

## First to the Lord

### Exulting in God's Economy

#### 2 Corinthians 8:8-15

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8 I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine. 9 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. 10 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. 13 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" (2 Cor 8:8-15).

Generosity is one of the few arenas in which God invites us to test him. Malachi 3:10 is ripe with promise:

"Bring the full tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need."

Giving is an act of faith, a choice made out of the values of your heart, and an act of obedience that puts you in a place where you are able to see God at work in your life. Money becomes the platform for your faith to come alive. Giving is an opportunity for God to show himself strong in your life. And that is why it is worth talking about even if it makes us a bit uncomfortable. I can't think of anything that has the ability to test our hearts, reveal our true love, exhibit faith, or create lasting joy more than how we deal with giving. Money has tremendous spiritual power.

### **Why First to the Lord?**

This is our second week in a journey through 2 Corinthians 8-9, an expositional study what the Bible says about generosity. We're talking about this right now because of this unique moment in the history of College Park Church. Before us is the prospect of increasing our capacity for more ministry – expanding our mission – through the construction of a new facility. We've entered a 40 day season of discovery where our Elders are asking every family to prayerfully

make a three-year commitment over and above our regular giving. Our funding goal is 14 million, and we already have over 6 million committed.

This week we begin our dessert nights, a time for groups of 120 to learn more details about the project and to interact with our leadership on the specifics of our plans. Last week I ask you to be engaged in our process by doing three things:

1. **Pray.** Seek the Lord together with us for his will for our church.
2. **Attend a Dessert Night.** Sign up today for your opportunity to hear more about what we are doing.
3. **Turn in a commitment card.** We're asking you to prayerfully consider giving to what I'll call the "gulp line" – a level that you know is possible but painful. Our goal is to have every card turned in by March 14.

So we are talking about giving because we are entering into the largest opportunity for giving that we've known as a church, and I don't want you to miss the spiritual value of this process. My end game is not a building. My end game is to use giving to ignite a passion in you to follow Jesus.

## **20 Principles from 2 Corinthians 8-9**

2 Corinthians 8-9 was written to motivate the church at Corinth to give. Paul was traveling to various churches and taking an offering for the benevolent needs of Jewish believers in Jerusalem. The Corinthian church had made a commitment about a year earlier, and when the believers in Macedonia heard about it they gave generously. Paul writes these two chapters in order to help the people in Corinth think correctly about their commitment. In other words, Paul used the prospect of a future offering to talk about the priority of biblical generosity.

Last week we looked at four principles that were drawn out of 2 Corinthians 8. Over the next few weeks, I'm going to give you a total of 20. Here are the four from last week:

1. **Generosity is motivated through personal example (8:1).** The story of how God shows that he is worthy to be trusted needs to be shared.
2. **Generosity is rooted in the grace of God (8:1).** Past grace, present grace, and future grace are all part of the equation in our giving.
3. **Generosity is linked to the Lordship of Christ (8:5).** God doesn't just want our money; he wants all of us.
4. **Generosity is part of spiritual maturity (8:7).** As we excel in everything, we need to excel in this area as well.

This morning I want to show you five additional observations that help us understand the beauty of biblical generosity.

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

Paul identifies one of the most critical things to understand about biblical giving: it is directly connected to love. True giving is directly connected to the heart. Love is a part of giving in two ways.

First, love is critical to the motivation behind giving. Giving a gift out of a sense of duty or obligation takes away everything that is beautiful about giving. You can give someone a gift but not really give if the motive isn't right. Let me give you an example.

Today is Valentines Day. Imagine that I buy my wife some flowers and bring them home while she is gone. I put the beautiful spread on the kitchen table, and I sit down to read the paper while I wait for her to come home. When she walks in the door with the groceries, she sees the flowers and says, "Wow! Honey, they are beautiful! You didn't have to do that!" Now imagine what would happen if I said, "Yes, I do. Are you crazy! Believe me! I **had** to buy you flowers. Happy?" That's not going to be a very happy moment. The genuineness of the love is critical to the power, meaning, and even the validity of the gift. The gift is meant to be a platform for something more; namely, a display of love. Love makes a gift genuine.

The second way that love is a part of giving is the fact that giving proves the genuineness of love. Talk is cheap. The real proof is in actions. Let me give you a few examples from other passages:

"But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? 18 Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth" (1 John 3:17-18).

"If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? 17 So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead" (James 2:15-17).

Therefore, giving provides proof that our love for God and our love for others are real. And this is why Paul draws upon love and not command as the motivation for the people the Corinthians to give. He knew that giving by compulsion might result in a monetary gift, but that is not real giving. True giving comes from a heart of love and giving shows us where our true love is.

So for someone to say that they love Jesus but never give says a lot about what they really love. To say that you really love your church and what happens there every Sunday but not to give to support it says something about what you really love. To say that you love foreign missions but not to give to it means that you really do not love missions. Giving is barometer of what we really love. Giving is a proof that our love is genuine.

Randy Alcorn's second Treasure Principle Key is "my heart always goes where I put God's money." He says, "Show me your checkbook, your VISA statement, and your receipts and I'll show you where your heart is...{Jesus} wants people so filled with a vision for eternity that they wouldn't dream of not investing their money, time, and prayers where they will matter the most."

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

Last week we talked about the central role that past, present, and future grace plays in biblical giving, but verse 9 takes it even deeper. It specifically talks about the gospel; it talks about the gospel in financial terms: "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" (2 Cor 8:9). It is very clear, isn't it?

Jesus is called "rich" because he possessed everything. He is the owner, creator, sustainer, and ruler of everything. Jesus owns a monopoly on power, sovereignty, and supremacy.

16 For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. 17 And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together (Col 1:16-17)

Jesus possessed all of this even before he came to the earth. He possessed perfect happiness, perfect fellowship with the Father and the Spirit, and perfect joy. He had everything. And yet the Bible tells us that Jesus willingly embraced a poverty that didn't fit with who he is.

7 but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross (Phil 2:7-8).

This is a poverty that you and I cannot even imagine because we can barely scratch the surface of what his life was like prior to the coming to the earth. Yet Jesus embraces all of this poverty so that a divine transfer could happen. Jesus became poor so that we, who were spiritually poor, could be rich. Listen to the unbelievable transfer described in Ephesians 2:

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins 2 in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— 3 among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. 4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ— by grace you have been saved— 6 and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. 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 (Eph 2:1-10)

There are two clear implications. First, people who've experienced this much giving ought to overflow with giving. Stinginess doesn't fit with the gospel. Second, every time you give it takes you back to the fact that you wouldn't think about giving, want to give, or act on the impulse to give if it wasn't for God's grace. Generosity is a strong reminder about the gospel.

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

When Paul considered this gift, he believed that it was not only good for the people in Jerusalem; he believed it was good and profitable for the church at Corinth. That is why he says, "And in this matter I give my judgment: this benefits you..." Paul knew that giving was not a one way street with the receiver being the only one who receives.

Paul understood that generosity is rewarded, and he elevates the reward. This is the principle that Alcorn calls "living for the line, not the dot" which means that we ought to view our giving through the lens of eternity, specifically eternal rewards. Jesus put it this way:

32 "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. 33 Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys (Luke 12:32-34).

Therefore, Jesus is not against investment or the use of money. He is against bad investment – an investment only in this lifetime. Paul sees that the Corinthian participation will not only be good for the saints in Jerusalem; it will be very beneficial to the people at Corinth.

This is very important because it is another act of faith that takes place when you give. It is this mentality that guards us from thinking that we are just throwing our money away. You give it to someone else or some organization, and there is always a part of you that could think, "Do you know what I could have done with that money this month!" And the fight of faith in that regard is won by considering the true wealth that you are earning. Jim Elliot, the missionary who was martyred at age twenty-eight while trying to reach the Indians in Ecuador, famously said, "He is no fool to give what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose."

Mark it down! You never lose anything you give away.

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

Verse twelve gives us a very important but often missed principle when it comes to giving. The verse says, "For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have." What does this mean?

It means that every person is responsible to give according his or her ability. This will play out even further in the next point, but it is important to see here that we must give out of our resources. This is to combat two problems.

The first problem is thinking that the only gifts that count are big gifts. There is a natural tendency to look at giving through a lens of "what is my small gift going to do?" Giving can easily be squelched with a mentality that your gift is small in comparison to others. The Bible constantly works to help us see the real value or the real economy behind giving. In fact Luke 21 records Jesus' word upon observing a widow put two small copper coins in the offering box. Regarding this Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them." Generosity is measured by God based upon heart and sacrifice, not size or amount.

The second problem is a tendency to give through someone else's checkbook. This happens when you pray more about God getting a hold of someone else's heart rather than praying about your own because they have more than you.

Biblical generosity means that you take a look at what you have and ask the Lord what you can do. This requires some creative thinking. In my last church there was a man who became convicted that he had way too many big, expensive toys. He began selling them one at a time and giving the money away. I also heard from a man this week who was convicted about how much he was spending on his cable bill in light of this discussion on stewardship. He reduced his cable package and decided to give the difference away.

This also raises a sensitive and fairly important issue. This series is really painful to some of you because your spending patterns have gotten you into a position where it looks like it is impossible to give. You are so in debt that you have no freedom to give. You are double bondage – captive to your debt and not free to be generous. I just want to encourage you to consider two things: 1) giving something up so that you can give something somewhere and 2) maybe it is time to get your financial house in order. A lack of freedom to give is a consequence of poor stewardship.

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

The final principle is central to understanding how God's giving economy works. Verse fourteen lists the principle and verse fifteen gives an Old Testament reference point. Let's start with the Old Testament reference.

Exodus 16:18 is the verse that is quoted in 2 Corinthians 8:14, and it relates to the collection of manna while the Israelites were in the wilderness. It says, "They gathered, some more, some less. 18 But when they measured it with an omer, whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack. Each of them gathered as much as he could eat." The point of the verse is simply that God provided for the entire assembly enough for every person each and every day. There was no lack. Every day God provided and everyone had their needs met.

Now just before he cites Exodus 16, Paul says, "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" (2 Cor 8:13-14). What is the connection?

Paul is calling for a very different view of possessions! He is comparing the sufficient provision of manna to the provisions that God gives to us. And he is saying that God gives us provisions not just to meet our needs but to meet the needs of those who are lacking. God doesn't rain down manna from heaven; he gives provisions to his people expecting them to use what they have to meet the needs of others. Again, to quote Randy Alcorn – "God prospers me not to raise my standard of living, but raise my standard of giving."

Now just stop and consider that with me for a moment. If you start from a perspective that everything belongs to God, and then you consider the fact that God gives you money not just to meet your needs but to meet the needs of others – that radically changes how you view generosity.

How does that apply where our church is at? There are people who gave generously and sacrificially for you to worship in this facility today. We have been blessed, and there will be for many, many years who will be blessed by what takes place in our new facility. But it also relates to the challenges of the economy that we are experiencing. Some of our people have had a very difficult season of life, and they would love to give like they could have four years ago. They can't. But there are others who can give, and this is a moment for you to step up and see that God's blessings upon your life were never meant just for you. The design of God's economy is such that he uses the blessings of one to meet the needs of another whether it is food and shelter, a benevolence need, or providing for a new building.

The point that I want you to see is that we need to view our possession differently. They are not just for our enjoyment. God gives us stuff so that we can meet the needs of others.

Let me give you an example of this. About 6 months ago our family was checking out of a grocery store and in front of us was an old Amish couple. They looked like a picture perfect Amish couple complete with the man wearing dark blue overalls, light blue shirt, broad rimmed hat, and a long beard while the woman had a head covering, hair in a bun, and a long dress.

They took a long time to trying to figure out how to check out, and when they tried to pay there was a problem. The check-out clerk started talking with them rudely and loudly. Apparently, they wanted to write a check but it was an out-of-town check and their ID didn't have a picture (something I assume had to do with their Amish beliefs). Their supplies were all bagged up and in the cart when the teller said, "You can't write a check if you don't have proper ID." They hung their heads, looked at each other, and just walked away from their supplies.

I was standing there with my debit card in my hand, and the scene broke my heart. I left my wife to pay for our groceries, and I ran after them. I said, "Sir, I couldn't help overhearing your problem back there. If you'd like to write me a check, and I'd be happy to use my debit card to pay for your stuff." He was relieved, and then he told me their story. They needed the supplies because they were spending the night in Indianapolis for a pre-surgery appointment for his wife. His wife was getting ready for a major back surgery.

As he left, I gave him my card and said, "When your wife has surgery please let me know. I'm a pastor and I'd love to pray for you." Three or four weeks later he called, and I will never forget walking into a room after surgery with 10 grown Amish children who knew me by name. I briefly shared the gospel with them and prayed for their mom. It was a memorable ministry moment, and it all began by seeing my debit card differently – as the vehicle to meet someone else's need.

That is God's economy: He gives me resources to meet my needs and to meet the needs of others.

Money has power, but generosity has far more. Generosity proves that your love is real, it a reminder of the gospel, it is rewarded, it comes from what you have, and it the means by which God intends to provide for others.

So let me encourage you not to miss out on the joy of using what you have to be a part of what God is doing. See your stuff through a lens of potential generosity.

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