

# The Grace of Giving

## Slide -

One of the more hotly debated issues in religion is the one over spiritual gifts, which ones are still available to Christians today.

Many evangelical and all charismatic groups believe that the ability, for example, to speak in tongues or heal or receive direct personal revelation from God, known as prophesying, are still practiced today within their church.

In churches of Christ we believe that the bible teaches that such miraculous gifts were intended for use by the Apostles and the early disciples in order to establish the church and then these gifts ceased to be.

We understand that according to the New Testament these gifts were necessary at the time,

but once the Bible was fully recorded,

the need for these miraculous witnesses were replaced by the inspired and eternal witness of God's word, preserved in the Bible.

Paul refers to this idea where he says,

Slide - I Corinthians 13:8-10 - “But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect (complete) has come, then that which is in part will be done away.”

We maintain that miraculous gifts, then, were a temporary assistance in helping the church to be established and grow

When the perfect or the complete revelation or witness of God was available, the Bible,

then this miraculous assistance would no longer be needed.

And would be incomplete, because we have the complete tool to work with.

I mentioned this debate because it demonstrates how little we pay attention to the gifts or the graces that are still available to everyone in the church today.

We tend to argue over the things that don't exist anymore, but we don't pay a lot of attention to the things that do.

It's interesting to note that after Paul has dealt with the various gifts that were transient in nature, he goes on to discuss, in his next letter, II Corinthians, a gift or an ability that few argued over.

People were arguing over tongues, they still argue over tongues, but he talked about another gift in II Corinthians that nobody ever argues over today **and few seek diligently to exercise, and that was the gift or the ability to give graciously.**

So, in this lesson, I'd like to review what Paul said about this gift and how this gift or ability brought rewards that the miraculous gifts never could.

## Background – II Corinthians 8-9

I want to give you a little background that will explain what Paul is talking about in these chapters.

If you have this background, then what he says makes a lot more sense.

Aside from his missionary efforts among the gentiles, Paul was also charged with the task of raising money among the different congregations,

in order to help with famine relief for the brethren who lived in Judea at that time.

In these two chapters, II Corinthians 8 and 9, he's going to talk about the Macedonian churches.

These were congregations in the northern part of Greece at the time - Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea.

These churches had been generous in their giving to help the brethren in Judea and the area around the city of Jerusalem.

In his letter to the Corinthians, who were located in the southern part of Greece, he will often compare and refer to the attitude of the Northern churches, the Macedonian churches, and the brethren in the South, the Corinthians.

Using these churches as examples, Paul will describe both the character of the spiritual gift of gracious giving and, more importantly at this point, the blessings received for those who exercise this gift.

### Slide -Elements of Gracious Giving

So, as we begin reading in Second Corinthians 8:1, Paul will briefly outline seven elements and characteristics of the type of giving that blesses the givers.

#### Slide -1. Gracious Giving is Eager

Slide -II Corinthians 8:1-4 – “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.”

What gracious giving, it is eager

Despite their own hardships and financial obstacles, these people in the north were eager to give, in order to help their brethren in Jerusalem.

Giving as an afterthought, giving what is left over, giving that is not planned and prayed over, giving out of duty or guilt, this is giving, **but it's not gracious giving; and gracious giving is what blesses us.**

Giving that isn't gracious in nature, it's still giving, it still meets the needs, but it doesn't bless the giver and it doesn't honor God.

#### Slide -2. Gracious Giving is Contagious

Slide -II Corinthians 8:5-7 – “And 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.”

In this section Paul points to the giving of the Macedonians as something to be copied, an example, a motivation for other people.

Giving, when done graciously, stimulates the faith and the zeal of other people by setting a high standard and by displaying courage.

It takes guts to give graciously.

Congregations have a good example of this process, when at the beginning of a building program, for example, the first ones called upon to give, give graciously.

And in doing so, they inspire many others in the church to have the same kind of courage to do exactly the same thing.

### **Slide -3. Gracious Giving is Consistent**

**Slide** -II Corinthians 8:8-12 – “I speak not by commandment, but I am testing the sincerity of your love by the diligence of others. 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. 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. For if there is first a willing mind, it is accepted according to what one has, and not according to what he does not have.”

Paul explains that the Corinthians were the first ones to commit themselves to helping the brethren in Jerusalem.

In other words, they pledged - these people are having problems, they pledge to give, to help them.

However, the Macedonians were the first to actually give the money and in so doing, they set a high standard for generosity and gracious giving.

Now Paul is encouraging the Corinthians to finish what they started.

To come through on their original pledge. Gracious giving is consistent - the talk and the gift are the same.

A person is not considered a gracious giver if he gives as much as somebody else.

No, a gracious giver is the one who gives eagerly what he has promised to give, whatever that amount is.

### **Slide -4. Gracious Giving is Sacrificial**

**Slide** -II Corinthians 8:13-15 – “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.”

Paul makes a parallel here.

The Jewish Christians suffered persecution and they endured under famine conditions, in order to bring the gospel to the gentiles.

The gentile Christians sacrificed their finances in order to support their Jewish brethren in the Lord.

Their giving was not meant to advantage one over the other,

No, they're giving was an opportunity to share an equal sacrifice in the name of Jesus Christ.

Giving is not gracious, is not spiritual, until it's sacrificial.

In the church, not all can give equally, but all can give sacrificially, in order to practice this gift of giving graciously.

### **Slide -5. Gracious Giving is Orderly**

In verses 16-25, this is a long passage, so I am not going to read but summarize it for you.

Paul takes great pains in declaring and detailing how the money is controlled.

The money, that you collected, he gives a lot of detail how it is controlled, how it was transported, how it was accounted for, thus protecting the integrity of his mission.

In God's gracious plan, even the handling of the gift is special.

There needs to be an orderly manner in handling the gift once it is given, because it is holy unto God.

You realize that?

The money we put into the plate, the checks we put into the plate.

That gift, that's a holy gift. That's a holy thing.

It's been set apart for the Lord.

It is the embodiment of what is supposed to be holy, separate, sacred. It needs to be handled in that way.

I don't just mean carrying the trays to the back, I mean the way the money is handled and spent and accounted for.

It is a holy thing.

Both the collecting and the management must be above reproach, so as not to spoil the faith of the giver or to dishonor God, the receiver.

### Slide -6. Gracious Giving is Premeditated

Slide -II Corinthians 9:1-5 – “Now concerning the ministering to the saints, it is superfluous for me to write to you; for I know your willingness, about which I boast of you to the Macedonians, that Achaia was ready a year ago; and your zeal has stirred up the majority. Yet I have sent the brethren, lest our boasting of you should be in vain in this respect, that, as I said, you may be ready; lest if some Macedonians come with me and find you unprepared, we (not to mention you!) should be ashamed of this confident boasting. Therefore I thought it necessary to exhort (encourage) the brethren to go to you ahead of time, and prepare your generous gift beforehand, which you had previously promised, that it may be ready as a matter of generosity and not as a grudging (covetousness) obligation.”

Imagine someone coming to your birthday party and as you are opening your gifts and cards this person hands you a \$1 bill wrapped in one of your own party napkins.

Think about that. How would you feel? What would you think of your guest?

Notice that in worship we:

ask in prayer

share in song

take the communion

receive God's word

The offering, or the collection, we actually give something from ourselves to God.

God gives us time, which we should give to Him and He gives us wealth, which we should give to Him.

In every other action we're on the receiving end.

We're receiving ministry. To be prepared to give says something about our spirituality.

It says how mature we are. Being prepared to give says something about our faith.

It tells how strong or how weak it is.

Being prepared to give says something about our love, it reflects how deep it is.

Being prepared to give says something about our piety, the degree of respect we have for the Lord and His church.

An offering that is not prepared, is not a gift, it becomes something else.

It becomes guilt money, or a habit, or a tradition, but it's not a gift.

You don't go to a 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary and when they start opening the gifts,

And you start asking around, "anybody got change for a 20", that's a gift?

An offering that is not prepared, does not bless you. It does not honor God.

It simply helps to pay the electric bill. Well, that's a good thing.

Gracious giving is gracious because it is given in love and respect and thoughtfulness,

for the one we wish to bless and honor with our gift.

And that requires preparation.

### Slide -7. Gracious Giving is Generous

Slide -II Corinthians 9:6-7 - "But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully (with blessings) will also reap bountifully (with blessings). So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity (compulsion); for God loves a cheerful giver."

As for what the Holy Spirit has revealed here, if you give grudgingly or of compulsion, don't waste your time.

Don't waste God's time.

God loves a cheerful giver. How many times have we said that? How many times have we repeated that verse?

Do you know how to become a cheerful giver? Do you know why God loves a cheerful giver?

A person becomes a cheerful giver, by being a generous giver.

A cheerful giver is loved by God, because God loves a generous giver.

Look at it this way, have you ever saved up your money and sacrificed to buy your wife or girlfriend or your boyfriend, your spouse, whatever, an expensive gift?

Not just any gift, but something you really know that they want, but it's kind of expensive.

So, you've saved your crazy money and you're spending money and whatever, and you've hoarded it for a while, in order to buy that special person a gift.

And then once you purchase it, you carefully wrap it and then you wait for the very best moment to give it to them.

How do you feel when you offer that gift? Do you feel cheerful? Do you feel joyful?

Do you feel happily anxious?

When we give in this mode do, we need excuses? Of course not.

You can't wait to give it, because of the joy that you feel, and the happiness that you will create, and the love that you will receive.

There are certain times of the years when those diamond commercials come on, what's the subtle message there?

What makes you think that God is any different?

He loves to give, He loves to receive our sincere gifts, He loves those who give generously.

Generous giving is gracious, because it fills the giver with joy and the blessedness of giving.

It fills the benefactor, the church, with blessings and opportunities.

It fills the heavens with rejoicing because a sinful person has overcome basic human weakness and selfishness, in order to give a generous gift of faith and hope and love.

God loves a cheerful giver because such a person is a generous son or daughter, after His own heart.

### Slide -The Blessings of Gracious Giving

Now, in Acts 20:35, Jesus said that it was more blessed to give than to receive.

The Lord said this for a reason.

What you receive from giving graciously is greater than what you experience as the receiver of a gift.

In other words, the giver is more blessed than the receiver.

Not that receiving isn't pleasant and gratifying,

but Jesus says that the rewards that come from giving are greater than the rewards that come from receiving.

And so, in chapter nine, Paul explains two of the precious blessings attached to gracious giving.

What we get from gracious giving, you know what in it for me.

### Slide -1. The giver will be increased by God.

Slide -II Corinthians 9:8-11 - "And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work. As it is written: "He has dispersed abroad, He has given to the poor; His righteousness endures forever." Now may He who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food, supply and multiply the seed you have sown and increase the fruits of your righteousness, while you are enriched in everything for all liberality, which causes thanksgiving through us to God."

### **There's an old saying that goes like this: you cannot out-give God.**

Now this is true, but not always in the way you might think.

Some people think that well, if you give twenty bucks, you put that in the plate,

God is going to provide an extra \$40 next week, because you cannot out-give God.

They see God's blessing only in terms of money.

And while God's increase for the generous giver might be an increase in personal wealth, true,

but it also could include greater peace of mind.

How would you like that?

Would you rather an extra 100 bucks or would you rather greater peace of mind?

Or it could be a greater ability to need less material things and still be happy.

How about that? Would that work for you?

How about harmony in your family?

Well, there's a good one.

Or an opportunity to serve Christ in new and greater ways, that you have not thought of before.

Is that a blessing?

Or an increase of saved souls among those you love.

How would you like your 16-year-old granddaughter to be baptized, would you like that?

Would you like your son-in-law who's 50-years-old now and who's never put a foot in the church building?  
all of a sudden, begin to ask questions and want to have a Bible study with you.

How would you like that would you see that as a blessing?

How about the opportunity to truly suffer for Christ?

That'd be a good thing?

That the suffering that you are in, you're enduring all of a sudden in your life for whatever reason,  
you know that you're doing this because of Christ.

You're being persecuted because of your faith. Would that be a good blessing?

These, and many others, are ways God can increase a gracious giver and none of these can be bought with money.

Whatever way God chooses to bless you, the promise is clearly made that He will respond to your generosity.

If this is so, it may be the reason why some of our prayers are not answered and the Lord is not blessing us.

Perhaps it has to do with the quality of our giving.

### **Slide -2. The giver will be the cause of praise**

**Slide -II Corinthians 9:12-15 – “For the administration of this service not only supplies the needs of the saints, but also is abounding through many thanksgivings to God, while, through the proof of this ministry, they glorify God for the obedience of your confession to the gospel of Christ, and for your liberal sharing with them and all men, and by their prayer for you, who long for you because of the exceeding grace of God in you. Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!”**

In other words, the Jews were praising God because of the brethren in Greece

**Slide -Jesus said, Matthew 5:16 - "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven."**

Your gracious giving, in various situations, not just in the collection plate, but serving the church.

I'm was always inspired when I came to the church building in Port Charlotte at odd hours,

Morning or night, and I see some brother or sister here cleaning something, fixing something, arranging something,  
preparing something.

Just off hours, often eight o'clock at night, 11 o'clock at night, seven o'clock in the morning, two o'clock in the afternoon.

They're just there.

They're not on any list anywhere. They saw that something had to be done. They just came in and did it.

I'm inspired when I see that, what do you think?

Giving of your time and talent to help others, and your families, and your community.

Being seen as a generous giver in these various ways will prompt other people to praise God because of what you do.

Next to martyrdom and soul winning, this is one of the greatest spiritual treasures that can be attributed to you.

Not that you gave a lot of money or service or self or time, but that your giving made others love God more.

I love God more because of what you did. I don't love you more. I love God more.

Others will do this, because they are moved by the clear harmony between your confession of Christ and your actions in His name.

In other words, they can actually see Christ in you, and they glorify God because of it.

This stuff must be true. Look at their life.

You are blessed in becoming the visible kingdom of God, the light in the dark world.

Can there be a greater privilege?

It seems in our society everybody wants to be a star on TV.

Everybody wants to be a singer or a dancer, which is fine, if that's your creative talents, wonderful.

God's given you that talent, express it, but how about being stars that shine for Christ.

What about that?

Summary

So, in closing, I want to comment on one question we often get when discussing money that's given to the church.

I have heard at other churches, Hey, I got a great idea. Let's have a raffle. Let's give away something.

Let's get a car and give it away, and sell tickets.

The short response of why we don't do this is that the New Testament only gives us one way to provide for the financial needs of the church, and that is a free-will, meaning you give it according to your own decision,

a free will offering, collected when the saints gathered together for public worship on the Lord's day.

The only example we have of money collection.

Now this is the only instruction and example we have from Christ and His apostles concerning money for the church.

When we compare this method of giving with the principles of gracious giving, we've just looked at,

we see that it is the only way that all the elements of gracious giving come together in one single act.

Other methods can gather money, but they cannot accomplish the spiritual goals that the regular offering on the Lord's day can accomplish.

In other words, a bake sale or a raffle or a charity concert raises money.

That's good. But it does not raise a person's spirit, like a free-will offering at worship.

And so, my invitation this morning is two-fold:

number one, please give your life to Christ, if you have not already done so.

Some people need to do this through repentance and baptism, others, having already done this and fallen away, need to be restored through repentance and prayer, or they need to restore a spirit of service in themselves.

That's my first invitation.

Do that today and guarantee your soul survival at death and the judgment, which is sure to follow.

And then number two, please give your pocketbook to Christ also, if you have not already done so.

Of course, one reason for this is so that the church can do its work.

I'm appealing to you to launch out financially, because I want you to experience new heights, new spiritual power, better spiritual health, and greater personal freedom from earthly things;

all of which come as a result of gracious giving.

Just ask yourself one question, am I giving more than I gave last year?

Am I giving more than I gave five years ago? Do I plan to give more next year?

God could have created a never-ending flow of gold, to be used exclusively by the church for her work.

But He didn't do that because He wanted us to know the blessings that come from gracious giving.

We can do great things in this place if each one is devoted to giving beyond whatever they have done in the past.

Give your life and give your pocketbook to Christ this day as we stand and as we sing our song of encouragement.