

## Message #23

## II Corinthians 8:10-15

A man was once sitting in a church service and it came time to take the offering. As the offering plate was passed, he reached into his pocket thinking he was going to give a \$10 bill and by mistake pulled out a \$100 dollar bill and placed it in the offering plate. Just as the church attendant was about to take the plate to pass it to the next row, he realized what he had done. So he said, "I intended to give \$10 so maybe I should make change." Then he said, "Oh never mind, God will reward me for giving \$100 dollars." The wise church attendant taking the offering said, "No, God won't reward you for giving \$100, He will reward you for giving \$10 and because you could really afford to give \$100 and didn't, He won't reward you at all."

Giving to the Lord's work is not just about the dollar amount. Some people could give nickels and actually thrill God more than people who give hundreds. In fact, there is a story in Scripture of this very thing. In Luke 21:1-4, Luke records the story of a poor widow. Rich people were putting huge sums of money into the Temple treasury out of their surplus of money and a widow came and put in two small copper coins, which was all she had in the world. Jesus said that the widow gave more than all of the rich people combined because she gave from her need and poverty. She actually put all she had into the offering when she actually had her own needs.

The subject of giving is a subject that Paul addresses in great detail in II Corinthians 8-9. He wanted to instruct the Corinthians regarding grace giving, which is willing giving, proportionate giving and sacrificial giving. **In fact, one of the great evidences that we have experienced the grace of God and are a new creation is that which relates to our concept of and use of money. People who truly understand grace are led by the Spirit of God to give up some of their money for the work of God.**

When it comes to grace giving, Paul never commanded anything (v. 8). Grace giving is giving that automatically comes from a heart that is right with God. Paul did not try to manipulate people into giving. He did not try to shame people into giving. He did not try to threaten people into giving. He did not try to scold people so they would give. He simply set forth grace truth and let God do what God was going to do.

When Paul begins **verse 10** by saying "I give my opinion," he does not mean this is not inspired by God. After all, Paul was an apostle who spoke and wrote by inspiration of God. What he means is this information has not previously been addressed in the grace Church Age. Paul had not received a direct command from Jesus Christ about grace giving, like he did on the topic of the communion service (I Cor. 11:23). Paul, himself, is not commanding anything either, he is simply setting forth God-inspired truth about giving and specifically about completing a project.

**IN VIEW OF THE GRACE OF GOD THAT HAS BEEN GIVEN TO EVERY BELIEVER, GOD'S PEOPLE ARE TO COMPLETE FINANCIAL PROJECTS BY SACRIFICIALLY AND PROPORTIONATELY AND WILLINGLY CONTRIBUTING IN PROPORTION TO WHAT GOD HAS GIVEN THEM.**

We may recall that to motivate these Corinthians, Paul had used a couple of examples. He used the example of the Macedonians who gave far beyond anything he expected and He used the ultimate example of Jesus Christ.

This passage, if properly considered, forces every believer to do some sort of self-analysis in regard to grace and giving. There are at least four key financial points Paul makes in this text:

**FINANCIAL POINT #1** – When it comes to grace giving, finish what you start. **8:10-11**

The previous year the Corinthians had decided to help the Jerusalem church. They wanted to do something for God and promised to do something and were focused on helping. In fact, according to **verse 11** there was a readiness to help. They had started this project. Apparently in one year's time they had put away a considerable sum of money.

Now we must assume that God's Spirit had led the Corinthians to this and it was the will of God or else Paul would never even address this subject. He would not address in the inspired Scriptures something that wasn't God's will. The Corinthians had experienced God's grace and they wanted to be part of a major financial project.

But a year had passed and they began to lose their focus. So Paul says look, what you wanted to do in the past doesn't mean much if you don't get it done in the present. There is often a huge gap when it comes to giving between what one once promised and what one actually accomplished. There is often a huge gap between promise and performance. Every New Years people make promises or pledges of which they never follow through.

God is not pleased with jobs half-done, He wants it all done. When we start something for God, we need to finish it and see it through. We need to get it done because that is what pleases God. It isn't pleasing to God to start something and not finish it. We must assume that if we had the ability to start something, God has also given us the ability to finish something. In fact, Paul says at the end of **verse 11** that the project can be completed "by your ability." I understand this to mean that if every person in the Corinthian church responded to this instruction, it was within their ability to do it.

Obviously God knew how much money was in this church. He knew what people had and what they didn't have. Paul believed the Corinthian church had the ability to complete the project.

Now carefully observe what Paul says in **verse 10**, "this is to your advantage." Do you see that? Now remember the issue here is collecting a large offering and sending it to the poor saints of Jerusalem. So you would naturally think that the advantage of the offering would be the poor saints of Jerusalem. Paul says "no." **The advantage of giving is not for the believers in Jerusalem who would receive the gift, but the believers in Corinth who would give the gift.**

When a church starts to do something for God that has financial involvement and then completes it, God blesses the people. It is for the people's advantage to complete a project because God will grant great growth and great blessing to those who do.

By giving, we develop our own spirituality. It is for our own good. That is why Paul says to the Corinthians finish what you started a year ago.

**FINANCIAL POINT #2** – When it comes to grace giving, willingly give what you do have, not what you don't have. **8:12**

Our grace giving to God's work that is to our advantage before God is based on two key elements brought out in this verse:

**(Element #1)** - A readiness and willingness to give of our own volition.

**(Element #2)** - An assessment of what we actually have not what we don't have.

Now the word "readiness" (προθυμια) that appears here and also **verse 11** is one that describes an eager, willing and ready mindset and attitude about getting the job done for God (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 381). When grace is working right in us, we will have a joyful desire to give to the work of God. **Now one may contribute to a financial project reluctantly, but there will be no advantage to the person if that is the attitude in which the gift was given. God blesses the one who gives eagerly, willingly, cheerfully.**

So Paul is saying that when God's grace is affecting a person properly, that individual will have a willing, ready and eager mindset to complete the financial project that has been started. No person right with God can possibly find joy in a project half-done.

**Now carefully observe what the grace mindset individually does; it assesses what one actually has, not what one doesn't have.** What I understand this to mean is that each person does a self-analysis of what he/she actually has and then based on what one has, one desires to eagerly give to complete the project. This is proportionate giving. Each person was to analyze what he/she had and then give to complete the project they started the year before. We are to base our giving on what we actually have, not on hopeful financial windfalls or anticipated earnings.

Many times someone will say well if this happens then I will give this. That is not grace, biblical financial thinking. Grace thinking calculates what one has, not what one expects to have.

**This is a very important principle of giving; you give proportionately to what you have, not what you don't have.** Paul said in his first letter to the Corinthians that grace giving was to be in proportion to how God had prospered a person (I Cor. 16:2). So our individual giving is to be based on what God has actually given us, not based on what He hasn't given us.

God knows what we actually have and He sees our attitude about giving to Him. He knows if a person is really holding out on Him or if one is sacrificially giving to Him.

If a person truly has a little, giving a lot is not an option because giving a little is giving a lot. But if a person truly has stock piles of money, giving a lot is the natural outworking for one who is walking close with God.

**By the way, this principle seems to contradict the idea of the “faith pledging” of money we don’t have.** This idea of passing out cards for people to sign a pledge promise based on what they don’t have is not right. Biblical giving is always based on what we actually have, not what we don’t have.

Dr. J. Vernon McGee said he thought that if a person pledged to give a certain amount they knew they had, it was okay. In fact, he said we sign pledges on houses, cars, refrigerators and everything else, so we certainly can “sign on the dotted line for God’s work” (*II Corinthians*, p. 128). Even if we concede his point, it would be based on what we know we have and can give and not based on what we don’t have, which is Paul’s point here.

Now we may recall that in **verse 3**, Paul said that the Macedonians had given “beyond their ability.” This was a very unusual sacrificial demonstration of grace. They were giving at the ultimate sacrificial level. They were way beyond proportionate giving. But proportionate giving is what Paul stresses here. You give based on what you have, not what you don’t have.

**This point also completely contradicts the idea of legal, O.T. tithing.** A tithe in the O.T. was actually more than 10%. There were three different tithes that totalled about 30 %. But even using the 10% figure, which comes out of the O.T., the fact is giving 10% is really not grace proportionate giving because it may or may not be sacrificial giving.

Let’s illustrate the point. Let’s say a person makes \$100 per week. 10 % is \$10 and that is a major sacrifice because it leaves him only \$90 per week to live on. But if a man makes \$100,000 per week, 10% would be \$10,000 per week, but he has \$90,000 per week left over. So proportionately speaking, to be at the same sacrifice level he would have to give far more than \$10,000 per week.

In grace giving to the church, a person assesses what he really has and then gives accordingly. When that happens, projects are completed.

I want to again cite J. Vernon McGee and an illustration that he personally experienced. He said that he was the pastor of a church in Texas back around 1930 and he had a man on his board who owned several Coca-Cola plants. He owned a huge ranch and Dr. McGee said he used to go out and hunt and fish on the ranch. The man would often say to Dr. McGee, “Why don’t you teach on tithing? After all, it is in the Bible and it is a way of giving.” Dr. McGee said “Yes it was the Old Testament way of giving, but under grace I don’t believe tithing is the way it should be done.” So the rich man asked him how he thought it should be done. Dr. McGee took him to I Corinthians 16:2 and said according to how God has prospered a person. Now this was during the depression so Dr. McGee said to this man “For some strange reason, Coca Cola is selling and you are doing very well.

However, there are some members in our church who couldn't give a tithe right now. I don't believe God is asking them to give a tenth. There are a few people who are doing well and they are to give as they have been prospered—and they ought to give half.” Dr. McGee said the man never asked him about tithing again.

This is exactly the point Paul makes here; our giving is to be proportionate to what we have.

**FINANCIAL POINT #3** – This instruction about finances is not to burden, but for equality.  
**8:13-14**

No grace giving financial project should ever be undertaken with the idea of placing a terrible burden on someone. Carefully observe that the giving was based on “abundance” not based on what would put the giver in such a financial duress that he/she couldn't pay his own bills.

**Now let's be real clear on this point; the equality that Paul is discussing here is a free from need equality.** Paul is not developing some socialism that says we force rich people to give to the poor people so all people have what the rich have. He is promoting the idea that the Corinthian's need to help the Judean believers is because they did have real need. They were hurting for food, clothing and shelter not because they didn't want to work or weren't willing to work, but because of their faith in Jesus Christ. Paul believed that every believer deserved an equality of having needs met.

Now Paul says I am not discussing this with you to put some financial hardship on you; I am discussing this with you so you will relieve the financial hardship which is on the Jerusalem saints.

Paul says there should be some sort of equality in God's people in that they would have some food, shelter and clothing. He was not saying that the Corinthians had to give up everything they have in order to make someone else rich. But there was real “want” real “need” in those Judean saints and Paul says I am trying to collect this money to help bring them relief.

In the first century, the Gentile world had been greatly blessed by the preaching of grace, which came out from Jerusalem and Judea. All Gentiles owe a great debt of thanks to the Jewish people. Paul says I just want them free from having nothing. So he appeals to the Corinthians to complete the project they started.

Furthermore, at the time Paul wrote this, for the most part, the Gentile believing world was prosperous and the Jewish believing world was poor. **God controls economies of the world and never is that point more clearly stated than in verse 14.**

Paul says to the Corinthians at the present time you have been blessed by God financially, but that could change. There could come a time when the roles could be reversed. There could come a time when you need help and if you have financially completed the project for Him, God will see to it that others will help you.

**FINANCIAL POINT #4** – God’s Word teaches that His work is doable with what one has because God will continue to supply. **8:15**

Paul uses an illustration from Exodus 16 and the matter pertaining to manna. When the children of Israel came out of the land of Egypt and headed to the Promised Land, God gave them manna, which was called by Asaph “angel’s food” (Ps. 78:24-25) because it came down from heaven. There was kind of a frost-looking flake on the ground (Ex. 16:14) and when the people saw it they said “man hu” (Ex. 16:15), which means “what is it.” The word “manna” means what is it.

All the people gathered what they needed. The one who gathered much didn’t have too much and the one who gathered a little did not lack anything. There was complete equality among the people. God gave the people who needed much enough. God gave the people who needed little what they needed.

Now it seems to me that Paul is using this illustration for two purposes:

- 1) To show that there should be equality among God’s people in that they have enough to eat.
- 2) To show that when we give, God will bless both the one who has much and the one who has little. He will see that we always have what we need.

The point is that God gives enough to get the job done. In this case, the Gentile world had plenty and the Jewish world didn’t. They had enough money to accomplish the goal.

God’s people have the opportunity to use their money to accomplish major things for Him and to do this is to our advantage. People who generously, sacrificially, proportionately, willingly give to God so that things started may be completed will discover God will open the flood tide of His blessings, just as Paul will say later in this section: “he who sows sparingly shall also reap sparingly and he who sows bountifully shall also reap bountifully” (II Cor. 9:6).