

Principles of Generosity

2 Corinthians 9:1-15

How many of you know, people can be funny when it comes to money? They can be very suspicious of others when doing business with them. And they can be very susceptible to get-rich-quick schemes. Our relationship with money has the potential to heavily influence our attitudes, behaviors and major decisions we make in life, as it can affect our sense of security.

Knowing how people feel about money and because they don't want to be associated with the prosperity preachers who get rich through their false teachings, Pastors are often uncomfortable talking about the subject of money.

But interestingly, Jesus, who was radically and selflessly generous, had much to say about money. In fact, many of His parables were related to money, which He used to teach divine truths and principles of the kingdom.

Why did Jesus speak so much about money? Our attitudes and actions in relation to money can say a lot about what we truly believe and worship. If you think about it, our bank statements reveal the truth about where we find our ultimate security and what matters most to us.

Jesus makes this point abundantly clear when He said to His followers: *"For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also"* (Matthew 6:19-21). If we truly believe in the kingdom to come, we won't invest all of our time, energy, and resources in temporary pleasures and possessions which have no eternal value.

Rather, we will steward the resources God blesses us with in a manner that demonstrates our allegiance to God. But again, if money is what we treasure most, money will be where we find our primary sense of security and it will ultimately shape how we live our lives.

Knowing this, the Apostle Paul in our text exhorts the Corinthian believers to follow through on their promise to give to the relief effort in Jerusalem and in doing so prove their love and what they truly value the most. While exhorting them in this way, he also highlights some vital principles for Christian generosity that reflects the gracious heart of Jesus and advances His kingdom agenda.

Main idea: Gratitude for God’s grace overflows in joyful and purposeful generosity that glorifies the gospel of Jesus.

This morning we are going to consider five key principles of Christian generosity that magnifies the grace of Jesus and which overflows in many thanksgivings to God.

1. Give with gospel preparedness

Notice first that Christian generosity gives with gospel preparedness. While encouraging the Corinthian church to follow through with their promise to give to the poor saints in Jerusalem, Paul continues:

“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.”
2 Corinthians 9:1-5

Regarding the generosity of the Corinthians, we see in this passage that Paul uses the word ready or readiness repeatedly. And Paul seems to be using these words to speak of the eager willingness of the Corinthians to give, and in relation to being practically prepared to give.

In a previous correspondence with the Corinthians, they learned of the need in Jerusalem. Additionally, Paul points out in verse two that the Corinthian church had expressed a readiness and zeal to help. Their apparent excitement about giving was such that Paul boasted about it to the Macedonian churches.

Furthermore, he testified about how their zeal to give stirred up many of the Macedonian believers who later followed through with their intentions to give with great joy and sacrifice.

But now, although they had shown an inspiring readiness and willingness to give, something impeded them from making good on their promise.

In previous messages we talked about what may have slowed them down from making good on their promise. We saw, for example, that Corinth was a prosperous city. And human nature is such that the more money and possessions we have the greater the temptation will be to find our security in them and the harder it will be to let them go.

In light of this, the author of Hebrews writes: *“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.”⁶ So we can confidently say, “The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?”* (Hebrews 13:5-6).

There’s nothing inherently sinful about possessing money. The question is, does money possess you. Is it controlling and shaping your life? Has it become your god? An important way to test whether money or possessions are possessing us is whether or not we have a heart of generosity. When the Lord has your heart and your ultimate security is found in Him, you will find great joy in giving. But when money is your god, you will hold unto it with a clinched fist or if you do let it go, you will do so begrudgingly.

Now, whatever the reason the Corinthians hadn’t followed through with their promise to give, Paul reminds them of their past willingness

to give to encourage them to make good on their promise. Although his ultimate concern is for the glory of God, according to verse 4, he doesn't want the Corinthians or himself to appear like they were just full of hot air.

Remember, Paul had boasted about their readiness to give before the Macedonians which inspired them to give sacrificially. If they failed to follow through, the Corinthians and Paul would look shady and thus lose credibility.

As we learned last week, when we prove ourselves faithful before a watching world, we earn trust and credibility and more importantly God will entrust us with more so that we could give more.

Now notice also that when Paul talks about the readiness of the Corinthians to give, he is not only speaking of their willingness but also of their preparedness. Paul writes: *"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. 2 Corinthians 9:3*

It's one thing to promise to give, but it's another thing to actually be prepared to follow through. It's been said, "Hell is paved with good intentions." Good intentions mean little if we're not prepared and equipped to fulfill them.

Paul didn't want the Corinthians to be caught off guard. So according to verses 3 and 5 he sends a team ahead of him so that the Corinthians could both make ready the gift and prepare their hearts to give with the right attitude and motive.

Let me ask you, when it comes to living on mission for God, which necessitates being generous with our time, talents and treasures, are you preparing to be ready when God calls or when opportunities to serve His kingdom present themselves? To stay ready, among other things, we need to abide in the word and prayerfully seek God's grace and guidance to accomplish His kingdom purposes.

Notice that in regard to staying ready, the Apostle Paul also encouraged his young protégé by exhorting him in 2 Tim. 2:3-4: *“Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. 4 No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him”* (2 Timothy 2:3-4).

Beloved, as soldiers of Christ and representatives of His kingdom, are we seeking by the grace of God to be free from worldly entanglements so that we can be ready to share the gospel, be available to serve God’s church, and be prepared to give to advance the cause of Christ? If we desire to be ready when God calls, we must prepare to be ready.

Among other things, we must manage the finances God entrusts us with so as not to be enslaved to unnecessary debt. More importantly, we must cultivate close communion with Jesus so that we find in Him our greatest treasure and the overflowing joy of being channels of His blessings to others.

We come now to a second principle of generosity:

2. Give with gospel planning

After exhorting the Corinthians to be ready to follow through with their pledge, Paul continues: *“The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.”* 2 Corinthians 9:6

Although there’s a wonderful promise in this passage associated with generosity, it’s important to note that it often gets misapplied by greedy prosperity preachers. In context, what Paul is saying here is not give so that we can be wealthy, but give so that with God’s blessings we overflow in a wealth of generosity.

In other words, the more that we give by the grace of God, the more God will increase our capacity to give with a joy and righteousness that produces thanksgivings to God. Paul makes this clear in verses 10-11, as we will see in a moment.

Now it's important to note also that when Paul states the promise that *"whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountiful will also reap bountifully,"* he's not only speaking of the quantity of our giving, but of the quality of our giving.

Paul continues in verse 7: *"Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver."* 2 Corinthians 9:7

Notice that grace giving that is blessed by God is first a matter of the heart. Again, Paul writes *"Each one must give as he has decided in his heart..."* Christian giving, by the grace and blessing of God, is not done halfheartedly, begrudgingly or out of obligation. Rather, it is done prayerfully, intentionally and with thoughtful planning.

I often get asked by Christians who want to be more intentional with their giving, "are Christians required to tithe," which means to give ten percent of their income to their local church? My biblical answer to that question is that although tithing was required under the Old Covenant, it is not mandated under the New Covenant.

However, because tithing was actually practiced by the Jewish people before the law was given, many Christians today use it as a guideline or a starting point, which I believe is a good practice. The principle is that we don't just give God whatever we have left over. Rather, we give prayerfully, proportionately and systematically a predetermined percentage of what He blesses us with. And the rest we continue to manage as God leads and directs.

It's important to emphasize that although tithing is not required today, but can be a good guideline, the New Testament doesn't lower the bar when it comes to giving. Rather, the New Testament, which teaches that we are under grace and emphasizes the law of love, raises the bar when it comes to generosity. In other words, the grace of God is not a license to be stingy, but the motivation and the means to give supernaturally, sacrificially and with overflowing joy.

This brings us to a third principle of Christian generosity:

3. Give with gospel pleasure

Notice again at the end of verse 7 we read: “*Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.*” 2 Corinthians 9:7

If you’ve ever gone to Chick-fil-A, you know that when you thank one of their employees for something, they often respond by saying, *my pleasure*, rather than your typical, *you’re welcome* or *no problem*. This is not something that just happened. Early in the company’s history, their Christian owner encouraged their employees in training to say *my pleasure* when someone thanked them. He wanted the business to be known for not only good chicken, but for their welcoming hospitality. Today, *my pleasure* has become part of Chick-Fil-A’s culture and brand.

Now with more than just polite words, followers of Jesus are also to be distinctively known for the joyful pleasure they get from their grace filled generosity. As I mentioned before, one of the ways to test what we truly worship is by our heart attitude towards generosity. If it pains us to give generously, this is a good indication that we treasure money more than Christ.

On the other hand, if motivated by the grace of Christ, it brings us great pleasure to give, even when it cost us, this is a good indication that His love fills our hearts. When we know the power of God’s grace and love, we are blessed when others our blessed and take great joy in being channels of His blessings.

Remember, God doesn’t need our money. He desires and deserves that we give Him our whole heart. Because what our hearts truly worship, will shape who we become and the trajectory of our lives.

We come now to a fourth principle of generosity:

4. Give with gospel power

After presenting the gospel centered joy and readiness for generosity, Paul continues: *“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.” 2 Corinthians 9:8*

It’s important to note here that the word grace, which Paul uses repeatedly when he teaches on Christian generosity, speaks of the blessings that God supplies. And these blessing that God supplies speak of both spiritual and physical resources.

So when Paul says *God is able to make all grace abound to you*, he is saying that whatever kingdom work we are being called to, God will give us both the spiritual endowment and the physical resources we need to do the work or meet the need.

In other words, when we are abounding in the work, His grace will abound to us to make us sufficient in all the things He’s calling us to do at all times. When we continue giving from what He’s giving to us, the fountain of grace over our lives will never cease flowing. As the old hymn, “He giveth more grace,” beautifully puts it:

“When we have exhausted our store of endurance
When our strength has failed ere the day is half done
When we reach the end of our hoarded resources
Our Father's full giving is only begun
His love has no limit, His grace has no measure
His pow'r has no boundary known unto men
For out of His infinite riches in Jesus
He giveth, and giveth, and giveth again.”

Notice that to support his teaching about the generosity that God blesses unto more generosity, Paul quotes from Psalm 112:9 and alludes to Isaiah 55:10. He continues:

“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 to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. 2 Corinthians 9:9-11

Commenting on this passage, Craig Keener writes in his commentary: “In 9:9, Paul quotes Psalm 112:9, which in context refers to the generosity and vindication of the righteous; having given to the poor, their righteousness endures. Yet God is the supreme benefactor on whom these generous benefactors also must depend; thus in 9:10 Paul recalls Isaiah 55:10, which speaks of God as the one who gives seed to the sower (i.e., to those who scatter in 9:9) and bread for food. As they kept giving, God would keep multiplying their seed so they could give more and multiply their harvest of righteousness.”

Again, the more that we give by the grace of God the more God will increase our capacity to give with a joy and righteousness that produces thanksgiving to God.

This brings us to our fifth and final principle of Christian generosity:

5. Give for gospel praise

Paul continues in verses 12-15: *“For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God. ¹³ By their approval of this service, they will glorify God because of your submission that comes from your confession of the gospel of Christ, and the generosity of your contribution for them and for all others, ¹⁴ while they long for you and pray for you, because of the surpassing grace of God upon you.”* 2 Corinthians 9:12-14

Notice that in verse 12 Paul emphasizes that their grace filled giving will not only supply the needs of the saints in Jerusalem, it also is overflowing in many thanksgivings to God. Keep in mind that the gospel which went out from a predominantly Jewish church in Jerusalem, has saved and established a Gentile church in Corinth.

These two people groups that at one time were at odds with one another are now generously blessing one another with spiritual and

physical blessings. And as the Corinthians follow through with their pledge to give to the poor in Jerusalem, their needs will not only be supplied, but they will praise and glorify God for the transforming power of the gospel among the Corinthians which produces such righteousness and generosity.

Moreover, according to verse 14, as Paul anticipates that “the surpassing grace of God will produce a generous offering, he knows that the Jewish believers will long for the Gentiles and make them a focus of their prayer, enhancing the wider unity of the church. The church-wide benefits of ready, willing, generous giving, then and now, are remarkable: [producing] thanksgiving to God, glory to God, and a bond of affection within the church.” R. Kent Hughes

No doubt it was the prayers of the believers in Jerusalem that contributed to this work of transforming grace among the Corinthians. And now Paul anticipates that their grace filled generosity toward the Jerusalem church will fuel more prayer that will lead to more grace being poured out, thus widening the circle of generosity to the glory of Christ.

Now knowing what the surpassing grace of God upon our lives can accomplish, Paul closes this chapter with his own expression of exuberant gratitude to God for His grace: “*Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!*” (2 Corinthians 9:15).

What is the inexpressible gift from God that Paul is most grateful for? It is the grace of God in Christ that not only saves us from sin but gives us access to the throne of grace.

Chuck Swindoll put it this way: “The perfect picture of grace God has placed throughout Scripture is Jesus Christ hanging on a rugged cross. Can you turn away from such a picture of love, such a picture of giving, such a picture of amazing self-sacrificial grace? Can you look at such a picture and not be changed, not be compelled to give yourself to Him, not be compelled to give to others in the way He gave Himself to you?”

Conclusion

O may gospel grace, God's Riches at Christ's Expense, fill our hearts with gratitude that moves us to pray for more grace to generously give of our time, talents and treasure to bless and inspire God's people and thus widen the circle of gospel generosity to the glory of Christ.