And he says, well? To which Jack responds, I'm thinking, I'm thinking.

You know. And so, money, you know. Americans are, I think it's safe to say, obsessed with money. And we all think about it quite a bit.

[4:36] And it's valid to think about it. In the right context. And with the right kind of spirit. And so forth. But not to be obsessed with it. And not just obsessed with the thought of it.

But certainly not to be obsessed with the love of it. As the Bible says, the love of money is the root of all sorts, all kinds of evil.

Alright? And so, that being the case, when a preacher like me stands up behind the pulpit and starts talking about believers giving their money, you know, to the church.

Then maybe there is at least the temptation to kind of tune that out. Or kind of turn that off. Yet, the Apostle Paul has some, I think, some pretty important things to say to Christians about giving.

And what the Bible does. In fact, the Bible spends a lot of black print. Speaking to us about money. And the proper use of money. And so forth.

[5 : 38] But in this text, Paul gives us some important things about it. About giving. And I think his words are motivational. They're not harsh words.

And, you know, sometimes we preachers can be guilty. And are guilty of being kind of harsh. And, you know, offensive in some way. But Paul's words are not that way.

They're very motivational. And he really has a very persuasive way. As we're going to see. Kind of a persuasive way.

He uses persuasion, in a sense, to encourage the believers here at the church of Corinth to give.

To give. Now, let me say on the front end, before we look at the text, that the subject here, Paul's subject, is not tithing.

That would be another sermon. Though, I think the principles, I believe the principles we're going to learn about giving apply to tithing as well. But Paul's not going to issue any commands in here.

[6 : 41] He's not issuing a command to the church of Corinth to give to, in this case, a special offering to meet people's needs. The church's need.

So, it's not tithing. Though, again, now keep this in mind. The things we're going to be discussing and learning about a giving spirit apply to tithing as well as giving over and above the tithe.

I believe in tithing. I believe it's scriptural. I believe there is a command to tithe. And I do not believe it's just Old Testament. Now, that's been abolished. And now, in New Testament, we have no command to tithe.

I believe it carries over into the New Testament. I'll probably mention that a little bit later. Okay?

Let's just read the text. Or let me read it. You read along. Follow along in your Bibles.

Chapter 8, 2 Corinthians. And I'm going to start with verse 1. Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia.

[7 : 44] 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 ministry to the saints.

Not only as we have 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.

I speak not by commandment, but I am testing the sincerity of your love by the diligence of others. Others, a reference to the church at Macedonia. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that you through his poverty might become rich.

[9 : 04] And in this I give advice. It is to your advantage not only to be doing what you began and were desiring to do a year ago, but now you also must complete the doing of it, that as there was a readiness to desire it, so there also may be a completion out of what you have.

And he's speaking of them giving an offering. For if there is first a willing mind, it is acceptable according to what one has, and not according to what he does not have.

For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened, but by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may supply their lack, that their abundance also may supply your lack, that there may be equality.

As it is written, He who gathered much had nothing left over, and he who gathered little had no lack.

All right. Now, I want to draw from this text four or five things very quickly that we need to understand about giving, about a spirit of giving, really about what I believe Paul would label the grace of giving, the grace of giving.

In fact, if you'll look there again in verse 6, you'll find the word grace there. And so, number one, get this down, there is the, in giving, or giving represents or demonstrates, the perfection of grace.

[10:46] The perfection of grace. Now, let me explain. Verse 6, he said, So we urge Titus. Now, where does Titus come into play here? Well, Titus had apparently, formerly been sent by Paul to the church in Corinth to encourage them, to urge them to collect the collection, the gift for the church in Jerusalem.

And so now Titus is being sent again. I think there were two times that he went. And so he said, We urge Titus that as he had begun, that is this gathering of an offering that he had led you to begin, so that he would also complete this, what?

Grace. In you as well. Now, we're talking about, Paul's talking about giving. He's talking about taking a collection. Now, we would assume, I think it's safe to assume, that we're talking about money that was collected.

That the church there is collecting. Money. It could be some other items, but I think primarily money. And so Paul is saying, I've sent Titus. He began this thing.

I'm sending him again to complete what he began. And what did he begin? Or what is it that he needs to complete? The grace in you. It's their giving.

[12:05] And he calls it grace. It's the grace of giving. Did you know that giving is one of the most important Christian graces? Giving is.

Giving is a grace. That's very clear here in verse 6. You can back up to verse 1 as he is describing or referring to this very poor church in Macedonia who has also put together an offering, taken a collection.

And he says, There more of a brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia. The subject is giving.

And it is the grace of giving. The Corinthian believers were being commended here. In fact, he commends them in verse 7.

What does he commend them of? Look at it. Verse 7. As you abound in everything. What was he commending them for? Their faith. Their speech.

[13:07] That would be their witness. Their knowledge. Their diligence. That is, they were hard workers. And he commended them for that. And also their love for us, he says.

That is, their desire to love and provide for and help their spiritual leaders. That would be Paul and the other apostles. But, the perfection of Christian grace is giving.

A spirit of giving. And Paul is, in effect, as he closes that verse, verse 7. He is saying that we want, I want to commend you for that as well. He says there, look at it.

That you abound in this grace also. What grace? What is the grace? This offering. This giving. Giving out of your abundance.

Giving from what God has blessed you with. So that others' needs can be met. The grace of giving. Alright, so there is the perfection of grace.

[14:10] Number two, grace, or giving rather, demonstrates not only the perfection of grace, but the proof of love. It demonstrates the proof of love.

Genuine love. Verse 8. Paul said, I speak not by commandment, but I am testing the sincerity of your love.

And I'm testing it by the diligence of others. Alright? Now, again, and I mentioned this kind of at the outset, that Paul does not give them a command here.

To give. Does not command them to give to this offering. Because the issue here is not tithing. The issue here is giving over and above.

Giving a special offering to, in this case, this special collection. To meet the needs of God's people. At another church. Which is something, by the way, a few Baptists would probably do.

[15:20] You know, we don't necessarily take a collection to help other sister churches. Though, I guess there are times when we do that. But he's not commanding them.

Because the issue is not tithing. Now, we, again, I want to make this very clear. Coming from your pastor. I believe very clearly that the Bible commands us to tithe.

That means to give a tenth of everything that God has given us. He commands us to do that. And it is one of the few commands. In fact, I have said this before. It's the only command, in my judgment, that God issues to us that we can obey perfectly.

We can give ten percent. Other commands that God gives us. We can come close and desire. And by his grace, try to be perfect in obeying all of God's commands to us.

But this command. The command to give a tenth of everything God has blessed you with. You can obey that one hundred percent. Because it's easy to measure. Malachi 3.10, I believe, is a command to not only Old Testament believers, but also New Testament as well.

[16:28] And the reason I say that is because Jesus affirmed it in Matthew 23.23. And we're not going to turn to that text and deal with that issue.

Because that's not really what I wanted to do tonight. But there, Jesus speaks about Pharisees. He says, you give the tithe and you do this and that. And he says, and you ought to do that.

But not leave off other things like love and justice and so forth. And so, I think in that text, Jesus very clearly affirming that the command to tithe a tenth to bring it into the storehouse is, in effect, even in the New Testament.

But this is not the issue here. And so, Paul's not commanding them to give. He is not commanding them what to give. He's not commanding them how much they should give, each one should give. Or setting a goal for them or something like that. Though he could have. He could have, but he did not. Rather, he chose to use, I think, a very effective method of persuasion.

[17:38] He told them about the poor Macedonians. I don't mean poor in the sense that they were, you know, burdened poor or, you know, persecuted more than any other church.

Poor in the sense of economics. They were a poor church. Poor people. And so, he refers to them in his appeal to the Corinthians that they, too, should be givers.

He said, just consider the Macedonians. And I'll remind you again, if you look back there at the first part of chapter 8, how he kind of describes this.

And it's really quite interesting the way he puts it. Tells you a great deal about this church. He says, to make known to you, I want you to know the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia, that in great trial of affliction, the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality.

Though they were very poor, had very little, but they did have some abundance. And out of that, they gave liberally. He said, just think of them.

[18:54] He goes on. He said, for I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing, willing to give.

And so, you know, I don't think Paul is being shameless here, you know. Oh, Paul, you'd have to bring up the Macedonian church, you know.

Try to compare what they're doing with us. You know, I mean, my goodness, all right, get out my pocketbook. He's not using some kind of gimmick or tactic unfairly.

But just reminding us that at the core of it, at the very essence of our giving, it is a demonstration of the genuineness of our love.

Our love, the proof of our love. Because then Paul says here in verse 8, that very truth. That giving of our personal possessions to meet the needs of others proves the reality of our love.

[20:00] Our love for God. Our love for God's people. Our love for His work. Isn't that what he said in verse 8? I speak not by commandment. I don't have to tell you what to do exactly.

But I am testing, proving, really would be a better word, proving. Proving what? The sincerity of your love.

And I'm proving it by comparing it with the diligence of others. Others being the Macedonian church. It was true of the Macedonians. That is, their giving proved their love. The sincerity of their love.

And it will also be true of you and me.

And, you know, it's kind of interesting to me. Though I guess maybe I'm stretching this a little bit.

But, you know, when Paul set out to encourage these New Testament believers to be giving people.

[21:04] To be generous. When he set out, you know, to encourage them to give to a special offering. To raise a special amount of money for the needs of God's people.

He didn't, apparently didn't hold any pep rallies to do that. He didn't, you know, have or institute a pledge drive in the church.

He didn't send out, you know, kind of a mass mailing to all the church members. He didn't, you know, there was no buy a brick campaigns. Have you ever been a part of something like that?

Trying to raise money for a new church building, buy a brick. He didn't do something like that. There wasn't, you know, Titus didn't go there to the church in Corinth and set up a giant thermometer.

You know, you know what I'm talking about? And see, you know, that giving go up and up to reach that goal. He didn't do that.

[22:08] I doubt very seriously they had posters and handbills and bulletins and special things like that. Anything wrong with all those things? I don't think necessarily. I'm not, that's not my point.

But if that's the only way to get it done, then there is something wrong, isn't there? There's something wrong and that thing that is wrong is in our hearts. And what is missing is a genuine spirit of love.

Love for God and His people and His work. And our giving, each of us individually and even collectively as a church, serves as a barometer for the sincerity of our love.

Alright, so number one, the perfection of our spirituality in a sense is revealed through the grace of giving. The proof of our love that we have for God and His church and for His people comes through the giving of our material possessions.

And by the way, the Bible says in that famous passage, For God so loved the world that He gave.

Third, there is the pattern of Christ.

[23:21] Giving is a demonstration of the pattern of Christ. Verse 9. And I guess, you know, if the, you know, bringing up the Macedonian church doesn't work, then Paul is kind of going for it all here.

And rightfully so, he brings up Jesus. And His sacrifice. His giving. The pattern of Christ. Verse 9. For you know, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.

Here's the pattern. Or we might say, the supreme example. So, Jesus was rich for us. And for us, He became poor.

How so? Well, may I remind you of that in Philippians chapter 2 and verse 4? For let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.

Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, being very, in effect, in essence, equal with God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God.

[24:55] That is, He didn't consider it something He had to hold on to, grasp, not let loose of. But made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men, and being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself, became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.

That's pretty clear. See, Jesus was rich, rich beyond compare. In glory. And He left that, put that aside, and became poor for us.

And then Paul says, in that same passage there, that same verse, he says, And you, through His poverty, that you, through His poverty, might become what?

Rich. Rich. How so? Well, let me read another passage to you. 2 Corinthians 5, 21. For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. What an exchange. He became poor that He was rich and became poor, and so that we could be rich, might be rich.

[26:16] Rich in righteousness. And so, what is Paul's point? Well, it's pretty clear. Jesus Christ is the perfect pattern, perfect example of sacrificial giving. He gave His all. And then, number four.

There is the performance of God's people. Verse 10. 10 and 11, as a matter of fact. And in this I give advice.

It is to your advantage, not only to be doing what you began, that is, collecting this offering, and were desiring. Now, it's very key to notice the past tense.

Were, were. You began, you were desiring to do. And just in case you missed the past tense, he said this was a year ago. But now, you also must complete the doing of it.

That as there was a readiness to desire it, so there also may be a completion out of what you have. All right. Now, the point here is, just like the Corinthians church, sometimes, even today, things just happen, don't they, in a church?

[27:31] Things just happen. And a church can, can lose, lose sight of its purpose.

A church can let go by the wayside, a part of the vision that God has given them. Things just happen sometimes.

And, you know, we can lose sight of certain goals that we have. And lose sight of our real purpose and so forth.

And so, you know, there is sometimes a postponed dream. That's what was happening here in Corinth. I don't know what caused it. You know that Paul dealt with quite a number of theological issues in the church.

But apparently, something kind of put them off track. And so, they need to get back to it. Sometimes there are postponed dreams or misplaced visions of ministry or a lost excitement, even, if nothing else.

[28:37] Just a lost excitement about God's work. And the purpose he has for his church. And so, you know, just think about these Corinthian believers.

They were excited about this collection. And they were willing to do it. And yet, it had been a year, a whole year had passed by and they hadn't done it.

And so, the point is, Paul is saying, let's do it. Let's get back on track and do it. So, there is the performance. There is a performance of God's people.

And then one more and I'll be finished. Our giving demonstrates the perfection of grace. The proof of love. The pattern of Christ. The performance of God's people.

And then, finally, and I don't add this to give some of God's people a buy or a way out.

[29:38] But there is the proportion of giving. And I add this because it's in the text. It's not a contrived outline in a sense.

It's just step by step through what Paul is saying to God's people in Corinth. And there is a proportion of giving. Because, you know, some of you might be thinking, whether it's tithing, but especially as it applies to giving over and above the tithes to the church and to special mission projects.

Some might be thinking, well, now, Brother Don, I just don't have much money. I just don't want to have hardly any. Well, what does Paul say here in verse 12 and following? For if there is first a willing mind, that's where it begins.

That's key. Willing mind, it is accepted according to what one has. That is, the offering is going to be accepted according to what you have. Not according to what you don't have.

For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened. But by an equality. That now at this time your abundance.

[30:53] He's not saying that you have an abundance. I mean, this great amount. He's not suggesting that the church of Corinth was a very wealthy church. That's not it. But each of them had some over and above.

Some abundance. God had blessed them. And he's saying that's what we're talking about here.

That their abundance also may supply, or excuse me, but by an equality that now at this time your abundance may supply their lack.

That's what's needed right now. Others who need, God has blessed you, out of that abundance, according to each one's ability, give so that we can meet their lack.

And that their abundance, because sometimes they're going to have more than they need, and that their abundance also may supply your lack. That there may be equality. For it is written, he who hath much had nothing left over.

And he who gathered little had no lack. Now, you see, the idea here is that you give according to how God has blessed you. And so the quantity is not the issue here, is it?

[32:07] The quantity is not the issue. The quality of your faith is the issue. Your faith and obedience. I read a story some years ago about a certain woman who was preparing a care package for a missionary in India.

And she was doing that and also involved her Sunday school class, which happened to be just little children. And one small child in her Sunday school class gave her a penny, put in the care package. Penny. I mean, the faith of a little girl that would think that God could use a penny. But he can. And this woman, this Sunday school teacher, used that penny to buy a gospel tract.

Put that in the box, sent to the missionary in India. So the box was received by the missionary in India. And he took the tract. And he led a Burmese chief to faith in Christ.

And that chief told his friends about Jesus. And many of them believed. And eventually a church was established there in that village. And there were over 1,500 natives converted to Christ.

[33:21] Now God can do anything he wants to do. God can use a penny. So it's not the quantity, is it?

Now that's not an excuse, a way out. God may stretch you and may require that you give much. Much more than a penny. But the quantity is not the issue. It's the quality. Your faith. And your obedience to God.

Thank you.