

Philippians Postscript | The Grace of Giving

The Grace of Giving (Part Two)

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8.31.14

2 Corinthians 9.1-15

For it is superfluous for me to write to you about this ministry to the saints; ² for I know your readiness, of which I boast about you to the Macedonians, namely, that Achaia has been prepared since last year, and your zeal has stirred up most of them. ³ But I have sent the brethren, in order that our boasting about you may not be made empty in this case, so that, as I was saying, you may be prepared; ⁴ otherwise if any Macedonians come with me and find you unprepared, we-- not to speak of you-- will be put to shame by this confidence. ⁵ So I thought it necessary to urge the brethren that they would go on ahead to you and arrange beforehand your previously promised bountiful gift, so that the same would be ready as a bountiful gift and not affected by covetousness.

⁶ Now this I say, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. ⁷ Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. ⁸ 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; ⁹ as it is written, "HE SCATTERED ABROAD, HE GAVE TO THE POOR, HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS ENDURES FOREVER." 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; ¹¹ you will be enriched in everything for all liberality, which through us is producing thanksgiving to God. 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. ¹³ 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. ¹⁵ Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!

This current series (mini-series) is a kind of *appendix* or *postscript* to the main series from this summer.

We looked at the Apostle Paul's *Letter to the Church at Philippi* (Macedonia, N. Greece). We got to know that ancient church and now our acquaintance is rounded out by another letter...in which Paul refers to the Church at Philippi (or Macedonia) and uses them as an example of generosity – a church that was wildly liberal and liberated with their money.

They didn't have a lot of money but they gave beyond their ability to do so... And now Paul wants to see that same *giving dynamic*, the same impulse toward generosity in another church – in Southern Greece, the church at Corinth.

And Paul...would like to see this impulse in all churches including this one (St. A). For Paul, it only makes sense. The Gospel, the basic message of Christianity is not only about generosity – *it also leads to that: it generates bigheartedness and freedom from financial anxiety in everyone who believes it.*

This morning we see the rest of the story, which began last week. We get a bit more of the actual situation in both these churches and we find out more about how to maintain this practice of charitable giving and ongoing generosity *and how to do it in the distinctive way the Gospel empowers.*

Let's look at: #1 – Responding to an Awkward Situation #2 – Giving As the Right Thing to Do; #3 – The New Way to Do the Right Thing

The awkward situation is that Paul had been in this church we've been studying this summer, the church at Philippi (Macedonia) and Paul has been kind of boasting about their neighbors in the South, the Church at Corinth.

Paul said to the Philippians, "Hey, I know a church just like you Philippians...really generous...the Church at Corinth... In fact, they've started to raise money to help the famine victims in Jerusalem JUST LIKE YOUR CHURCH is doing!"

And the Church at Philippi (in the North) was thrilled. They really got excited about cooperating with this sister church and excited that the "grace contagion" THEY had caught was having similar results in other local churches. So Paul arranged to bring a delegation of Philippians down to Corinth to see this same generosity in another church. They were psyched!

And then while Paul was there, in Macedonia (the North), a friend, Titus, arrived from Corinth and Paul learned that the fundraising had stopped. They started well, but they had a lot going on and a lot of other issues (in that Corinthian Church) and they shelved it.

And Paul says, "Uh oh! This is gonna be really awkward! See, I've already made plans to come to Corinth and I've already invited a mission team to accompany me – plan have been made. I'm gonna look like a liar...you're gonna look unprepared and even the Philippians/Macedonians are gonna be embarrassed.

It'd be like bragging to your new college roommate about how great your home was and you invite him home with you for the weekend...but mom and dad have really let the empty-nest fall apart...Dad stopped shaving and they're walking around in their...sweat pants (or worse!) Awkward!

So Paul says, “Look! There’s still time...I’m telling you in this letter that I’m on my way and you can still clean up the house...you can sweep and tidy up so that it won’t be so awkward for everyone...”

You can DO the right thing! You want to be generous and you started to raise the money... It was YOUR idea... Please don’t let me look like a liar: fix this awkward situation. DO the right thing!

So... feeling the awkwardness, we want Paul to help us out! Direct us: what IS the right thing?

Well Paul repeats these words over and over – *get organized! Don’t be sloppy and haphazard.* Don’t be ruled by your feelings but prepare! “(5) Arrange beforehand your previously promised bountiful gift.”

You see the repetition of words like “readiness... prepared... unprepared... arrange... promised... purposed”. This is NOT simply a kind of immature, purely emotional, “do what your heart tells you to do” kind of appeal. It’s a practice. *It’s a spiritual discipline that requires forethought and planning and follow-through.* Paul wrote in the First Corinthian Letter (Ch. 16) “On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with your income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made”. (NIV)

And NOT ONLY *is it the right thing* to get past the need for emotional appeals and heart-rending pictures (not to say there’s never a place for that) but not only is Paul saying, “It’s time to grow up and be intentional, regular givers, a spiritual practice not just a erratic, random acts of kindness ... but commitment.”

BUT ALSO... you have to give for the right reasons. “(7) God loves a cheerful giver.” You have to do it whether you feel like it or NOT ...AND you have to feel like it! “Each one as he/she has purposed in heart”... “cheerful” (that Greek word is the root of our English word “exhilarate” – you have to be exhilarated to give...and you have to stay that way so your giving is NOT impulsive but deliberate, planned.

And at this point, we may want to go back to Paul and say, “Hey, Paul, you know that question about how do we address this awkward situation and how do we DO THE RIGHT THING...well...uh...never mind”

Because who could do this? It’s NOT like paying your electric bill or your taxes – THEY only have to be paid with discipline and regularity...but it doesn’t matter if “your motives are right”. FP&L and the IRS don’t care if you’re “exhilarated” to pay your bills. You only have to commit. Simply put the check in the envelope or click the mouse and you can curse or stomp your foot or whine or shake your fist.

But PAUL...you want us to give as regularly as if it were a bill that we owe...to which we COMMIT...a planned, intentional giving... AND our heart has to be in it as well...?

How can that kind of giving POSSIBLY be sustained?

Well, one clue may come in this odd quotation right in the middle of the passage (it's v. 9, in capital letters signifying that it comes from the OT; also, "it is written"). The reference is from Psalm 112...*BUT* the odd part is that the "HE" in the Psalm is NOT referring to God but to the righteous man.

That Psalm begins with the words, "Praise YHWH! How blessed is the man who fears YHWH!"

That is the man who, as it's quoted here in 2nd Cor, this righteous man is the one who scatters abroad and gives to the poor and this man's righteousness endures forever.

It's unclear...is this a reference to God or a reference to a righteous man? AND the point seems to be that this way of life and this way of giving is unsustainable EXCEPT by a kind of partnership between God and man.

This is written by Paul who quoted the words, "there IS no one righteous – No NOT ONE!" He clearly teaches at every turn that NO ONE has what it takes! No one can be righteous and HERE, in this context, you see it – HOW CAN ANY SINFUL, SELFISH human being, give in a way that is both disciplined and delightful – expected and exhilarated.

Paul knew of ONLY ONE – a Person who was BOTH GOD and MAN – Martin Luther said, "Did we in our own strength confide, our striving would be losing! Were not the Right Man on our side the Man of God's own choosing!"

Luther saw it and Paul sees it – we can't give this way! Only God can give this way...and a perfectly righteous Man – "Dost ask who that may be? Christ Jesus it is HE! The Lord of hosts, His name...and He must win the battle!"

In Jesus Christ, we have the indescribable gift! The righteousness of God embodied in human flesh. And it is only as we are appropriating Him, seizing Him by faith, confiding in Him, giving the battle to Him that His righteousness – the RIGHT-NESS of the only Right Man becomes embodied in US.

It is by seeing this indescribable gift by faith; it's seeing IN Jesus Christ all the riches of God come sliding across the table to us. We ask, "Lord, how can I possibly give this way, when every cell in my fallen body, racked with fear and insecurity screams out, "MINE! MINE! MINE!"

And God says, “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...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; you will be enriched in everything for all liberality, which through us is producing thanksgiving to God.”

In Jesus Christ, we see God’s supply...all grace... all sufficiency ... everything we need, an abundance for every good deed, supply, multiply, increase, harvest”

In Him, we the un-righteous who despair of our own efforts and simply cling to Him, the Right Man, IN HIM WE ARE DECLARED RIGHTEOUS and as we keep coming, repenting of our selfishness and our half-hearted obedience...as we keep coming to the One who declares us righteous, we actually begin to BE in practice what He has declared us to be.

Somehow, the Righteousness of the One is scattered abroad and His righteousness begins to actually show up in us...a kind of Divine-Human partnership as we give like it’s a BILL...a commitment...and yet it’s also an exhilarating adventure...an exercise of faith.

Now, how do you DO it? What’s the New Way to Do the Right Thing?

A lot we could still say about this but let me limit it to these three: 1) Get the Gift 2) Practice the Paradox and 3) Reap the Results

It begins with GETTING THE GIFT. You have to see your own fallen-ness. You have to give up the idea that you're a good person, that you're better than other people, that you're above the curve and that if God only takes the highest percentiles, you're probably good to go...

The bad news is a) You're worse off than you think b) God is much holier and has a higher standard than you think.

The Good News is: God is the ULTIMATE Giver, the Lord and Giver of LIFE. So, quit fooling around and admit that you are a TERRIBLY NEEDY messed person like everyone else and see that God has done something about it – HE’S given the radical remedy we need in Jesus Christ. Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift.

Come talk to me after the service about how to receive the Gift – it all starts there!

2nd – PRACTICE THE PARADOX – you may be a kind of very disciplined person or maybe a very sensitive and sympathetic person...or some of each (most of us are both). You may THINK you have this giving thing down because you really FEEL for people (like homeless or disabled or helpless or needy people) OR you may feel like you have it down because YOU pay your tithes like it's a bill – never waver...it’s a discipline and it’s a done deal (direct deposit – done!)

But it's in the BOTH-ness of this that we face our limitations and IT HAS TO BE BOTH!

That's why as we obey, we face our self-pity and our bad attitudes (we might admit that we are anything but exhilarated and certainly NOT spontaneously and exuberantly generous) but we are disciplined.

Or you may be very compassionate and sensitive and relational (creative type) but you don't tithe or give regularly...only when you feel moved.

See we all have need to keep obeying and keep seeing that our obedience is low quality. We're not waiting 'til we're whole-hearted...we obey anyway... but we cry out as we obey, "Lord Jesus Christ, give me Your heart and Your discipline" (repent as we obey).

Last, 1) get the gift, 2) practice the paradox and 3) REAP THE RESULTS. People thank God for your giving. It brings glory to Him.

It connects you to the Body as these two congregations saw themselves as a part of a worldwide movement TOGETHER.

Last, Christians do slip into that old way of giving – strictly because it's a obligation OR giving ONLY when we feel moved (BTW a great article on kiosk...)

But when we come back to God's excessive generosity (and this text IS fixated on that vey reality – vv. 8-11 is deliberately lavish about God's intentions toward His children because of Jesus Christ!)

And when we SEE it and TASTE it – when we humble ourselves to receive it FRESH, that "He was pierced for ME and Christ was broken for ME..." God longs to be gracious to me...And when we see it, that puts us in a position to believe...to trust.

And in that place we actually change. The righteousness of Jesus that's on loan to us, that is declared OURS...actually begins to show up...a kind of harvest. We become what we are destined to BE.