

2 Corinthians 8:1-7 The Grace of Giving 3/18/18

We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, ²for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. ³For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, ⁴begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints— ⁵and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us. ⁶Accordingly, we urged Titus that as he had started, so he should complete among you this act of grace. ⁷But as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you—see that you excel in this act of grace also.

(Pastor prays)

As believers in Jesus, we see ourselves as men and women who were dead in sin, made alive by God giving us grace through faith in Jesus, more pointedly, the life and death and resurrection of Jesus. Even our favorite verse (supports this), John 3:16, *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.*

The Christian impulse that we have received from God is to *give*. Giving. This doesn't need to be an unpleasant necessity or an unmentionable subject. Giving. In fact, the job of a pastor is not to be a fundraiser or manipulator by trying to guilt people into giving. My job is to point you, from God's word, to the excellencies of Christ so that you see what God has given you in Christ and, upon beholding the gift of grace, you want and desire to give.

In this passage, Paul is not trying to raise money, He's trying to change the way people think about money in light of the saving grace of God in Christ. You can read it. Paul isn't manipulating or cajoling people into giving; he's celebrating that the people in Macedonia got it! Giving is a sign you *get it!* That you believe what God has done for us in Jesus and, because of that, you don't worship the God of materialism and more, you break the chains of greed and envy. Because of what God has done for you, you give gratefully and eagerly and smilingly. Because of what God has done for you, you give

and you do so worshipfully and joyfully and sacrificially. It's what the Macedonians did and Paul calls our attention to them in this passage.

Let me set the context. The Christian church in Jerusalem, the mother church, was suffering, and the other churches were sharing their collections with their struggling brothers and sisters. Paul was making the rounds to gather the collections to get it to Jerusalem. He passed through Macedonia, which comprised Thessalonica and Philippi. They were poor Christians in poor persecuted churches and the apostle Paul is completely blown away at their generosity. Here he's writing the church at Corinth to tell them of what the grace of God has done in Macedonia, to remind us of what God has done.

If God has not done anything for you, then don't give Him a dime. But if He has, then why don't you pour it out according to the measure you have received according to His grace. The Gospel is the grace of God and...

The Grace of God is the Grace of Giving

Let me see if I can prove it from the passage.

Gospel Giving is Motivated by Grace

Notice what Paul immediately speaks of in verse 1. *We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia,* Really, this entire passage is dominated by grace. It's a work of grace and, until you understand grace and are gripped by grace, you can't really know the freedom of giving, especially Gospel-focused giving. When you belong to Jesus and Jesus belongs to you, you go through a money and material detox. You are not seduced by the false prosperity of a fading world. You're a Gospel person, and the Gospel that saved you is the grace gospel that moves you to fling yourself and all you have to God and His mission.

As a focus, Paul tells the Corinthians to look at the church at Macedonia and look through them unto Christ. In verse 9, *For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.*

The Bible says we love because He first loved us, so it stands to reason that we give because He first gave to us. Your giving to the Lord and His work frees you up from the slavery of “stuff” and signs you up for the mission of God. According to verse 1, a right view of money and things is an outward display of an inward transformation that has nothing to do with how rich or how poor or ordinary you might be, which Paul addresses in the next verse.

Gospel Giving is Faith on Display

Listen to Paul’s description of the Macedonians in verse 2. *for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part.* Keep looking at the antonyms in verse 2. Affliction – Joy, Poverty – Wealth. Affliction - could be the persecution of believers or could have been some unexpected or uninvited trouble. Poverty – in this case extreme poverty, and it’s not even the normal word for “poverty.” It’s a word used in Luke 11 describing cripples, lame, blind, beggars, people who have hit rock bottom.

Now take those two definitions back to those two words and the two antonyms and see what the message is. Affliction is a test to see where your joy is. Poverty is a test to see where your riches are. Notice in verse 2 joy is not rooted in absence of affliction. Joy is the presence of Jesus. Joy is rooted in grace. John Piper says the effects of God’s grace isn’t to first remove the affliction or poverty; the effect of God’s grace is to create joy in Jesus, and when that happens, according to verse 2, you give. You give in the middle of difficulties. You give with joy and an *abundance* of joy. I have joy left over.

II Corinthians 9:7 says, *Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.* God loves a cheerful giver. Giving is not hindered by poverty. Giving is generosity. Notice the description of the Macedonians in verse 2. Out of the rock bottom, they gave generously. All of this is telling us that giving is not a matter of what you have, it’s a function of the heart, that where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. It’s your faith on display. There is something else there in this passage and it gets even stronger.

Giving is a Sacrificial Honor

Let's read verses 3 and 4 together and then come back and point out a couple of things. *For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, 4 begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints* There are four categories we can use out of these two verses.

Giving is Proportional – They gave according to their means. Someone who makes \$25,000 a year is not giving the same amount as someone making \$80,000 a year. That is the grace of tithing, that across the board it is a percentage. But I don't think that is where you should stop; that's a fine starting point. As New Testament believers, we have been saved by grace and freed from the law, and because of that abundant grace, we give like New Testament believers...Like slaves set free.

Giving is Sacrificial – Verse 3 says they gave beyond their means, more than they could afford. They looked at their budgets and gave more than that giving line item allowed. They had no real regard for themselves, no thought for the future. They were glad to place themselves even further into a poor condition if it meant that they could give. Their hearts were right with God. They were serving the Lord. They were faithful, and their giving was a natural outflow of walking with the Lord.

Giving was Voluntary – “of their own accord” – their own decision. They weren't manipulated or intimidated or coddled into giving. There wasn't some weird promise of prosperity if they would sow into this ministry. It was from their own hearts being saturated with the grace found in Christ.

Giving is a Privilege – Listen to the astonishing verse 4. *begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints* Begging, pleading, “please let us give.” Notice who's doing the begging. It's not the preacher, it's the church members. This means I should search my heart and plead with God to give me the will and the want to give more and more, to rejoice in it and look for ways to give more to the Lord's work. It is a great privilege to have the chance to be a part of Gospel giving, and this giving has to have a foundation.

Gospel Giving Begins at the Cross

Notice what Paul says about the Macedonians giving as worship in verse 5. *and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God*

to us. See the root of Gospel giving. Grace is rooted in our response to God. When we know our lives are not our own, then we won't think that our possessions are our own. It doesn't do any good to give *money* to God if you haven't first given *yourself* to Him. Once you do, there is no way to grow in spiritual maturity without committing your finances and your giving to the Lord.

Jesus can have our money and not have our hearts, but He cannot have our hearts without having our money. Notice also in verse 5 that this is done by the will of God. Giving doesn't come naturally. It's the work of the sovereign grace. When a heart and life are fully saturated and surrendered to Christ, then giving becomes a genuine act of real worship. It becomes a spiritual discipline. That can be the final point.

Gospel Giving is an Act of Worship

See it in verses 6 and 7 but mostly 7. *Accordingly, we urged Titus that as he had started, so he should complete among you this act of grace. 7 But as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you—see that you excel in this act of grace also.* As you excel (grow) in everything – then he starts listing a few spiritual disciplines.

1. Faith – spiritual power to resist temptation in prayer.
2. Speech – teaching, preaching, Bible knowledge.
3. Knowledge – solid doctrine.
4. Earnestness – intensity in worship.

The Corinthians were strong in all the activities that displayed the Gospel, and Paul says giving completes the circle. We are to excel in it because of grace. Grace is described by Paul in Romans 5:8, *but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

The gift of grace is what I want you to have by turning from your sin and turning to Christ. The grace of God is the grace of giving. How do you view giving? Are you excelling? Will you commit to giving?

(Pastor extends the invitation and prays)