

Grace-Oriented Giving

An Exhortation to Grace-Oriented Giving

2 Corinthians 8:6-15

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An Exhortation to Grace-Oriented Giving

Scripture

Today I would like to continue my four-week series titled, “Grace-Oriented Giving” from 2 Corinthians 8-9. These two chapters give us some of the clearest and most explicit teaching on giving throughout all of Scripture.

Last week we looked at “An Example of Grace-Oriented Giving” from 2 Corinthians 8:1-5.

Today, I would like to examine “An Exhortation to Grace-Oriented Giving” from 2 Corinthians 8:6-15.

So, let’s read 2 Corinthians 8:6-15:

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.

⁸I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine. ⁹For 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. ¹⁰And in this matter I give my judgment: this benefits you, who a year ago started not only to do this work but also to desire to do it. ¹¹So now finish doing it as well, so that your readiness in desiring it may be matched by your completing it out of what you have. ¹²For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have. ¹³For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened, but that as a matter of fairness ¹⁴your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need, that there may be fairness. ¹⁵As it is written, “Whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack.” (2 Corinthians 8:6-15)

Introduction

Today we continue our sermon series on “Guidelines to Grace-Oriented Giving” from 2 Corinthians 8-9. These two chapters are rich in teaching about financial stewardship. They teach us so much about how we are to use the resources that God has entrusted to us for the advancement of his kingdom and his glory. Properly understanding and applying the teaching of this part of God’s Word can have profound effects on each one of us as we learn from the apostle Paul what God has to say about giving.

Now, I know that having said that, some of you are wishing that you had scheduled a trip to dear old Aunt Beatrice. Maybe some of you are opening the bulletin to check if you are not really scheduled to work in the nursery this morning! Or maybe you are wondering why your dentist doesn’t schedule root canals on Sunday morning, because surely that will be less painful than listening to a sermon on giving!

I think it is fair to say that most of us feel some level of guilt about our giving or, perhaps I should say, our *lack* of giving!

This past fall our church officers noticed that giving to the various ministry funds in the church was down rather significantly. One of the things we noticed is that many of you give regularly and faithfully to the church. However, some of you give nothing at all, and a number of you give very little to the ministries of the church. That is why the church officers agreed that a sermon series on financial stewardship would be appropriate at this time.

I should mention, however, that if you have fallen on hard financial times, please let us know. For one thing, we want to pray with you and for you. And it also helps us to know your situation.

Now, my goal is not to make you feel bad. I want to make you feel better. However, the path to making you feel better about your stewardship of God’s resources is laid out right here in the

Review

But, let us first review what we covered last week.

Paul planted the church in Corinth in 51-52 AD, during his second missionary journey. After Paul established the Corinthian Church he returned to Antioch, thus concluding his second missionary journey.

On his third missionary journey Paul traveled to Ephesus and stayed there for three years. During his stay at Ephesus, Paul wrote several letters to the Corinthian Church, addressing several concerns that had arisen at that church. Most likely Paul wrote this letter about 55 AD.

The churches of Macedonia consisted of three churches: in Philippi, Berea, and Thessalonica. The Macedonian churches were north of Corinth, in what is northern Greece today. Corinth is in southern Greece. So the churches in Macedonia were not far away but they were in very different circumstances.

Macedonia was severely impoverished. It had been a Roman territory for 200 years. They had been cruelly treated by the Romans. The Romans had taxed them so heavily on their rich mineral resources that they were extremely poor. Moreover, the churches of Macedonia were the objects of persecution.

Paul was raising money for the church in Jerusalem. The church in Jerusalem was experiencing an extremely difficult time financially for several reasons. There had been an explosion of new Christians in Jerusalem from all over the world that needed to be housed and fed. There had also been a persecution of Christians, so that they could not easily find work. And finally, there had been a massive famine that impacted the availability of food.

And so Paul was raising money for the church in Jerusalem. Wherever he went he asked for financial support for the church in

Jerusalem. He had previously asked the churches of Macedonia, and now he was asking the church of Corinth to support the work. Actually, he had already asked the church of Corinth to support the work about a year earlier (see 1 Corinthians 16:1-3), and so now he was repeating his request to them.

There was so much poverty and so much persecution that the churches in Macedonia were likely the poorest of all churches in the Gentile world. Consequently, they provide the best example of grace-oriented giving. And last week we looked at that example of grace-oriented giving by the Macedonian churches.

Lesson

Today, I want us to look an exhortation to grace-oriented giving by the apostle Paul.

Let's use the following outline:

1. Grace-Oriented Givers Give Graciously (8:6-9)
2. Grace-Oriented Givers Give Willingly (8:10-12)
3. Grace-Oriented Givers Give Proportionally (8:13-15)

I. **Grace-Oriented Givers Give Graciously (8:6-9)**

First, grace-oriented givers give graciously.

The apostle Paul said to the church at Corinth in verses 6-9, **“Accordingly, we urged Titus that as he had started, so he should complete among you this act of grace. 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. I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine. 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.”**

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The Lord Jesus Christ is always the preeminent example for us to follow, whether in service, suffering, or sacrifice. Like Jesus Christ, the Macedonian Christians gave themselves first to the Lord and also to others (8:5).

If we give ourselves to God, we will have little problem giving our money to God. And if we give ourselves to God, we will also give ourselves to others.

It is impossible to love God and ignore the needs of our neighbor. Jesus Christ gave himself for us (Galatians 1:4; 2:20). Should we not give ourselves to him? He died so that we might not live for ourselves, but for him and for others (2 Corinthians 5:15).

The Macedonians' giving was motivated by grace (8:7-8). In 2 Corinthians 8-9 the apostle Paul used nine different words for the offering, but the one he used the most was grace.

Remember, the Macedonians were extremely poor, and the Corinthians were relatively rich.

What a rebuke to the Corinthians who were so enriched with spiritual blessings (1 Corinthians 1:4-5). They were so wrapped up in the *gifts* of the Spirit that they had neglected the *graces* of the Spirit, including the grace of giving.

The Macedonian churches had an “abundance of . . . extreme poverty” (8:2), and yet they abounded in their generosity. The Corinthians had an abundance of spiritual gifts, yet they were slow in keeping their promise and fulfilling their pledge to help the poor in Jerusalem.

We must never argue that the ministry of our spiritual gifts is a substitute for generous giving. “I teach a Sunday School class, so I don't have to give!” is not an explanation – it's an excuse.

The Christian who remembers that his gifts are *gifts* will be motivated to give to others and not “hide” behind his ministry for the Lord. I have met Christians who have argued that, since they devote their time in serving the Lord, they are not obligated to

give. Paul argued just the opposite: since you are wonderfully gifted from God, you ought to want to give even more financially!

Paul was careful that they understood that he was not giving them a command to give. Actually, he was contrasting the attitude of the Macedonians with that of the Corinthians. He was pointing out that the Macedonians were following the example of the Lord: they were poor, yet they gave. The Corinthians said that they loved Paul; now he asked them to prove that love by sharing in the offering. Grace-oriented giving is an evidence of love – love for Christ, love for God’s servants who have ministered to us, and love for those who have needs that we are able to help meet.

Notice also that Paul pointed to the example of Jesus as our model for giving. In what ways was Jesus rich? Certainly he was rich in his person, for he is eternal God. He is rich in his possessions and in his position as King of kings and Lord of lords. He is rich in his power, for he can do anything. Yet, in spite of the fact that he had all these riches – and more – he became poor.

The tense of the verb indicates that it is his incarnation, his birth at Bethlehem, that is meant here. He united himself to mankind and took on himself a human body. He left the throne to become a servant. He laid aside all his possessions so that he did not even have a place to lay his head. His ultimate experience of poverty was when he was made sin for us on the cross. Hell is eternal poverty, and on the cross Jesus Christ became the poorest of the poor.

Some of you have seen the Ken Burns’ series titled *The War* on PBS. In one of the interviews one man shared how he and his brother were among the first troops to assault Omaha Beach in France. He lost contact with his brother, whom he loved dearly. Five weeks later he learned that his brother had died during the assault. And then he said, “I would have given my arms and my legs to have my brother back.”

Well, Jesus gave his arms and legs. He gave his entire body

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for us. And why did he do it? That we might become rich! We were poor before we met Jesus Christ, and we were totally bankrupt. But now that we have trusted him, we share in all of his riches! We are now the children of God, “heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ” (Romans 8:17).

Since this is true, how can we refuse to give to others? He became poor to make us rich!

Can we not follow his example, as did the Macedonian churches, who out of their extreme poverty abounded in generosity?

So, grace-oriented givers give graciously.

II. Grace-Oriented Givers Give Willingly (8:10-12)

Second, grace-oriented givers give willingly.

Paul said in verses 10-12, **“And in this matter I give my judgment: this benefits you, who a year ago started not only to do this work but also to desire to do it. So now finish doing it as well, so that your readiness in desiring it may be matched by your completing it out of what you have. For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have.”**

There is a great difference between *promise* and *performance*. The Corinthians had boasted to Titus a year before that they would share in the special collection (8:6), but they did not keep their promise. Now in verses 10–12 Paul emphasized *willingness*. Grace giving must come from a willing heart; it cannot be coerced or forced.

We must be careful here not to confuse *willing* with *doing*, but the two must go together. If the willing is sincere and in the will of God, then there must be “a performance also” (8:11; Philippians 2:12-13). Paul did not say that *willing* was a substitute for *doing*, because it is not. But if our giving is motivated by grace, we will give

willingly, and not because we have been forced to give.

There is a sense in which God sees the “heart gift” and not the “hand gift.” If the heart wanted to give more, but was unable to do so, God sees it and records it accordingly. But if the hand gives more than the heart wants to give, God records what is in the heart, no matter how big the offering in the hand might be.

Pastor and author Warren Wiersbe tells the story of a friend of his who was leaving for a business trip, and his wife reminded him before church that she needed some extra money for household expenses. Just before the offering, he slipped some money into her hand, and she, thinking it was their weekly offering, put it all in the offering plate. It was the expense money for the week.

“Well,” said Wiersbe’s friend, “we gave it to the Lord and he keeps the records.”

“How much did you *intend* to give?” asked their pastor, and the man gave an amount. “Then that’s what God recorded,” said the pastor, “because he saw the intent of your heart!”

God sees, not the portion, but the proportion. If we could have given more, and did not, God notes it. If we wanted to give more, and could not, God also notes that. When we give willingly, according to what we have, we are practicing grace-oriented giving.

So, grace-oriented givers give graciously. And they give willingly.

III. Grace-Oriented Givers Give Proportionately (8:13-15)

And third, grace-oriented givers give proportionately.

Paul said in verses 13-15, **“I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened, but that as a matter of fairness your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need, that there may be fairness. As it is written, ‘Whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had**

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no lack.”

Paul did not suggest that the rich become poor so that the poor might become rich. It would be unwise for a Christian to go into debt in order to relieve somebody else's debt, unless, of course, he was able to handle the responsibility of paying the debt back. Paul saw a “fairness” in the whole procedure: the Gentiles were enriched spiritually by the Jews, so the Jews should be enriched materially by the Gentiles (see Romans 15:25–28). Furthermore, the Gentile churches at that time were enjoying some measure of material wealth, while the believers in Jerusalem were suffering. That situation could one day be reversed. There might come a time when the Jewish believers would be assisting the Gentiles.

Who does the equalizing? God does. Paul used the miracle of the manna as an illustration of the principle (Exodus 16:18). No matter how much manna the Jews gathered each day, they always had what they needed. Those who tried to hoard the manna discovered that it was impossible, because the manna would decay and smell (Exodus 16:20). The lesson is clear: gather what you need, share what you can, and don't try to hoard God's blessings. God will see to it that you will not be in need if you trust him and obey his Word.

Our *motive* for giving is God's glory, but our *measure* for giving is God's material blessing. Paul made this clear when he wrote to the Corinthians in his first letter, “On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come” (1 Corinthians 16:2). Paul did not lay down any mathematical formula, because grace-oriented giving is not limited by a tithe (10 percent). Grace-oriented giving is systematic, but it is not legalistic. It is not satisfied with only the minimum, whatever that minimum might be.

Since it is God who does the “balancing of the books,” we

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cannot accuse Paul of teaching some form of communism. In fact, 2 Corinthians 8:13 is a direct statement against communism. The so-called “communism” of the early church (Acts 2:44-47; 4:32-37) has no relationship to the communistic political and economic systems that are promoted today. The early Christians (like many Christians today) *voluntarily* shared what they had, but did not force people to participate. The entire program was temporary; and the fact that Paul had to take up a special collection to relieve their needs is proof that the program was never meant to be imitated by later generations of Christians.

Grace-oriented giving is a matter of faith: we obey God and believe that he will meet our needs as we help to meet the needs of others. As the Jews gathered the manna each day, so we must depend on God to “give us this day our daily bread” (Matthew 6:11). We must not waste or squander what God gives us; neither must we hoard it. In the will of God, it is right to save. (The Jews saved Friday’s manna to eat on the Sabbath, and the manna did not decay [Exodus 16:22–26].) But out of God’s will, the wealth that we hoard will harm us rather than help us (see James 5:1–6).

So, grace-oriented givers give graciously. They give willingly. And they give proportionately.

Conclusion

Amy Carmichael (1867-1951) was a missionary to India, and she once said, “You can give without loving, but you cannot love without giving.” How true that is. You and I are the recipients of God’s love and grace. We knew the riches of Christ who became poor for our sake. And so, we must respond to God’s love and grace with giving that is oriented by the grace of God. Amen.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

This sermon, and other sermons, by the Rev. Freddy Fritz can be found at:

1. www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/sermons
2. www.sermoncentral.com/contributors/freddy-fritz-sermons-11181.asp
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PRAYER:

Our Father, thank you for your Word, which is authoritative, inspired and inerrant.

You have exhorted us to become grace-oriented givers today. Our supreme example is the Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for our sake he became poor, so that we by his poverty might become rich.

O Lord, thank you for the Lord Jesus Christ. Thank you for his willingness to give everything so that we might be reconciled to you and have riches beyond measure.

Enable us now to become givers who give graciously, willingly, and proportionately. May we be more like the Macedonian Christians than the Corinthian Christians. May we recognize that all that we have is yours, and we are simply stewards of the riches that you have entrusted to us to use for your glory and your kingdom.

And all of this we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

BENEDICTION:

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.

CHARGE:

Now, brothers and sisters, go and serve God wholeheartedly!