



Another Grace to Consider: Generosity

Practices and Principles of New Testament Generosity: A Review

Dec 1, 2019

Text: 1 Corinthians 16:1-4; 2 Corinthians 8:1-15, 9:1-7

Last week, we looked at the Grace of Thanksgiving from 2 Corinthians 4. We also learned that the two letters we have from Paul to Corinth were very different: the first was mostly prescriptive in content, the second pastoral. Once more from MacDonald:

One reason we love 2 Corinthians so greatly is because it is so personal. We seem to get closer to the heart of Paul here than in any of his other writings. We feel something of the tremendous enthusiasm he had for the work of the Lord. We catch a sense of the dignity of life's greatest calling. We read with silent amazement the catalog of sufferings which he endured. We experience the hot flush of indignation with which he answered his unscrupulous critics. In short, Paul seems to let us into every secret of his soul.

For a bit of context, when we studied 1 Corinthians, we learned that it was written to respond to questions the Corinthian saints had for Paul ([1Co 7:1a ESV](#) Now concerning the matters about which you wrote...)

- His doctrinal instruction and encouragement now concluded, the apostle turns to another question that was apparently asked of him by the church at Corinth (7:1).
- We must understand that the church in Paul's day was "The Church." What I mean is that there were no denominations, few schismatic groups, no buildings, and no regional/geographic boundaries in the minds of the people.
- The church was simply the church. Indeed in this very epistle Paul speaks of the church as both local and universal at the same time:
 1. [1Co 1:2 ESV](#) *To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours:*
 2. [1Co 7:17 ESV](#) *Only let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him, and to which God has called him. This is my rule in all the churches.*
 3. [1Co 11:16 ESV](#) *If anyone is inclined to be contentious, we have no such practice, nor do the churches of God.*
 4. [1Co 14:33 ESV](#) *For God is not a God of confusion but of peace. As in all the churches of the saints,*
- The point is that when one local church rejoiced, all the churches did. When one suffered, all did. When one dealt with falsehoods, all were warned.
- Via the letters and travels of the apostles and their companions, the churches communicated with one another, prayed for one another, and supported one another financially.

In our Text, Paul mentioned a collection of money he had directed the churches of Galatia to take up. Apparently, it was for the church in Jerusalem which had undergone immense persecution, and famine:

- *Act 8:1 ESV* And Saul approved of his execution. And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.
- *Act 11:27-30 ESV* Now in these days prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. (28) And one of them named Agabus stood up and foretold by the Spirit that there would be a great famine over all the world (this took place in the days of Claudius). (29) So the disciples determined, everyone according to his ability, to send relief to the brothers living in Judea. (30) And they did so, sending it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul.

The whole point of 1 Cor 16:1-4 was not a collection for the local church at Corinth, but actually a call for this local church to give outside themselves...to give to the needy in another place. This in no way lessens the importance of each local church giving to support itself, its ministries, and its leaders, but it is to say that in context, the church should be concerned not just with “us” but also with “them...” our brothers and sisters in every place.

Upon reviewing God’s word concerning generosity, I realized it has been a couple of years since we looked at giving principles, and even longer since we have reviewed today’s very important texts.

In fact, our church giving model is essentially built on 1 Corinthians 16:2. From the ESV:

- **1 Corinthians 16:2 (ESV)** *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.*

From this verse we can glean very important practices. The Church of Jesus is to give:

1. **Regularly** on the Lord’s Day (the “first day of the week” principle). This doesn’t mean we cannot give monthly; it means giving must be done often enough to be a part of our worship.
2. Regardless of **socio-economic** status (“each of you”). Giving can be hard for rich, poor, and everyone in-between. The wealthy may say “that’s too much.” The poor may say, “I have nothing.” Folks in the middle might say both!
3. With **forethought** (“put something aside”). Giving to Christ’s work isn’t to be done in a haphazard manner.
4. With an **intentional**, budgetary mindset (“store it up”). Worshipful New Testament giving is set aside with prayer and cheerfulness.
5. According to **ability** (“as he may prosper”). No one is to feel guilty during times of giving.

6. With little fanfare and hooplah (“so that there will be no collecting...”). Paul wanted to both exhort giving and generosity while deemphasizing the process. The last thing he wanted was for anyone to think he was out for money. (1 Cor 9:3-18)

In 2 Corinthians chapters 8-9, Paul continues to discuss the *grace of giving*. In these verses we find very important principles:

Principles of Generosity from 2 Corinthians 8-9

1. *2Co 8:1-2 ESV* We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, (2) for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part.

Principle: Giving tests the Heart and Attitude.

- Amazingly, these churches in Macedonia (in places like Thessalonica, Philippi and others) gave despite their affliction!
- Corinth had poor members like any church, but was known to be wealthier overall.
- Apparently, the Macedonian churches understood that despite their own poverty, some were worse off; what grace and what a test of what is truly in the heart!
- How easy they could have adopted that attitude of, “I ain’t giving nobody nothing!”
- Being stingy doesn’t ultimately profit:

Proverbs 11:24 (KJV) There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth; and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty.

“One gives freely, yet grows all the richer; another withholds what he should give, and only suffers want.” *Proverbs 11:24 ESV*

2. *2Co 8:3-4 ESV* For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, (4) begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints—

Principle: Giving tests Perspective.

- What would cause poorer churches to give beyond their means for this special offering?
 - I submit they lived for something beyond material wealth; their perspective concerning Kingdom life and what is truly important must have been changed by Christ.
 - Christians are commanded to “seek those things above;” this is an issue of perspective. (Col 3:1-4) See below...
3. *2Co 8:5-7 ESV* and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us. (6) Accordingly, we urged Titus that as he had started, so he should complete among you this act of grace. (7) 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.

Principle: Giving is an act of Grace.

- The churches in Macedonia had a “God-ward” focus. This enabled them to walk in great grace.
 - Who really thinks of giving as an act of grace...of unmerited favor?
 - And who really puts giving in the same category as walking in faith, preaching the Word, and acquiring knowledge?
 - Kingdom giving is an act of Grace by those whose hearts have been redeemed by grace.
4. *2Co 8:8 ESV I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine.*

Principle: Giving, by being always voluntary, tests Love.

- It wouldn't be an act of grace if it was taken or coerced.
 - I've said for years that true New Testament giving, based upon the Gospel of Jesus, is the hardest type there is because it is based not upon *regulation*, but upon *redemption*...not upon law but upon love.
5. *2Co 8:9 ESV 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.*

Principle: True Kingdom giving is rooted in an understanding of the Gospel of Jesus.

- Just remember what we've been given!
 - He has called us, elected us, justified us, sanctified us, preserved us, and will glorify us!
 - We are saved from the curse and punishment of the Law and Lake of Fire because of the finished work of Christ on the cross!
 - Through his poverty (humanity, suffering, and death) we have become rich (hope, joy, everlasting life)! Hallelujah!
 - As in everything else, His Gospel is our motive for generosity!
6. *2Co 8:10-12 ESV 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. (11) 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. (12) For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have.*

Principle: Good giving is measured individually, according to ability.

- This is emphasized again. There is no guilt or envy in New Testament generosity. It is meant to be joyful!
7. *2Co 8:13-15 ESV For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened, but that as a matter of fairness (14) your abundance at the present time should supply their*

need, so that their abundance may supply your need, that there may be fairness. (15) As it is written, "Whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack."

Principle: To whom much is given, much is required. (Luke 12:48)

- Paul wasn't preaching socialism, but personal responsibility. He wasn't asking individual members of the church to give more as a percentage of their wealth, but for the entire church to recognize their blessings, to help the church in Jerusalem, and to do so voluntarily.
 - In other words it's only fair for the wealthy to volitionally help the poor, especially since in context, it all comes from God!
 - Do we, the wealthy church in America, have a responsibility to help churches in impoverished regions and nations?
 - **1 Timothy 6:17-19 (KJV)** Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; **18** That they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; **19** Laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.
8. **2Co 9:1-5 ESV** Now it is superfluous for me to write to you about the ministry for the saints, (2) for I know your readiness, of which I boast about you to the people of Macedonia, saying that Achaia has been ready since last year. And your zeal has stirred up most of them. (3) But I am sending the brothers so that our boasting about you may not prove empty in this matter, so that you may be ready, as I said you would be. (4) Otherwise, if some Macedonians come with me and find that you are not ready, we would be humiliated--to say nothing of you--for being so confident. (5) So I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to go on ahead to you and arrange in advance for the gift you have promised, so that it may be ready as a willing gift, not as an exaction.

Principle: Christians should always "be ready" to give.

- **The NT "call and response" should never be** motivated either by coercion or covetousness! The "ask" should be appropriate, and the asked should have hearts saturated with generosity.
 - Indeed, this is one of the tangible ways we "love one another," and thus are a witness to the world. (John 13:35; Jam 2:8-17).
9. **2Co 9:6 ESV** The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.

Principle: We Reap what we Sow

- **Gal 6:7 ESV** Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap.

- Now carefully, we must again understand that we don't give with a motive to get; nor is this some sort of spiritual extortion or manipulation; nor is giving a guarantee of earthly wealth.
- But it is to say that God has designed a "cause and effect" world.
- When we sow righteousness, we tend to reap it. (Pro 11:18).
- Examples: When we sow kind words, we tend to reap good friendships. When we sow biblical obedience into our marriages, we tend to reap strong marriages. When we sow stewardship (budgets, giving, saving, etc) when tend to reap surplus. When we sow hard work, we tend to be rewarded.
- When we show ourselves faithful in giving, God tends to keep us in position to do the same.

10. *2Co 9:7 ESV* Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

Principle: God loves a cheerful giver.

- Amen! A heart overwhelmed by God's goodness in giving His Son to die for sin rejoices in the ability to give!
- This is the heart we need! Cheerful, joyful giving based on the cross!
- The Greek word for cheerful is *hilaros*!

Some encouraging words from Paul as we close:

2 Corinthians 9:8-11 (KJV) *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: 9 (As it is written, He hath dispersed abroad; he hath given to the poor: his righteousness remaineth for ever. 10 Now he that ministereth seed to the sower both minister bread for your food, and multiply your seed sown, and increase the fruits of your righteousness;) 11 Being enriched in every thing to all bountifulness, which causeth through us thanksgiving to God.*

May we as a congregation see giving as a grace (or an act of divine favor) we've been given by God.

Let us look to be a blessing through the rest of this year, and into 2020!

Amen!

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