

Principles of Giving Generously

II Corinthians 8:1-5

► Preface

I saw a cartoon a while back that reflected the outside of the church following a Sunday morning service. People were pouring out of the building all dressed in their underclothing. The men were in their boxers and the women were in their slips. One person turns to another and says, "That was the best sermon on stewardship I have ever heard."

Well, I promise you will leave today fully dressed. I don't intend to get the shirt off your back. However, it is my prayer that you will be challenged to seek God concerning your giving to His work.

Throughout the Bible, one of the most significant acts of worship by human beings is making an offering to God. And yet, many people despise hearing a sermon on giving or "money", as they usually call it. I have come to realize that people who feel we talk too much about money, never really want to talk about giving at all.

If you are one of those people who cannot stand to hear a preacher talk about money then you definitely need to hear this sermon. You need to understand the principles that will be discussed and give them prayerful consideration.

I take preaching on giving and money very seriously for several reasons. First, it is routinely addressed in God's Word. Secondly, because giving has made a significant difference in my life. Thirdly, because I understand the importance of giving in every believer's life. And finally, because I know preaching about money can be a "turn-off" to visitors and some church members. For these reasons, I preach seldom on the subject but make no apologies about it when I do.

There were many scriptures from which to choose for a sermon on Stewardship. However, I decided on 2 Corinthians 8:1-5 because it is an exemplifies generous giving.

► Read Text 2 Corinthians 8:1-5

"¹And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. ²Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. ³For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, ⁴they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints. ⁵And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will."

2 Corinthians 6:1-5 (NIV)

Prayer

► Introduction

Our text picks up at a time when famine had devastated the area of Palestine including the church of Jerusalem. The Christians and others were barely able to feed their families. Paul writes to the Gentile churches concerning an offering to help those suffering in Jerusalem.

Paul writes to the church at Corinth concerning this offering. In doing so, he speaks of the offering that has been made by the Christians of Macedonia in Northern Greece.

Paul seems to be absolutely overwhelmed by the giving of the churches at Macedonia. There are several important things we can learn today about the generous gifts of the Macedonians.

I. Giving Is In Response To Grace (vs. 1)

We must begin by understanding that true spiritual giving is always a response to grace.

We learn from the writings in Acts that the early church, the "mother church" if you will, in Jerusalem was not originally keen on the Gentile churches. The Jews in the Jerusalem church were quite apprehensive about the idea of the Gentiles being Christians.

This was a tough pill for them to swallow. They required some persuading by God through the words of Peter but they did come to understand. I doubt they ever imagined that these Gentile churches would ultimately come to their rescue in "*rich generosity*."

In a sense, the Gentile churches at Macedonia had many good reasons not to give generously. They could have resented the initial attitude of the Christians in Jerusalem. Also, they were experiencing their own financial difficulties and could have easily told Paul to catch them next time as they could not give at this time.

But grace dictated differently. These Christians understood the grace of God and they knew God expected them to return grace for grace. Perhaps because they were the “unclean Gentiles”, they understood the cleansing and forgiving power of grace better than their Jewish counterparts.

If you are struggling with the concept of giving. If you find it hard to give up your hard earned money to support the work of the church, then you need to consider God’s grace in your life. You do not have a giving problem, you have a grace problem. You need to study God’s Word and better understand what He has done for you and experience His grace daily.

No doubt, the pinnacle of God’s grace is in salvation offered through Jesus Christ. However, God’s grace is a part of our everyday life as well. You can see God’s grace in our families, our country, our friends and just about everything we take for granted. The Macedonians understood this.

The very reasons that the Macedonians had for not giving became the reasons they did give. My friends, that is God’s grace at work.

Some people argue that we are no longer under the law and therefore, we are not required to give ten percent. Those who understand and experience the grace of God, who know the height and depth and breadth and length of God through Christ should give a tenth and more.

If you give because of guilt, for recognition or for something in return, you have missed the point of giving. Paul says in verse 1; *“We want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches.”* Grace is the New Testament motive for giving.

Grace should be at the heart of all of our giving. It is how our church programs and buildings should be funded. Generous giving doesn’t expect something in return from the church or man but rather lets God be the judge of what we receive in return. I have heard people say, “I am not giving any more of my money to the church until they start doing some things different around there.” That is really just another way of saying, “I am not giving any more money until I know I am going to get what I want and things are done the way I want.”

II. Giving Is A Privilege (vs. 3-4)

It is clear to see that the Macedonians considered it a privilege to give of their belongings, crops and finances for the Kingdom of God. Paul says, *“They urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints.”* Vs.4

People who understand the spiritual principals of giving generously are always eager to give. Like hawks searching for food, they are always on the lookout for opportunities to participate in what God is doing.

They want to be a part of God’s work. If God is doing something they want the privilege of being a part of it. The Macedonians were alive with the spirit of Christ and they were eager to be a part of team.

Illus: You’ve probably heard the story of the little boy who had two quarters. One was for the offering at the church and the other was for an ice cream cone. On the way to church, he was flipping one of the quarters up and catching it. Eventually, he dropped the quarter and it went rolling into the storm drain. His response was, “Sorry God.”

We laugh but how often do we make that same decision. We choose to spend on ourselves and ignore the needs of others, let alone the opportunities to be a part of what God’s is doing.

There seems to be two prevailing attitudes about giving. One is the Realist who understands that the church has expenses and while he wants to keep the expenses to a minimum, he sees giving as a “necessary evil.”

The other attitude is the Idealist who figures God will provide what is needed through wealthy people. He doesn’t feel the need to give himself and sees the offering as an “unnecessary evil.”

Giving is not a “necessary evil” or an “unnecessary evil.” Giving is a privilege. Oh that we could all grasp this important truth and have a heart for stewardship.

III. Giving Is An Investment (vs. 2)

The Macedonians also realized that giving is an investment of the highest order. When we give, we are investing in the spiritual lives of others. Our gifts go to support the work of sharing the gospel and ministering to the needy.

Some people attempt to compartmentalize their lives. They separate their financial lives from their spiritual lives. God's Word clearly says that cannot be. Jesus said in Luke 16:11; *"No servant can serve two masters... You cannot serve both God and Money."*

Illus: Howard Hendricks tells of the time he and his wife were guests of a rich man from a blueblood Boston family. Hendricks was impressed by the humbleness of this man. And so Hendricks asked him, "How in the world did you grow up in the midst of such wealth and not be consumed with materialism?" His answer: "My parents taught us that everything in our home was either an idol or a tool." What a great truth!

If God has all of you, God has all you own.

The paradox of the Christian life is that we only keep what we give away. So the offering is a savvy investment in eternity. Giving is not a matter of morality. Giving is a matter of wisdom. Building up treasures on earth is not immoral, it is just plain foolish. The Bible clearly teaches that we will see the rewards of our giving in eternity.

Illus: We have all played Monopoly. It is a long game and you know the strategy. You work to own different properties and get houses and motels on those properties. You build up your investments at the expense or sometimes bankruptcy of others. If you are really successful, you get Boardwalk and Park Place and watch the other players sell or mortgage property just to pay you rent. Eventually, the winner ends up with all of the money. There is one little fact that we must not overlook. When the game is over, it all goes back in the box.

The same is true with life. In the end, what you invest in the Kingdom of God is all that will matter.

IV. Giving Produces Rewarded Faith (vs. 5)

There is no question about it, giving requires faith. In fact, giving is a true measure of faith. It requires faith for us to give our first fruits trusting that God will provide for our needs.

God wants us to go out on a limb in faith. He wants this of us as individuals and as a church. We will never discover the resources of God until we attempt to do the impossible.

"Faith is not believing in spite of evidence, it is obeying in spite of consequences."

On the other hand, the rewards of such faith are guaranteed by God. God makes an extraordinary promise concerning the matter of giving in His Word.

"¹⁰ Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the LORD Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it." Malachi 3:10

This is a principle backed with a promise. God wants us to trust Him and prove Him. He challenges us to test Him. He promises a rewarded faith.

Challenge: Some of you are thinking that you simply cannot give 10% of your income to the work of the Lord. I am here to tell you today, you can.

However, I want to challenge you to do something. If you are absolutely convinced that you cannot give 10%, I want you to decide on a percent that will be a stretch for you but it can be done. Commit to that percent for one year. Make up your mind that no matter what, you will give that percent each week or month and at the end of one year you will review the results. I promise you at the end of that year, God will bless you greatly. You will increase that percent and keep doing so until you meet or exceed 10%.

Illus: I read a true story about a man who loved baseball and attended major league games for 20 years. At many of the games he would go early for batting practice in hopes of getting one of the players to toss him a practice ball. So far, he had never gotten one. On one occasion he was sitting close to the fence attempting to get a ball when he met a young boy whose name was James. They shared the love of baseball and before long he found his mission being to catch a ball for James. He promised James that if he got one he would give it to him. Well, 5 minutes later he received an autographed ball and yes, he gave it to James. Later, he realized that God works that same way in our lives. He waits to reward us with things when he knows we will be willing to give them away.

Giving always requires faith but that faith when demonstrated is always rewarded.

Conclusion

The bottom line is this; there is a direct connection between a person's faith and their generous giving.

Jesus said, where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. To put that in layman's terms, one could look at our checkbooks and tell exactly what is really in our hearts.

In closing I would like to ask you the three questions once posed by Dr. R.G. Lee, "Is Christ NOTHING to you? Is Christ SOMETHING to you? Or, is Christ EVERYTHING to you?"

I invite you to let Him be EVERTHING to you and everything you have. Trust Him by giving and supporting His work and you will never regret one dime of your investment.