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God's Indescribable Gift

We're going to complete the section on giving today and to do so I want to start with the basic thrust of Paul's instructions through the situation at Corinth so that in the end we have a total package on giving during the Church age. First, it's very important to realize that in 8:1 Paul begins with grace and in 9:15 he ends with grace. Giving from beginning to end is a function of God's grace and not human effort. God, by His grace, gives us the desire to give. Sometimes this desire is so extraordinary that it cannot be confused with human philanthropy. For example, the Macedonian's gave beyond their ability and this was a sure manifestation of the grace of God. Second, the supreme example of grace giving is the Lord Jesus Christ. He, although rich as God, became poor as us so that through His death we might become spiritually wealthy. His pre-eminent gift is the greatest motive to give during the Church Age. If God has given us this so great salvation in Christ then how much is it for us to part with some of what He has given us in order to meet the needs of others? Third, we ought to give generously and cheerfully as we have each purposed in our own heart for God loves a cheerful giver. Giving should not be motivated by pressure schemes. It should rather be motivated by God's grace in the supreme example of Christ's gift to us. When we consider His gift to us and decided in our own heart what to give and we do so cheerfully we have God's approval. So these three principles I have pulled out of what we have learned because they capture, on the most basic level, the thrust of Paul's instruction on giving. First it's a grace operation from beginning to end, second, the supreme example of grace giving is Jesus Christ's gift of salvation to us and third, in response we ought to give generously and cheerfully as we have purposed in our own heart.

Today we want to bring in a few more principles to complete this package on giving. To bring us up to speed, the historical situation is that Paul is writing

to stir up the Corinthians to complete the giving to the Jerusalem saints that they had pledged a year before. Originally when they pledged this amount Paul boasted to the Macedonians about the work of the grace of God in the Corinthian's lives as manifested by their liberality. In turn this stirred up the Macedonians to assemble a gift for the Jerusalem saints as well. However, the Corinthian's themselves never completed the assembly of their gift because of the break in fellowship with Paul. Now that the break was mended Paul encourages them to complete the assembly of their originally pledged gift so that his boasting in them and they themselves would not be humiliated when he arrived. To secure the completion of the gift he sent ahead a detachment of three men; Titus, the famous brother and a well-approved brother. Later Paul would come with some of the Macedonians to join these men and together they would take the gift to Jerusalem. The Corinthians should be prepared with their gift by giving just as they had originally purposed in their own heart, for God loves a cheerful giver, not a reluctant one.

In 9:8 we pick up with the theme of grace again which pervades this section on giving. **And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed, 9as it is written, "HE SCATTERED ABROAD, HE GAVE TO THE POOR, HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS ENDURES FOREVER."** The section begins with the fact that **God is able**. The Greek for **able** is *dunateo* from which we get dynamite. It refers to God's dynamic ability toward you that flows from His omnipotence. And what His dynamic ability toward you dispenses is grace. As Paul says it, **God is able to make all grace abound to you**. The Greek for **abound** means "to greatly increase." In short, God has extended grace toward you that was sufficient to bring you to salvation. But there is more of God's grace toward you after salvation that is sufficient for every good work. So while we have all enjoyed a measure of grace there is always more grace available.

The purpose for the more grace being available is **so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed**. The Greek piles word upon word that emphasizes **all, every, always** so that the lasting impression of this verse is that we are never lacking the grace necessary to enable us to accomplish every **good deed** we desire to do.

This means, of course, that we are not sufficient, left to ourselves, to accomplish every **good deed** that is laid before us to do. Instead our sufficiency must come from Him. He is the one who makes us sufficient to do the good deeds He lays before us. The promise to claim here is that if there is any **good deed** God lays before us then God will extend the grace necessary to accomplish that **good deed**.

In a way then, prosperity theology is true. But it is not true in the way the prosperity gospel advocates propose. They propose that if we give God will give to us in return so that we can spend it on ourselves and build up fortunes. However, what the verse teaches is that if God lays a good deed before us then He will provide whatever is necessary for us to complete that good deed.

In fact, in Ephesians 2:10 Paul teaches that we were “created in Christ Jesus for good deeds, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.” So from all eternity past God has written into His plan certain opportunities for us to do good deeds. If He wants us to walk in them would He not supply the grace necessary for us to do so? Of course He would. So what 2 Cor 9:8 is teaching is that when opportunities arise to do good deeds, God will extend to us the grace necessary to enable us to do those good deeds. Those good deeds cannot be accomplished independent of His grace because it is His grace that enables us to do the good deeds with the proper motivation.

So you can see that we are justified by grace and we are sanctified by grace. The only response on our part to His grace is faith. We trust that He will accomplish all His good pleasure through us as we depend upon Him. Faith is trust or dependence upon another. And we are trusting Him to supply what is necessary when an opportunity for a good deed arises.

Verse 9 proves this statement by quoting from the OT. If you have a study bible, check your margin and tell me where this quotation comes from? Ps 112:9. In the LXX, which Paul is quoting from, it is Ps 111:9, but in our English Bible it is Ps 112:9. In this Psalm, the **HE** who **SCATTERED ABROAD**, and the **HE** who **GAVE TO THE POOR** and the **HIS** whose **RIGHTEOUSNESS ENDURES FOREVER**, refer to a man and not God. In Psalm 112:1 the Psalm refers to “the man who fears the LORD and greatly

delights in His commandments.” So it is this man who when **HE SCATTERED ABROAD** and **GAVE TO THE POOR, HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS ENDURES FOREVER**. That is to say it remains forever such that it will be rewarded by God. It is probably better to translate the word **POOR** here as “needy” since the situation Paul is addressing is the saints at Jerusalem who were not necessarily poor but were going through a particularly difficult time which made them needy for a season.

But the most important point is that the man in Ps 112 is a man who fears the LORD and greatly delights in His commandments. To fear the LORD is to be ever cognizant that you are living in God’s presence, open to His watchful gaze. Therefore his entire outlook on life is one of pleasing the LORD. Thus when he sees a need he recognizes that it is the LORD giving Him an opportunity to provide for that need. With the LORD watching the man who fears Him will act on the opportunity. The question is whether or not you are that kind of believer? The kind of believer that fears the LORD and greatly delights in His commandments such that your outlook on life is one of recognizing the opportunities the LORD is giving you to fill a need?

Now part of this discussion is helped by turning to Eph 2:10. Just after the great verses in 2:5 and 8 that we have been saved by grace through faith in 2:10 he reveals what we have been saved for. Paul says, “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works.” And notice when these good works were prepared. “which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.” You have been created in Christ Jesus for good works. The opportunity to do these good works will come because God has prepared them before time. Your responsibility is to walk in them. So if you fear the LORD then you will recognize the opportunities God lays before you and you will desire to capitalize on those opportunities by doing the good works and the result will be righteousness that accrues to your eternal reward. Ultimately the believer will appear at the judgment seat of Christ and be rewarded for the good deeds we have done in the body, not in our own self-effort but in dependence upon Him.

Now this does not mean that you run around looking for opportunities under every bushel. Or that every program you start is racking up eternal reward. It means that in the natural course of life God will give you opportunities.

When He does then the only need is to be sensitive to these opportunities and capitalize on them.

But when you do, remember above all this is 2 Cor 9:8, that if you don't see how you can possibly meet the needs, God is able to extend grace to you to enable you to have plenty to do the good deeds.

Verse 10, **Now He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness;** Again, the one **who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food** is God. This is similar to verse 8, "God is able to make all grace abound..." He's the one who supplies what is necessary to sow in the ground and to sustain as food. And He's even able to **multiply your seed** so that you can **sow more and** in the end there is an **increase in the harvest of your righteousness**. In other words, there are two things specified here that God will do. One is something He does for you in time and the other is something He does for you in eternity. First, in time He will give you a constant supply of whatever is necessary to do good deeds for others. It may be money or it may be time. But whatever is necessary to do the good deeds He will give you a constant supply of that. The only implied condition here is that we actually use what He gives us for the good deeds and not for ourselves. Second, in eternity your harvest of righteousness is increasing so that at the judgment you will be rewarded accordingly. At the judgment seat of Christ all believers will be judged according to their works. If these works arise from dependence upon God's grace, as is in view here, then the works will be rewarded. If they arise from dependence upon self then the works will not be rewarded. Only works done dependent upon God's grace are rewardable at the judgment seat of Christ. Those are the works that are clearly in view here. They are works that are characterized as **righteousness** and therefore rewardable.

Putting together what has been said so far, if you are a Christian then you were created in Christ Jesus for good works. These works were prepared beforehand by God and when the opportunities for good works arise your responsibility is to depend upon God's grace which is extended to you in time to enable you to do everything necessary to do the good works. When you do this God keeps a record of the righteousness you have done in eternity that will be rewarded at the judgment seat of Christ.

Verse 11 is actually a new sentence in the Greek and not a continuation of verse 10. The new thought is that **In everything you will be enriched for all liberality, which through us is producing thanksgiving to God.** Again, God will supply whatever is necessary so that we can liberally give to others. The thought is not that God will make us rich so that we can spend it on ourselves. The thought is that God will make us rich so that we can be generous to others. Surely if our intentions are to spend our riches on ourselves God will not make us rich. But if our hearts are attuned to the fact that our riches are intended to be used to be generous to others then our becoming rich would not ruin us but would increase the harvest of our righteousness. There is an entire attitude toward being rich in these verses that is very important.

Another new thought this verse introduces is that as we are enriched in everything in order to be generous to others this **produces thanksgiving to God.** The recipients of the generous gift recognize that God extended grace to the giver to enable them to give so abundantly. They then direct their thanksgiving to God. So that in the end the credit goes to God and not to the giver. The recipients recognize that ultimately behind the givers generosity is the all-sufficient grace of God which enabled the giver to possess the resources necessary to supply their need. Again, there is an entire attitude toward money and assets here that is very important not to lose sight of.

Verse 12, **For the ministry of this service is not only fully supplying the needs of the saints, but is also overflowing through many thanksgivings to God.** In this verse Paul points out two things the contribution accomplishes. First, the obvious thing is that it **fully supplied the needs of the saints.** These were the saints in Jerusalem who were in need due to various temporal causes. God was giving them the opportunity to respond to this situation by engaging in the grace **ministry** of giving. Again we point out that giving is **ministry.** Ministry is not something that special believers called clergy do. Ministry is something all believers are called to do. However, they must be equipped to do the work of ministry. To fulfill this equipping purpose God has given gifted believers to the church. Eph 4:11, “And He gave some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists and some pastors and teachers, **12**for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry.” These gifts are specifically stated to be given to equip believers for

ministry. While some of these gifts have ceased, for example, apostle and prophet, the NT Scriptures they left us continue to be the primary tool pastors and teachers use to equip the saints. Right now I am equipping you to understand the ministry of giving so as to **fully supply the needs of the saints**. It is a grace enabled ministry. God supplies everything you need to be generous to others in order to meet their needs. But that's not all. Meeting the needs to others is not an end in itself. As shown in verse 12 it is a means to the end that God may be thanked for His generosity. Paul says, **but is also overflowing through many thanksgivings to God**. God is thanked by the receiver because ultimately He is the one who supplied everything that was necessary for the giver to give. The imagery of the word **overflowing** is interesting because the needs were fully supplied, as if a cup was full, and the thanksgivings overflowed beyond the full cup.

In verses 13-14 we see the ultimate goal of grace giving. **Because of the proof given by this ministry, they will glorify God for your obedience to your confession of the gospel of Christ and for the liberality of your contribution to them and to all, 14** while they also, by prayer on your behalf, yearn for you because of the surpassing grace of God in you. The ultimate goal of all things in general and grace giving in particular is the glorification of God. Paul says the Jerusalem saints will glorify God **because of the proof given by this ministry**. This **ministry** refers to the administration of the gift by Paul and the delegation. The Greek for **proof** means "proven character" or "evidence." His point is that the evidence that the Corinthians had given would cause the Jerusalem saints to **glorify God** for two reasons; first, because it was an attestation of the Corinthians **obedience to their confession of the gospel of Christ**. The Corinthians had a vital faith. Their faith might have been seriously questioned considering their prior carnality evidenced by 1 Corinthians. However, this gift would set aside those questions. Now they unquestionably had a vital faith. This is only proper because all those who confess the **gospel of Christ** imply that they follow the teachings of Christ and His apostles. Both teach us to love one another by depending upon the Lord. The Corinthian's contribution demonstrated that they not only confessed the gospel of Christ but they were obedient to it by loving other believers through grace giving. The result was that the Jerusalem saints would **glorify God**. Second, they would glorify God **for the liberality of their contribution to them and to all**. The expression **to them and to all** is interesting because obviously

them is the Jerusalem saints but **to all** refers to all other believers. I think this shows the unity of the church. Giving to one believer or one group of believers is a gift to all believers because we are all one universal church, one body of Christ, one bride, one building! We have a kind of spiritual unity among ourselves that no other people group shares. This is something like the idea that once a gift was given to the church it has benefitted all believers, whether or not that gift is currently active or not. For example, apostle is a gift that was given in the early church during the foundational phase of the Church. After the foundation was laid and the building phase began this gift was no longer given. Yet today we still benefit from this gift since the apostles gave us the NT Scriptures that we study. So once a gift is given, even if given only during one period of the Church, it continues to benefit all. We are a unit and what one part of the body contributes benefits all the other parts. Something like that is being said here of giving. They were giving to the Jerusalem saints but in a way this gift was for all believers since we are all one unit. So for those two reasons the Jerusalem saints would glorify God, because of their obedience to their confession of the gospel and for their liberal contribution.

In verse 14, in return for the liberal gift, the Jerusalem saints would pray for the Corinthians and long to see them. Paul says, **while they also, by prayer on your behalf, yearn for you because of the surpassing grace of God in you.** Ultimately you see that the **surpassing grace of God** at work in the Corinthians is what elicits the prayers for the Corinthians and their desire to see the Corinthians. It's should be natural, when someone shares with you, to want to pray for them and long to see them. It should be natural to want to pray for and want to be with those whom God's grace is at work in. So here again we see that it is God's surpassing grace at work in our lives as believers, that gives us new desires, in this case to give to others. Giving must be a grace enabled function. And it's not only grace but it's **surpassing grace.** The Greek word **surpassing** is "to throw" or "cast" beyond a point on a scale, to go above and beyond. And that is what He is able to make abound to us in verse 8, a total sufficiency to accomplish any and every good deed that arises as an opportunity. Of course they wanted to pray for the Corinthians and of course they longed to be with them. God's surpassing grace was at work in them.

Finally, in verse 15 we come to the zenith of the entire argument. **Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!** The Greek word for **indescribable** is possibly a word coined by Paul. It is found only one other place in *Aristeas* 99. Moulton and Milligan say it means “wonder beyond description.” Liddel Scott says it means “ineffable.” Louw-Nida says it means “inexpressible, something that cannot be fully related.” The best way to understand this word is to understand that it is something that is incapable of total explanation. Now there are three interpretations as to just what the **indescribable gift** is. First, some argue that it refers to the contribution itself, the liberal amount of money that the Corinthians had given to the Jerusalem saints as referred to in verse 13. It was so much that the amount was incapable of total explanation. However, this is unlikely. An amount of money is an amount of money and can be totally expressed. Further, the contribution had yet to be given, even though a pledged amount had been promised. Second, the most common interpretation is that this is Christ. A. T. Robertson, the Bible Knowledge Commentary, Tom Constable, Jamiesson-Faucet-Brown, J. Vernon McGee and others. This interpretation is tempting for several reasons. First, Jesus Christ is an indescribable gift. Romans 5:15 and 8:32 among other passages teach that He is a gift. Second, it is tempting to link this verse back to 8:9 where Paul said that although Christ was rich, for our sake He became poor so that through His poverty we might become rich. Clearly the gift of Christ is in view in this passage and a linkage is possible in Paul’s mind. Third, to refer to Christ as the gift would be a fitting ending to these two chapters on giving since He is the chief motivation to give. However, a third interpretation is more likely in my estimation, the indescribable gift is the surpassing grace of God in verse 15. EDNT and Darby, though in the minority, hold to this interpretation. Grammatically the noun **gift** is feminine, as well as its adjective **indescribable**. The nearest antecedent that agrees in gender is the **surpassing grace** in verse 14. For these grammatical reasons it seems more likely that the **indescribable gift** is the **surpassing grace of God**. It’s His grace at work in our lives that produces a giving spirit that could not be produced by mere flesh alone. And while Christ himself is clearly an indescribable gift God’s surpassing grace is clearly behind God’s giving Him to us. God of mere grace sent Christ to us. So to say that the indescribable gift is God’s surpassing grace is to include the gift of Christ, which Paul has done in this section by reminding us of Christ’s gift. Thanks be to God then for His indescribable gift of surpassing grace that produces desires and actions in our lives that would never be produced

otherwise. He is at work in us to will and to do His good pleasure. Our only responsibility is to take advantage of His work by working out our own salvation with fear and trembling.

In conclusion, did the Corinthians prepare and have a gift ready when the delegation arrived? If you turn to Acts 20 you'll see the follow up report. Paul was at Ephesus and he went with the delegation ahead just as he said he would in this book. While he was at Ephesus Acts 19 reports a riot that occurred resulting in a great uproar in the theater at Ephesus. In chapter 20, verse 1, Paul "sent for the disciples, and when he had exhorted them and taken leave of them, he left to go to Macedonia." Macedonia we know is the northern province of Greece. Verse 2, "When he had gone through those districts and had given them much exhortation, he came to Greece." The reference to Greece is the southern province of Achaia, where Corinth was. Verse 3 reports that "he spent three months" there. It was during those three months that he wrote the book of Romans. Just remember that because I'm going to come back to it in a few minutes. Continuing verse 3, "and when a plot was formed against him by the Jews as he was about to set sail for Syria, he decided to return through Macedonia. So rather than sailing he went by land. And you see in verse 4 the large company that he was accompanied by, several men from Macedonia and some from Asia Minor. They went ahead in verse 5 and were waiting at Troas. All these men were going with Paul to deliver the gift to the Jerusalem saints. Even though it doesn't say there was a gift received I'll confirm to you from another passage in a moment that there was. Now we could follow the whole journey but for the sake of time we won't. Eventually they did make it to Jerusalem. Acts 21:15, they docked in Caesarea, "After these days we got ready and started on our way up to Jerusalem. 16Some of the disciples from Caesarea also came with us, taking us to Mnason of Cyprus, a disciple of long standing with whom we were to lodge. 17After we arrived in Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly." I suppose it was this occasion that he gave the gift to the saints at Jerusalem and they received it and them gladly. Now all this is circumstantial evidence until we turn to Romans 15. I told you Paul wrote Romans while he was in Corinth for those three months. In Romans 15:22ff he's telling the Romans that he wants to come see them but he's never been able to come. And in verse 25 he says, "but now, I am going to Jerusalem serving the saints." We just saw that trip in Acts, they were received gladly. And the reason he was going, verse 26, "For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make a

contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. 27 Yes, they were pleased to do so..." we could go on and on, but you see there "Achaia" and Corinth was the chief city in Achaia. So Corinth did make the contribution, they were pleased to do it. You might take a look at verse 31 because Paul was hoping that his gift would prove acceptable to the saints at Jerusalem, which we saw that it was. In the end the Corinthians did just as they had purposed in their heart. The grace of God, indeed the surpassing grace of God, was at work in the lives of the Corinthians. What an indescribable gift. And with that said we have a lot to give thanks for because that same indescribable gift is at work in us.

In summary, God is able to make grace upon grace abound to you so that if there is any good deed you will have all that is necessary to accomplish it. When we do the righteousness accrues to our account waiting to be rewarded at the judgment seat of Christ. The one who supplies all the assets for us to do with will always grant us a continual supply to help others and will increase the amount of righteousness in preparation for the Day of Judgment. In everything He makes us rich, whether time, money or gifts for the purpose of liberally giving to other believers. This produces thanksgiving to God because the ministry of giving our time and money is not only fully supplying the needs of other believers but is also overflowing to many thanksgivings to God. The recipients of our grace gift will glorify God because our obedience is consistent with our confession of the gospel of Jesus Christ as well as because of our contribution to them and to all believers who share in this great organism, the Church. In return the recipients will also pray for the givers as well as long to be with them because of the indescribable gift of God at work in them, namely, the surpassing grace of God which enables believers to do good deeds that they could never do on their own.

In conclusion, what kind of applications can we make? First, God's grace is sufficient for every good work. In fact it's His grace that is necessary for every good work. We are not self-sufficient but His grace is sufficient. When the opportunities arise, since He has prepared those works beforehand for us to walk in them, then His grace will supply whatever we need to do the good works. Second, the result of every good work is an accruing of righteousness that He will reward at the judgment seat of Christ. How gracious it is for the Lord to reward us since it is His grace that supplied what was necessary to do the good works in the first place. So for Him to then reward us for them is

grace upon grace. Third, when we give to others it produces an overflow of thanksgiving to God. One of the chief things is to be thankful and the recipients of grace gifts recognize that God is the ultimate giver and therefore overflow in thanksgiving to Him. Fourth, giving is an obedient response consistent with the confession of the gospel. If you profess the gospel then you have first received from God His gracious gift of salvation; how consistent is it then to give grace gifts to other believers? A vital faith consistent with our profession is important. Fifth, the recipients of the gift also pray for the giver as well as long to be with them because they recognize God's surpassing grace at work in their lives. Finally, the indescribable gift is God's surpassing grace that enables us to do things we could never imagine to be able to do by ourselves. Grace, grace, grace, from beginning to end, giving is a grace operation. j

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