

Grace Giving 2 Corinthians 8-9

This last week, I ventured to try something new, just for the fun of it. My son Zachariah received a ripstick for Christmas from his grandparents and I asked him if I could give it a try. Now he and I have a new way to spend time together that we really enjoy.

Have you ever thought of giving to God's work as something else we can do for the fun of it? Sadly, "fun" is the last word that comes to mind when the subject of giving is brought up. Too often, giving brings up images of pain and hurt as opposed to satisfaction and joy.

Our Lord affirms that it is more blessed and satisfying to give than to receive, but it appears that many aren't convinced. While there are a number of factors that contribute to this response, I believe that one of the major issues that has turned God's people off to giving is unbiblical motivation. Pressure and gimmicks have all too often replaced the grace of God as the motivation for His people to give.

Let's consider together how Paul motivated the Corinthians to give in 2 Corinthians 8-9 and let's then give based on the principles and motivations he spells out for us in this passage.

As was predicted by the prophet named Agabus, there was a great famine over the entire Roman world (Acts 11:27-28). The church in Jerusalem not only suffered economic need due to this famine, but also encountered severe persecution which made matters even worse. This financial need prompted the church at Antioch to come to the aid of the church in Jerusalem.

Acts 11:29-30- "The disciples, each according to his ability, decided to provide help for the brothers living in Judea. This they did, sending their gift to the elders by Barnabas and Saul."

Paul and Barnabas were delegates from Antioch who delivered this first wave of assistance. Paul's interest in the material needs of the believers living in Jerusalem continued throughout his ministry. An important part of Paul's third missionary journey was his effort to raise relief funds among the Gentile churches of Galatia, Macedonia, and Achaia to provide for poverty-stricken believers living in Jerusalem.

Last week, we considered Paul's first communication to the Corinthian church in 1 Corinthians 16:1-2 exhorting them to be involved in meeting this need.

From this communication, we learned the following principles for giving:

Giving should be regular

Giving is the responsibility of everyone

Giving should be something for which we prepare

Giving should be proportionate to God's generosity towards us

The Corinthian church responded to this initial appeal by giving and by expressing the desire to give even more. In 2 Corinthians 8 and 9, we observe Paul in the process of leading the churches in the gathering of the collection for the believers in Jerusalem. The money from the Macedonians is in hand, but the contribution promised by the Corinthians has not yet been received. In 2 Corinthians 8-9, Paul writes to encourage them to complete the fundraising efforts that they agreed to do which they had begun the year before. They need to finish what they had started. Paul urges them to collect their share in the financial project before he arrives for a visit.

From Paul's epistle to the Romans, written after he had made his visit to Corinth, we learn that the Corinthian church did complete the project. Paul told the Romans that Achaia (of which Corinth was the capital) as well as Macedonia had made a contribution (Romans 15:25-27).

Paul's motivating instructions were used of God to encourage the Corinthian church to respond with faithful giving to meet the needs. God help us to be faithful in our giving motivated by the same principles.

Consider the example of the Macedonians (8:1-5)

Paul encourages the Corinthians to do their part in giving to the church in Jerusalem by sharing the example of how the Macedonian churches responded to the project.

Read 2 Corinthians 8:1-5

To what did Paul attribute the generous giving of the Macedonians?

They were moved to give by the grace of God

The Macedonians' generosity isn't attributed to their superior responsiveness to the project for the church in Jerusalem, nor to any superior attributes of kindness or generosity within them as compared to others. Their generous giving is the product of the grace of God. Only by God's grace, working in our hearts, will we be motivated to the kind of generous, sacrificial giving the Macedonians displayed.

Sadly, as I alluded to earlier, our culture has replaced grace with gimmicks and pressure tactics. Manipulative emotional appeals, prosperity theology, arm twisting, and the “ten percent rule” have taken the place of grace as the proper motivation for our giving. Grace comes up eight times in 2 Corinthians 8 & 9 in the original Greek. God is not only concerned that we do the right thing, but that we do it for the right reason. When we give, let’s do so motivated by God’s grace.

Not only is God’s grace evident in the Macedonian’s generosity, but also in the fact that they were willing to give any financial help at all. Only by the grace of God would the Macedonian believers have been willing to help Jewish brothers and sisters in Christ living in Jerusalem. You will remember from passages like Acts 16 and 1 Thessalonians 1:9 that the Macedonians came out of an anti-semitic, idol worshipping background. However, by the grace of God, their attitude changed and their giving to Jewish believers in need reflects it.

The essence of grace is to give, to give generously, to give with no expectation of anything in return, to give even when the recipient isn’t necessarily deserving. God’s grace is put on display for others to see by the Macedonians’ example in their giving.

They gave in the midst of severe trials

1 Thessalonians 1:6

“You also became imitators of us and of the Lord , having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit...”

1 Thessalonians 2:14

“For you, brethren , became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea , for you also endured the same sufferings at the hands of your own countrymen, even as they *did* from the Jews...”

The Macedonians were hated and under attack themselves. They too knew what it was like to go through prolonged suffering and deprivation. They could have said (and most people would have understood if they did), “We’re going through a really hard time right now and feel like we should hold on to the little we have to make sure there is enough for tomorrow.” Instead, they allowed the fires of persecution to refine them as believers and to form them into effective channels of God’s love and grace to others.

They gave with abundant joy

The Thessalonians welcomed the gospel message, “with joy given by the Holy Spirit.” Their joy over what God had done for them in Christ motivated them to give joyfully. I believe their joy was also the product of their anticipation of what God will do for them in the future. They are like the Christians written about in Hebrews 10:34- “You sympathized with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions.”

They joyfully divested themselves of the little they had, understanding the blessing of laying up treasures in heaven, of giving rather than receiving, of the better things that are awaiting us when we are with Jesus.

They gave in spite of deep poverty

They had serious financial needs of their own, being not just poor, but dirt poor, but they gave a generous gift anyway.

They demonstrated rich generosity

Paul makes a notable contrast between the Macedonians’ extreme poverty and their rich generosity. Their poverty situation didn’t discourage them from helping those with even greater needs than they had. We sometimes think that it is impossible for a person with lesser means to be generous. The fact is, a person doesn’t have to be rich to be generous. Generosity is not an issue of the amount which we give, but of the liberality of our hearts.

The Macedonians’ generosity can be attributed to their being single-minded. The Greek word translated “generosity” in the NIV and “liberality” in the NASB can also be translated sincerity. It conveys the idea of being single-minded as opposed to double minded. When a person is truly generous, he has overcome duplicity. It is our tendency to vacillate between concern for ourselves and the needs of others. In this state, we give some, but we often will hold back giving what others need just in case we need it later. This duplicity often keeps us from displaying the generosity God would have us to demonstrate towards our brothers and sisters in Christ who are in need.

They gave beyond their means (8:3)

We hear all the time of people failing to live within their means due to all of the money they are spending on themselves. However, in this case, the Macedonians went beyond their ability, beyond their means not to spend on themselves, but to give to others. They gave what they were able and even more. They sacrificially went beyond the call of duty and beyond anyone’s expectations. They were so confident in the promises of God to meet their daily needs that they gave of their meager supply in the present, trusting God implicitly with the needs of tomorrow.

They gave voluntarily, begging for the opportunity

The Thessalonians gave based on their own choice and initiative. Paul didn't have to plead for the Thessalonians to give, but rather, they pled with him, begging for the privilege (literally "grace") of sharing together in this ministry for the saints. Perhaps Paul told them that he was not expecting a gift from them since they were in such a financial need themselves. They didn't want to miss out on the grace of giving and insisted Paul receive their gift.

They gave themselves first and their funds followed

The Macedonians gave much more than their money. They gave themselves to the Lord and the apostles. The Macedonians gave put themselves at the Lord's disposal, dedicating themselves wholeheartedly to Him. They also gave themselves to the apostles. They accepted their guidance and committed themselves to doing what they instructed, recognizing that they were God's chosen leaders, responsible to direct them in doing God's will.

What we do with our money is the result of how we view our life. When we view our life as God's, our money will follow. God wants both from us.

Dr. Robert Gromacki writes, "God does not want the gift without the giver; He does not desire man's wealth apart from his will."

Follow the Macedonians' example and finish what has been started (8:6-11)

Complete the work (8:6, 10-11)

2 Corinthians 8:6, 10-11—"So we urged Titus, since he had earlier made a beginning, to bring also to completion this act of grace on your part....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."

Initial good intentions to give don't mean a thing if we don't follow through and complete what we have started. The Corinthian church had begun a year before to set aside money. The process had slowed and perhaps even stopped. Paul urges Titus to return to Corinth to see the collection project to completion—to bring to completion this act of grace. The Corinthians were the first to give and the first to express the desire to give. Now they need to match their eager willingness with the completion of the task.

Excel in the grace of giving (8:7)

Read 2 Corinthians 8:7

The Corinthians had excelled in so many other Christian virtues. Paul challenges them to correct the lack of a similar excellence in the grace of giving.

Prove the sincerity of your love (8:8)

Read 2 Corinthians 8:8

Paul doesn't issue apostolic orders for the Corinthians to give. Rather, he brings to their attention the enthusiastic, earnest zeal of the Macedonians as they gave. He asks them to measure themselves against the Macedonians' example to test and prove the depth and sincerity of their love. If they really love their brothers and sisters in Christ, they will put their love into action by participating in the collection for the poor in Jerusalem as the Macedonians had done.

John MacArthur writes, "You can give without loving (that's merely legalistic, required giving), but you can't love without giving (true affection leads to generosity)."

Remember the ultimate example of giving in Christ (8:9)

Read 2 Corinthians 8:9

Christ is the greatest example of grace giving. His example in surrendering everything for our sake, in becoming poor that we might become rich, is used to encourage the Corinthians to give also. Jesus enjoyed incomparable riches with the Father before coming to dwell on earth. Yet He did not shrink from laying aside that manner of existence in order to become a man that we might become rich. Because of what Christ gave, we as his children have become immeasurable wealthy with spiritual position and blessings. Given what Christ has done for us, shouldn't it be normal rather than exceptional for every Christian to exhibit a self-sacrificing, generous spirit in their giving to meet the needs of other believers?

Have the right attitude and motive (8:12-15)

Read 2 Corinthians 8:12-15

Give with a willing attitude in accordance with your means (8:12)

God desires willing hearts that are eager to give. Kent Hughes tells the story of how in a worship service, one participant accidentally put in a crown piece instead of a penny. When he realized what he'd done, he quietly asked for it back. The usher responded "in once, in forever!" "Oh well," groaned the giver, "at least I'll get credit in heaven."

“No,” said the usher, “you’ll get credit for only a penny.” God’s focus is not on the amount of our gift, but on the heart. God desires willing hearts eager to give.

God would have us to use the resources He has given us for His benefit and glory. He would have us to give according to what we have or in accordance with our means. Notice, God does not ask us to give what we don’t have. When we don’t have the resources to give, we shouldn’t feel guilty or embarrassed. We are not responsible for what we don’t have, but only for what we do. With regards to what we do have, we should give proportionate to how God has blessed us. God’s evaluation of us with reference to our giving isn’t based on the amount of our offering, but on the amount we have and whether or not we give in proportion to that amount.

Give motivated by the desire for everyone to have enough (8:13-15)

It is not right that some should have abundance while others suffer. God uses those who have abundance to supply the need of those who lack.

Paul isn’t advocating that the Corinthians completely impoverish themselves so that the church in Jerusalem can become rich. That would just shift the problem from one location to another. Paul is advocating that those who have plenty should share with those who lack what they need. Right now, the Corinthians are the ones with an abundant surplus. The situation could be reversed later. Later, they could be the ones in need while the church in Jerusalem has an abundance. By sharing with one another, there is plenty for everyone.

Paul sums up his appeal for generous giving by citing an Old Testament passage (Exodus 16:18). God made it clear in the wilderness that He desired everyone’s needs to be met. No one went hungry under His provision. Exodus 16:18 indicates that when the Israelites went to gather their daily supply of the Manna He sent, some gathered much and some little, but in the end, everyone had as much as he needed. Apparently, after gathering, they pooled their resources so that there was enough for everyone.

We should look upon our greater abundance of resources as a stewardship from God which God would have us to share with those in need so that there is equality. God’s plan is that all have enough. When we have abundance, He intends that we share it to meet the needs of other believers.

Transition (Summarize 2 Corinthians 8:16-9:5)

In 2 Corinthians 8:16-22, Paul recommends the messengers, the three men of trustworthy character, who were chosen to administer or take up the collection and were sent as a delegation ahead of Paul’s visit. Paul recognizes the importance of making sure those who handle God’s funds are people of integrity. Paul assures the Corinthians of the great pains that have been taken to do what is right in the eyes of the Lord and of men. All involved are working hard to avoid any criticism for how they handle the collection. Paul

himself stays away from the collection personally lest anyone accuse him of seeking personal profit or using his position to pressure them.

In 2 Corinthians 9:1-5, Paul explains the reason for his sending a delegation of men ahead of his visit. This delegation was sent to encourage the Corinthians to prepare the offerings in advance that they had expressed the willingness to give. Paul shared testimony with the Macedonians about the Corinthians enthusiastic eagerness to help with the collection for the Jerusalem saints. The Corinthians example stirred the Macedonians to actions. The Macedonians had their gift ready, but the Corinthians had not yet come through on their promised gift.

Paul is afraid of the potential embarrassment of his coming with some from Macedonians and their not having a gift ready. He therefore sends a delegation of men to arrange for the collection of their previously promised gift ahead of Paul's visit. He wants them to have a generous gift prepared, one given based on planning and preparation, not grudgingly given based on last minute pressure. He wants their giving to be motivated by grace, not by force. He wants their giving to be a source of blessing, not a grudging duty.

In 2 Corinthians 9:6-15, Paul addresses:

Seven Principles of Biblical Giving (9:6-15)

Our giving should be generous if we expect to receive God's generous blessings (9:6)

Read 2 Corinthians 9:6

We will reap what we sow. The sower who uses a sparing quantity of seed will get a sparing quantity of returns. If we give little, we can expect little blessing from God. If we give much, we can expect much blessing from God. If we give focused most on what we can keep for our selves, if we give based on how much is left after everything else is taken care of, our sowing will be small, but so will our reaping be small. Do understand, the blessings of God will not necessarily be monetary, but they will always be worthwhile. This is not a promise that we will get rich if we give as God's blessings often are not measured in dollars and cents. This is a promise that we will be richly blessed as we sow generously.

Our giving should be done cheerfully (2 Corinthians 9:7)

Read 2 Corinthians 9:7

Our giving should not be based on impulse, but on planning. We should give as we have carefully decided in our heart to give. When we give, we shouldn't give reluctantly ("It pains me to give" "I grieve over my loss" "Goodbye dear dollar"). We shouldn't give

under compulsion (“I’ll give because so and so expects it” “I give because I feel pressured into it”). Rather, we should give cheerfully.

The Greek word translated “cheerful” is the word from which we get our word “hilarious.” Our giving should be “Ha! Ha! Hilarious! Happy to do so! That was fun” giving. God loves this kind of giver. Giving should be a satisfying and joy producing activity in our life, not a grudging duty.

God will see to it that we have all we need to do the good He wants us to do (2 Corinthians 9:8-10)

Read 2 Corinthians 9:8-10

Some do not give as they should or they give with the wrong attitude because they fear that there will not be enough left to pay the bills. Regardless of the instructions of Scripture and the testimonies of others to God’s faithfulness to meet our needs, they remain unconvinced.

Friends, if our giving is Spirit-directed, God will see to it that we have enough to give what He leads us to give. God is able. He has all the power in the world to be generous to those who are generous in their giving. Our able God will make all grace abound to us so that we in turn are enabled to abound in every good work. God will supply the needs of the giver after the gift has been given. Don’t miss the “ALL” in 2 Corinthians 9:8! God provides ALL WE NEED to fulfill His purposes through us.

In 2 Corinthians 9:9, Paul quotes from Psalm 112:9—“He has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor; his righteousness endures forever.” The godly man gives generously to the poor and God remembers his righteous deed, rewarding him both in time and in eternity. In 2 Corinthians 9:10, Paul reminds us that the same God who provides the needs of men will “increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness.” When God gives us a work to do, He will supply the resources to do it. Intending for us to have an abundant harvest of righteousness, God will be faithful to supply an abundance of seed.

God wants to give us enough to allow us to use it generously for His purposes (2 Corinthians 9:11-12)

Read 2 Corinthians 9:11-12

Here is an important question? Why has God made us rich in America? Some of you might want to argue, “I’m not rich.” The fact is, compared to most of the world’s population, the majority of us are rich. The purpose for the riches that God has given to us is that we might be able to give generously. God has given us more, not so that we can get more for ourselves, but so that we can give more. When we give liberally of our

resources, God receives thanks from those who receive the gifts we have given. What a privilege is ours to be the catalyst for causing others to thank God!

God receives glory and praise because of our generosity (2 Corinthians 9:13)

Read 2 Corinthians 9:13

Giving liberally is not a natural human response. God produces it by the transforming work of the gospel of Christ in our lives. Therefore, He gets the praise and glory when our generous giving is observed!

Others will pray for our welfare, when we use our resources for God's glory (2 Corinthians 9:14)

Read 2 Corinthians 9:14

As we give, we need to recognize that God is the One who gives first (2 Corinthians 9:15)

Read 2 Corinthians 9:15

Some believe that the unspeakable gift mentioned in 2 Corinthians 9:15 is Christ. I am more inclined to believe that the unspeakable gift of God mentioned here is the gift of being able to give (See also 1 Chronicles 29:14, 16). Whichever unspeakable gift is in view here, what is clear is that God is the source of all Biblical giving.

Pastor Warren Wiersbe has made a great suggestion from 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 that I would like to pass on to y'all:

“I suggest you read 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 again, and that you note the emphasis on the grace of God. If our churches and other ministries would get back to grace giving, there would be fewer high pressure offering appeals, fewer gimmicks to raise funds, and fewer complaints from the people of God. Instead, there would be plenty of money available for the ministries that truly magnify the grace of God. And I think the unsaved people in the world would sit up and take notice! You and I are saved because God believed in grace giving. How much do we believe in grace giving?”

By God's grace, may we as His faithful stewards give regularly, proportionately, willingly, and cheerfully to the glory and praise of God.