

## First To the Lord

### God is Able

Mark Vroegop

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*8 And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work. 9 As it is written, "He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever." 10 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 every way for all your generosity... (2 Cor 9:8-11).*

2 Corinthians 9:8 is one of my most favorite verses in the Bible. It is a "go-to" verse for me that I have often used as a spiritual life-preserver for my own soul and the souls of others. I've used it in counseling more times than I can remember. I've preached it to my own heart. I've quoted it to people in the hospital. I've used it as a parent. It truly is one of the great promises of the Bible.

But here is what I find interesting: it is promise-verse whose immediate context is all about giving. If you were to just read the verse, you wouldn't automatically think that it is directly connected to giving. But it is. And this is why I think that talking about money is so important.

The Bible is full of God-given promises that we are called to believe in. The essence of what it means to be a Christian is that you have put your faith in Christ's death believing in God's promise that Jesus' death will count for your own. Coming to faith in Christ means that you believed the promise that "to as many as received Jesus, God gave the right to become the children of God" (John 1:12). But that is only one promise, the first promise that you believe. The rest of the Christian life is lived by faith as well, taking God at his word and living accordingly.

What does belief in those promises really look like? Well, with this promise in 2 Corinthians 9:8, it looks like being generous. In other words, giving is a practical way to live by faith. I see what God says; I believe it; I give. It's that simple, but it is that profound.

So my entire message today is built around this single thought: **Giving is one of the ways that we live by faith on the promises of God.**

### So Far in 2 Corinthians 8-9...

There are a total of 20 principles that we are going to look at in 2 Corinthians 8-9. I was planning to add two this week, but we're only going to cover one. We'll break for the

THINK|10 conference, and then finish up with six more on March 14. The list is long but every one of these is important, some of you missed a few, and it is good to quickly rehearse them.

**1. Generosity is motivated through personal example (8:1)**

**2. Generosity is rooted in the grace of God (8:1)**

**3. Generosity is linked to the Lordship of Christ (8:5)**

**4. Generosity is part of spiritual maturity (8:7)**

**5. Generosity is a proof of the genuineness of love (8:8)**

**6. Generosity is a reminder about the gospel (8:9)**

**7. Generosity is rewarded (8:10)**

**8. Generosity is to come from what you have (8:12)**

**9. Generosity is part of God's plan for provision (8:14)**

**10. Generosity is worth hard work (8:24)**

**11. Generosity is based upon a promise (9:6)**

**12. Generosity is to be done in freedom (9:7)**

**13. Generosity is worthless without joy (9:7)**

Again, we are talking about all of this because I want you to think correctly about generosity in general and very specifically as it relates to our Mission Expansion Project. It is not often that we are asked to make a multi-year commitment, and my labor in this text is so that you will discover the joy of giving. Remember, a joyless gift is a worthless gift. I don't want you to give if you can't give out of joy. Keep your money. Wait until you can give it the right way.

On the other hand, if I can show you how good it is for your soul to give (to any worthy cause), and if you will give with God-exalting, Jesus-honoring, Spirit-empowered, and faith-filled joy in the promises of God, beautiful things begin to happen both in you and through you.

There is one very important principle that we will look at today, and it is connected to the fact giving is one way that we live by faith. Let's look at it.

**14. Generosity is Living on Future Grace (9:8)**

As we opened our study of 2 Corinthians 8-9, I pointed out to you that there are three different dimensions of grace that intersect in giving. By grace, I mean the unmerited favor of God where he treats us in a way that we don't deserve. Let me explain these three dimensions of grace to you:

**Past Grace (8:9)** – a reflection through giving on what great favor God gave to us through His Son. This is by far that most common understanding of grace – a looking back at how we've been blessed.

**Present Grace (8:1, 8:7)** – a realization through giving that God empowers people to give. This kind of grace reminds us that anything good that we do is only because of God working through us. It is the desire and ability to do God's will.

Most people, when they think about grace gravitate toward past grace or present grace. They are certainly the most familiar. However, I have found that many Christian's don't understand the next element of grace. And it is so important.

**Future Grace<sup>1</sup> (9:8)** – this is living by faith in the future promises of God. It is grace because we receive the favor, empowerment, provision, and blessing from God. It is future grace in that it is lived out by faith through seeing what God promises to do and then acting in accordance to what we are told even if we don't see it right now. Future grace includes your eternal destiny, but it also includes what will happen tomorrow. It is the assurance of things hoped for (Hebrews 11:1) and the confidence that God will "graciously give us all things" (Romans 8:32). It is the kind of grace upon which Moses lived when he "considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for **he was looking to the reward**" and when "he endured **as seeing him who is invisible**" (Hebrews 11:26-27). Future grace lives by faith on God's promised favor yet to be realized.

Now the reason that this is so important is that living this way is central to the Christian life or sanctification. The Christian life is a battle of promises. Living by future grace means that we believe the promises of God over the promises of what the world, the flesh, and the devil offer us. This kind of faith in the promises of God has a sanctifying effect. It is how we grow. We grow increasingly in our belief in the promises of God, our trust in the promises of God, and ordering our lives by the promises of God. This is the life of faith!

So let me give you a few examples of how I fight promise with promise:

- When I begin to be too concerned about what others think of me, I fight by faith with the promise, "What shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Rom. 8:31).
- When I grow impatient, thinking that waiting is a waste, I fight by faith with the promise "From of old no one has heard or perceived by the ear, no eye has seen a God besides you, who acts for those who wait for him" (Isaiah 64:4).
- When the fleeting pleasures of greed, pride or lust come knocking at my door, I fight by faith with the promise, "To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind

on the Spirit is life and peace" (Rom 8:6). I remind my wavering soul that real joy, real happiness, and the fullness of life is found in God.

- When anxiety or worry seem to conquer my heart out of a fear of the unknown, I fight by faith with the promise, "But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you" (Matt 6:33).

So how does that intersect with giving? Here's how: Giving is **living by faith in God's promise to provide everything I need**. It is an act of faith where I claim more security and safety in God's promises than in my portfolio. It is an act of faith where I choose to live on God's ability to provide and not my ability to figure things out. Living by faith means that I see the promises in God's word, and I act, in faith, based upon that promise.

2 Corinthians is not the only place where this theme (living by future grace) show up. Consider Hebrews 13:5-6 and how a promise is offered to combat the love of money and discontentment:

Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." So we can confidently say, "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?"

The solution to loving money and a lack of contentment is to believe a God's promise. In other words, you fight the love of money and the sin of discontentment by living on the promise that God will never leave me nor forsake me. The promise of God overpowers the promise of money. And giving provides a very tangible way to live that reality out.

Therefore, 2 Corinthians 9:8 is about giving, but the implications for our lives are so much greater because it is not only through giving that we live by faith in future grace. The entire Christian life is lived by believing the promises of the Bible in direct contrast to the promises of sin.

That has serious implications for your giving. Your act of generosity could have very little to do with money. For some of you, an act of generosity could be the first decisive blow of a thousand to come regarding a new mantra in your life: "I'm going live by faith in your promises – for my life, my struggles, my marriage, my children, my career, my fears, my addictions, my...." Do you see how huge this is?

### **The Promises of Future Grace**

So what are the promises that we are called to believe in 2 Corinthians 9:8. They are important because they not only apply to giving; they apply to all of life, especially our spiritual growth. There are four:

#### **Promise #1: God is able**

The first promise comes on the heels of the statement – “God loves a cheerful giver” (9:7), which was meant to remind us that the real orientation of our heart in giving is toward God. Giving money is not enough; giving a tithe doesn’t mean you’ve obeyed 9:7. God isn’t pleased with a gift to him that comes from a heart that just wants to get “God off his back” when it come to generosity. No, God is looking for a cheerful heart because giving is about an upward, worship-filled heart.

What does giving cause us to think about God? What does it remind us about God? It calls to mind the ultimate ability and trustworthiness of God. Therefore, the promise that we believe is that God is able. The word translated as “able” means to be mighty and to show oneself powerful. You could think of it as ability, potential, and capacity. It is word that communicates that God has an infinite capacity as the sovereign creator. God’s ability is tied to who he is.

- “For every beast of the forest is mine, the cattle on a thousand hills” (Ps 50:10)
- “The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; he turns it wherever he will” (Prov 21:1).
- “Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! "For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?" "Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?" For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen” (Rom 11:33-36).

So God is infinitely rich, powerful, and full of capacity. Giving causes me to put my hope in his ability. Giving is acting, by faith, on the promise that God has a trustworthy capacity. There is nothing that God cannot do.

Money can create a sense of personal security and even self-made power. Giving embraces a level of insecurity or a gap, believing that God can be trusted. Giving acknowledges that a sovereign God controls the heart of your boss, the return on your investments, the warranties on your purchases, the longevity of your roof, and the profits of your company. God controls all the levers of life. He is infinitely able. Giving connects me to that truth.

{Jim Nossett Testimony}

## **Promise #2: Grace is on the way**

The second promise it that is “God is able to make all grace abound to you.” Notice that the provision that God provides is not just money. It may be the grace of more money. But the essence of the promise here is that God will supply grace. So the hope is God’s ability to give me grace in the future. This is kind of grace that Paul heard right from Jesus when he requested that the gap created by a “thorn in the flesh” be removed:

But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may

rest upon me. 10 For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong (2 Cor 12:9-10).

What is this grace? It is the supernatural, spiritual provision of God for you to do his will. It is divine empowerment. It is seeing God at work in your life. It is often the provision of resources, but it also could be other things: a new oneness in making financial decisions as a couple, a new desire to live within your means, the discipline to pay down your debt faster, a new joy in your relationship with the Lord, an ability to no longer worry, or an amazing preservation of what you own so that nothing breaks.

The point is this: Trusting God's ability results in an outpouring of grace. Giving puts that into practice.

### **Promise #3: I'll have everything I need**

Giving creates a potential gap. Every time you give money away it reduces your ability to buy what you might need in the future. And the promise here is meant to fight back the temptation to think that if you give you'll suffer from a lack of something. The word "sufficiency" means enough or to be content. And Paul lines up three Greek words in a row all of which mean all prior to the word sufficiency. It literally reads "that in all, always, and all things you will have a sufficiency."

Let me be clear. This is not a promise that you'll always have what you want. But I think most of us have learned that always getting what we want is a bad thing. A child who gets everything he or she wants is a brat. An adult who buys whatever he or she wants is in bondage. This promise anchors us to the fact that God knows, better than we do, what we really need. And he is worthy to be trusted to determine what we really need.

There are some of you who are thinking, "But isn't it possible to give so much away that you are actually foolish – unable to even provide for yourself?" Here's my pushback on that: Show me an example of that kind of person. I've never found one. Do you know why? I don't think that he or she exists.

### **Promise #4: I will abound in good works**

We come now to the final promise and the ultimate end-game in giving: good works. The promise here is that God will cause you to have an excess or excel (that's the meaning of "abound") in good works. Giving produces a supply of what we need in order to glorify God, and it is a reminder that we are not here on the earth for the accumulation of things; we are here to make much of God, to have his grace evidenced through us.

8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast. 10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them (Eph 2:8-10).

Giving is a regular statement, a powerful declaration: "I love good works more than money!"

Every time we give, we bank our lives on these four promises:

- God is able
- Grace will be given
- I'll have what I need
- I'll abound in good works

Living on future grace means that we live by faith on the promises of God. Do you live on the promises of God? Do you see the vain, fleeting promises offered to you by the world, the flesh, and the devil? Do you want to know what real joy and real contentment is? Do you long to live by faith in God's promises when it comes to tough sins like pride, lust, anxiety, the fear of man, and covetousness? Do you long to learn how to live by faith on God and see that he is real?

I want you to renew your commitment to live by faith not just on past or present grace, but on future grace. I want you to live on God's ability to keep his promises in all areas of your life. And I want to see you start down that path by learning how to live on future grace through giving.

1 For a full treatment of this subject please see John Piper's book *Future Grace* (Multnomah Publishers, 1995).

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