

Series: 2 Corinthians

Title: The Source, Spirit and Order of Giving

Text: 2 Corinthians 8: 1-5

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The Spirit of God moves Paul to deal with a new subject: the grace of giving. In this chapter, Paul repeatedly calls giving “grace.” That is a good name for it.

The source, spirit, order of the grace of giving are all of God.

So our subject and outline is “The Source, Spirit and Order of Giving.”

Paul is telling the church at Corinth how the churches in Macedonia gave to provide for the saints in need at Jerusalem. Northern Greece was called Macedonia. In Macedonia were the churches of Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea. It was a much poorer part of Greece. Southern Greece was called Achaia, where the church of Corinth was. It was a wealthier region. So Paul is writing to the Corinthian’s concerning the Macedonian churches.

THE SOURCE OF THE GRACE OF GIVING

2 Corinthians 8: 1: Moreover, brethren, we do you to wit of the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia;

The grace of giving begins with the grace of God bestowed upon us. The grace of giving is by the grace of God given. We are empty, bankrupt, God-hating, man-hating, self-loving, self-protecting sinners by nature. So any grace coming from a sinful child of God must be due, first, to the grace of God bestowed on us.

All things in salvation are by God’s grace. God bestowed grace on his people when he freely chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world not based on any good or evil in us. The Father bestowed grace on us when he sent his Son to be propitiation for our sins. He bestowed grace on us when he created us anew by the Holy Spirit, gifting us with repentance from dead works and faith in Christ. We are what we are and have what we have—both spiritually and temporally—by the grace of God bestowed upon us.

Therefore, we have nothing in which to boast. The grace of giving is entirely due to the grace of God given freely to us. *The need* to which we give is given us by the grace of God. *The substance* we have to give is given us by the grace of God. *The heart* to give is given us by the grace of God. *The doing of it* is given us by the grace of God.

So each time a true believer gives, he knows that he has nothing in which to boast. He says to himself, “*To me . . . is this grace given*” that I should be able to part with my money and/or my bodily service for the sake of Christ.

THE SPIRIT OF THE GRACE OF GIVING: JOYFUL, GENEROUS, WILLING

2 Corinthians 8: 2: How that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality. 3: For to *their* power, I bear record, yea, and beyond *their* power *they were* willing of themselves; 4: Praying us with much intreaty that we would receive the gift, and *take upon us* the fellowship of the ministering to the saints.

God gave the Macedonian churches “*a great trial, a proving-test of afflictions.*” God does not give us trials because he needs proof of our faith. But when God works grace, he makes it apparent that God did it! So God made them poor and worked this abundance in the Macedonians, to give proof to their Corinthian brethren by which God stirred up the Corinthians to follow the example of their northern brethren.

If you are dealing with one member of your body then you are dealing with every other member of your body because all the members of your body make up one body. So it is with Christ’s church. Christ is the Head, we are the body, and members in particular. God’s people are so one that God’s dealings with me, personally, is also God dealing with my brethren, personally.

So by his grace, God freely, without a cause, gave the Macedonian’s *deep poverty*. Usually, we do not consider poverty to be God bestowing his grace upon us. But that is exactly what the Spirit of God tells us this was. At the same time, it was God bestowing his grace upon the wealthier Corinthian brethren because God was stirring them up by the example of their Macedonian brethren who were much poorer, yet much more generous and joyful and willing.

Learn by this that our outward condition does not indicate God’s disfavor. By the grace of God, he may give me poverty to use what he works me, to work in my wealthier brethren, to stir them up to do the same. That is what he was doing here.

By the same grace that gave the Macedonians poverty, God made them “*abound in the riches of liberality.*” They gave sacrificially, generously. And God gave them “*abundant joy*” in doing so. By God working in their hearts, their outward condition of deep poverty did not dry up the inward fountain of love and generosity toward their needy brethren; nor did their fleshly grief dry up their joy in their new spirit! But by God’s grace, he increased both!

Notice in the verse, giving away our earthly riches generously with joy is what God calls true riches—“*their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality.*” We know this is proof of God’s grace because we know nothing makes our natural flesh more selfish than grief, especially grief that comes from our bank account taking a hit. Yet, by the grace of God working in the new man, the paradox of the believer is that we are “*sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things.*” (2 Cor 6: 10) So the spirit of the grace of giving is generous and joyful. And it is also willing.

Their sacrificial generosity was from a willing heart—“*For to their power, I bear record, yea, and beyond their power they were willing of themselves.*” *To their power*—means they gave according to their ability. *Beyond their power*—means they gave beyond their ability. And this they did *willingly of themselves*. It means no one coerced them to do it.

God does not measure our gift by the total amount we give; he measures by how proportionate the total amount is to what we have and by our hearts willingness to give it. God measures not by quantity but by sacrifice from a willing heart. The poor widow and the rich men is the example Christ used to declare this.

Luke 21: 1: [Christ] looked up, and saw the rich men casting their gifts into the treasury. 2: And he saw also a certain poor widow casting in thither two mites. 3: And he said, Of a truth I say unto you, that this poor widow hath cast in more than they all: 4: For all these have of their abundance cast in unto the offerings of God: but she of her penury hath cast in all the living that she had.

God loves a sacrificially generous, cheerful, willing giver—one who willingly goes beyond his ability! Friday night, I watched William Keller play cornerback at his homecoming game. I was impressed. He gave 110 percent! He tried to play beyond what he knew he was capable of. And he ended up with several tackles and an interception, too! Coaches love that kind of player! But the player who aims is to play within the

bounds of his ability, usually does not play half as well as he could. Brethren, in all service to God we serve best when our goal is to go beyond our ability.

I love this! The Macedonians were so willing, they begged Paul to receive their gift and minister it to the saints—“*Praying us with much intreaty that we would receive the gift, and take upon us the fellowship of the ministering to the saints.*” Natural religion has this backwards. Worldly pastors are always begging the people to give. Then the people tell the pastors how they can minister it. The grace of God makes the people beg the pastor to receive their gift and trusts him to take upon himself to minister it to the saints however it is needed—God calls it “*the fellowship of the ministering to the saints.*”

Let me see if I can illustrate “*The fellowship of ministering to the saints.*” When you know you are all fellows in the same ship then you know that your fellows good is your good and his poverty your poverty. When that is the case then you will minister faithfully to your fellows.

So the grace of giving is first, *by God’s grace*. Secondly, where the grace of God is working in the heart *the spirit of giving* is sacrificially generous, joyful and willing. Wherever God’s grace is at work ‘*deep poverty*’ will never be used as excuse for not giving to needy brethren. The grace of God teaches me that I am never so poor that I cannot contribute to my needy brethren. A man who will not give when he is poor will not give when he is rich. *The spirit* of the grace of giving is generous, joyful and willing to the praise of the glory of God’s grace!

THE ORDER OF THE GRACE OF GIVING

2 CORINTHIANS 8: 5: And *this they did*, not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God.

The order of the grace of giving is to give ourselves, first, to God then to brethren.

Where the grace of God is working in the heart, the believer first gives himself to the Lord. The only way the grace of giving is accepted by God is by us first giving our own selves to Christ in true, God-given faith. This was the one and only reason why the Macedonians did more than Paul had hoped. God gave them faith that the Lord Jesus was their Provider providing all for them. So they knew they did not own themselves nor their goods.

1 Corinthians 6: 19: What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost *which is* in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? 20: For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s.

Only when I surrender all to Christ, believing that Christ has, is and shall provide all for me, will I glorify God by being a sacrificial, joyful, willing giver.

1 Corinthians 4: 7: For who maketh thee to differ *from another?* and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive *it*, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received *it*?

Elect of God, knowing that everything we have is given to us freely by God by his free and sovereign grace, how can we not abound in this grace also? Knowing God gave his only begotten Son for us, knowing Christ gave his own precious blood to purchase us for himself, knowing God freely gave us his gospel in spirit and in truth, knowing God freely gave us spiritual life in regeneration, knowing God freely gives us all things that pertain to life and godliness, knowing God gave us free wisdom by Christ, free justification by Christ, free sanctification by Christ, free redemption by Christ, knowing God gives his grace freely to preserve us in

faith and good works, knowing everything we have is the gift of God, we know that God shall, with Christ, freely give us all things.

2 Corinthians 9: 7: Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver. 8: And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good **work**:

Therefore, by the same grace, they knew their pastor was also given to them by Christ. So secondly they gave themselves to be fellow-laborers, helpers to Paul, by giving him their full trust—and [*you gave yourself*] unto us by the will of God. God-given faith not only trusts Christ is working in me but that Christ is also working in the pastor he has sent to minister to me.

Think of how much they trusted Christ, and therefore how they trusted Paul. They handed over this generous gift to Paul and watched him sail over the horizon. They did so because they first trusted Christ! They trusted Christ would use Paul to bring their gift to the needy saints for whom it was intended. That is the *working faith* that God freely, abundantly gives his saints.

James 2: 19: Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble. 20: But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?...26: For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.

God gives faith that works. Grace does not make me suspicious and untrusting of my brethren. Grace produces faith in Christ which trusts Christ is working sovereignly, irresistibly in my brethren the same as he is in me. They knew it was *the will of God* for them to trust Paul and they had full confidence that Paul could only do that which was *the will of God* for him to do. That is a soft pillow to rest on! The whole of the life of faith and this whole grace of giving is summed up in Psalm 37:3, "*Trust in the Lord, and do good; so shall you dwell in the land, and verily you shall be fed.*"

Amen!