



2 Corinthians 8:1-15

When God Owns it All

Not long ago I heard the story of a circus ringmaster who had a standing offer that he was the strongest man in town. He offered a \$1000 to anyone who could squeeze the last drop out of lemon. The ringmaster would squeeze a lemon until all the juice ran into a glass and hand the lemon rind to a contender. Anyone who could squeeze just one drop of juice would get the thousand dollars. Well, everyone would come up and try it. There were cowboys, body builders, ironworkers, farmers, baseball players, wrestlers, etc. No one could get another drop out of the lemon. One day a thin, balding, little man came in wearing wire rim glasses. He spoke in a thin, faint squeaky voice; "I can squeeze your lemon."

Everyone started laughing. The master of ceremonies said, "OK." He grabbed a lemon, and without even cutting a hole in it started squeezing. Squish, lemon juice ran out into a glass. He handed the wrinkled remains of the lemon over to the little, thin nerd. He grabbed hold of the lemon remains, as the hysterical laughter faded away. One, two, three big drops of lemon juice plunged into the glass.

The silence turned to hysterical cheers. The ringmaster handed over the bounty. Then he asked, "How in the world did you do that?" a thousand men have been in here and they couldn't get a drop out of a lemon. "What in the world do you do for a living?"

"Nothing to it," he said. "I do it every day. I am the treasurer at local Baptist Church!"

In his letters to the church at Corinth the apostle Paul was encouraging them, along with other Gentile churches, to give to help with the needs of the Jerusalem believers. They were going through extremely difficult times financially because of the persecution from the Jews living in Jerusalem. They had been socially ostracized and excommunicated from the synagogues because they believed that Jesus of Nazareth was the messiah. Their businesses failed because of the national disinheritance. Paul encouraged the Gentile Christians to help with this great need in Jerusalem by putting aside a gift for the Jerusalem fund. The amount of the gift depended on how God provided for them during that week. The goal would be a substantial sum when Paul arrived with the designated men to take the contributions to the church at Jerusalem. Probably a year earlier these believers at Corinth had said they would like to help, and made a start. Now they needed a little encouragement to continue with their commitment.

In Second Corinthians chapters eight and nine we discover that Christian giving is an act of grace.

THERE IS ENCOURAGEMENT ON CHRISTIAN STEWARDSHIP (8:1)

STEWARDSHIP (8:1)

"Now, brethren, we *wish to* make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia . . ." (v. 1).

Paul repeats the word for "grace" seven times in the eighth chapter and three times in the ninth chapter. "The grace of God" (v. 1). In the context he is concerned with the activity of grace. In classical Greek the word first meant something beautiful, as opposed to that which is ugly; strength as contrary to weakness; health as the opposite of illness; love against hate. The New Testament writers took the word and put new life into it. Grace becomes full blown in the incarnation of God's Son and His death and resurrection. It is in Him that we see everything the Greeks longed for in beauty, glory, health, power and love. Moreover, He gives us His kind of life. He gives His life to poor lost sinners who will receive it as a gift from Him by faith. In the passage before us, "grace" means the generous giving on the part of the believers at Macedonia. It is looked upon as a gift of thanksgiving to God. It is the "grace of generosity" that God gives to believers.

Giving is an activity of grace.

Paul argues that the subject of giving to the needs of the saints in Jerusalem is an activity of grace. It is something beautiful and lovely. The source of their activity is the grace of God, which produced an attitude of joy.

It is an act of grace when it comes from the heart. The grace Paul speaks of in 8:1 is the generous giving on the part of the Macedonian churches. Every believer owes 100% of what he is and has to God. New Testament giving might mean any percentage. God is concerned with 100% of what we possess because He owns it all.

Where is your treasure?

Jesus spoke of our core values when He said in Matthew 6:21; "where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." The context is the Pharisees use of money. They selfishly held on to their possessions thinking their riches were an indication of their spiritual vitality. What is your treasure? It is your time, your talent and your earthly treasures. Moreover, we Christians have this beautiful treasure in clay pots. It is "Christ in you the hope of glory." God wants us to take the beautiful treasure out and give it away, not selfishly hold on to it. An awesome responsibility goes with being recipients of His grace. Either Jesus Christ or our possessions is lord. You can't have both as your master. God doesn't give us the option. Do you recognize Him as the lord of your possessions? Is He really the owner of everything?

Grace stewardship principles

The apostle Paul had already taught the Corinthians some great principles of stewardship. "Now, concerning the collection for the saints, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so do you also. On the first day of every week each one

churches of Galatia, so do you also. On the first day of every week each one of you is to put aside and save, as he may prosper, so that no collections be made when I come" (1 Corinthians 16:1-2).

Here is the grace of giving. There is no pressure on the giver. There is no public display, no competition and no manipulation of the givers. There weren't any free offers and giveaways. It is honest, open, transparent and genuine giving from the heart. It is a ministry of grace. The whole letter of Second Corinthians is about ministry. This is another aspect of ministering in the church.

- They gave *methodically*. Paul instructed them to give "on the first day of every week." It was periodic giving. The church received the gifts every Lord's day.
- They gave *personally*. It was a personal privilege and responsibility to give. "Let each one of you" give.
- They gave *regularly*. They were to "put aside and save." You will never give consistently unless God comes first. When you give Him His part first, before the house note, car notes, even food, you will give as a gift of grace.
- They gave *impartially*. They gave as God caused them to prosper. Each person gave "as he may prosper." They gave in proportion to what they had.
- They gave *confidentially*. Paul wanted them to take the offering before he came, so "no collection be made when I come." He did not want a big show. He didn't want to make a contest out of it. Do it privately so that when I get there we can concentrate on other matters. It is an act of grace. Do it methodically, individually, regularly, impartially and with confidentiality. It is a matter of the heart. "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

Let's see these great principles of stewardship giving in practice. What can the churches of ancient Macedonia teach us?

THERE IS AN EXAMPLE OF THE MACEDONIAN'S STEWARDSHIP (8:2-8)

Who were the Macedonians churches?

These were neighboring churches to the north which Paul had started in the Roman province of Macedonia and included Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea (Acts 16:11-17:13).

Grace stewardship always begins with a profound spiritual experience (v. 1).

These Macedonians were the recipients of "the grace of God." God's grace makes us exceedingly rich. We can give to others because of we are the recipients of His rich grace. "We love, because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19).

The Macedonians make it absolutely clear that our stewardship does not depend upon our circumstances. It depends upon the quality of our relationship with Jesus Christ. We give because He first gave to us His amazing grace.

Grace stewardship is an attitude (v. 2).

These Macedonian Christians were extremely poor. Their land had been decimated by civil wars. These believers had recently been subjected to intense persecution. They were going through "severe testing of affliction," or a "great deal of affliction, oppression, tribulation." They were enduring tremendous pressure in difficult times. They were living in "extreme poverty," even at the lowest stages of abject poverty. As we

difficult times. They were living in "extreme poverty," even at the lowest stages of abject poverty. As we would say, they were at "rock bottom," down to the last penny. If we take the meaning literally, they had nothing and were in imminent danger of real starvation.

Much of the poverty came because the Roman government had taken over the gold and silver mines in Macedonia. They also taxed the copper and iron smelting industry. No longer could they use the trees for the construction of ships of commerce. They lived in difficult days.

Observe the contrasts in verse two. In spite of "a great ordeal of affliction" they had "abundance of joy" and "in their deep poverty" they "overflowed in the wealth of their liberality." They were generous in their giving with pure motives.

The word "liberality" means to be free of ulterior motives. It is uncalculating. It was just the sheer unadulterated joy of giving that motivated their hearts.

I can hear it now. "How reckless of them to give when they needed it themselves." "We take care of our own first, preacher." No, these Macedonians gave because they understood God's gift of grace. They "first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us to the will of God" (v. 3). They made a total commitment to the Lord in response to His grace. They were totally available, without reservation, to the will of God. Because of this surrender, they were abandoned to the will of God. This attitude of all-out abandonment to God's will was the secret to their sacrificial giving.

Many years ago there was a widow in Iowa who supported us in our mission work for sixteen years. She was so moved by the Holy Spirit to be a part of our ministry that she got a job after she had retired so she could be personally involved. She continued to work well into her eighties because she did not want to be left out.

J. B. Phillips paraphrases verse two: "Somehow, in most difficult circumstances, their joy and the fact of being down to their last penny themselves, produced a magnificent concern for other people" (*Letters to Young Churches*).

Grace stewardship is according to our ability (v. 3).

They gave "according to their ability, and beyond their ability they gave of their own accord."

The Amplified Bible reads, "For, as I can bear witness, [they gave] according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability; and [they did it] voluntarily."

Every church has members who give sacrificially every week. Like the Macedonians, they give "beyond their ability they [give] of their own accord." They don't use money to manipulate or as a power play. They give out of the sincerity of their heart. They give with "abundance of joy" and "in the wealth of their liberality." There is never any fanfare. No one ever knows they give, even sacrificially.

There is no need to manipulate by guilt. "They gave according to their ability." If we don't have it we are not responsible.

I asked one of those grace givers in a former church where I pastored to share a testimony on giving. He looked at me for a moment, his eyes filled with tears and they rolled down his cheeks. He said to me, "Oh, no, brother Wil I can't do that. It would take the glory from the Lord and the joy of giving." I had been rebuked in a kind, gentle manner of grace. My motive was sincere. I thought it would be an encouragement to others to give out of sincere hearts. My dear brother in Christ simply says, "I count it a great privilege to give in

to give out of sincere hearts. My dear brother in Christ simply says, "I count it a great privilege to give in Christ name." That's grace giving.

Grace stewardship is done willingly (v. 3).

These Macedonians "gave of their own accord" (v. 3). There was no pushing, no pressure from anyone and no manipulation. That is beautiful.

They gave voluntarily, of their own accord. It was spontaneous and voluntarily, of their own initiative, without request or coercion.

It also tells us that they responded from a sincere heart. We live in a day, perhaps because we are bombarded with many needs, when you have to reach a certain crescendo before people respond. Many pastors feel they have to reach a certain high fevered pitch before their people will let go and respond. That is not true where I pastor. You are excellent givers. The Macedonians became involved of their own accord and their own initiative. What a tremendous joy to know I don't have to come in on Sunday and beg our people to give. God lays its on hearts and you respond.

Grace giving is often sacrificial (v. 3).

Paul says they "gave beyond their ability of their own accord." It was sacrificial giving.

These Macedonians were plunged into sorrow, trouble and deep poverty. However, they gave far beyond what they could afford. They were penniless, and could afford nothing and they begged Paul for the opportunity to give. How could they afford that? That is the secret. They could not afford not to! They were the recipients of grace. They belonged to the Lord and they knew He owned it all.

Grace giving is often supplicating (v.4).

Please don't miss the arresting attitude on the part of these churches. They were "begging us with much urging for the favor of participation in the support of the saints" (v. 4). Note who is doing the begging; it is the ones who want to give! It is not the preacher begging them to give! They begged Paul for the opportunity to become involved in meeting the needs at Jerusalem. It must have been a humbling experience for Paul. I suspect that he did not mention the need to the churches in Macedonia because he knew they were experiencing great poverty, themselves. He did not want to burden them any further.

There have been many occasions when Ann and I have had individuals and churches become excited about our ministries and have asked, almost to the point of begging, to have a part of our ministry. I had a fellow missionary tell me one day, in an admiring and winsome manner; "I envy you more than any other person in this mission." He was simply excited about what God was doing and wanted to join in and be apart of it. We have even had missionaries ask us if they could have a part in meeting financial needs in our ministries. Like Paul, it was a humbling experience. When God is at work in your life other people see Him at work and want to be a part of it. It causes your heart to overflow with gratitude and praise to the Lord.

This is true in our Internet sermon ministry. I never ask anyone for donations for the free services we offer to pastors and Christians who want our Bible studies. It is all free, and we will always keep it that way. We have a businessman who, month after month, faithfully helps meet some of these expenses. God is faithful and He provides.

The ads on our website helps to provide for our mission work in Latin America. I don't like running the ads, but that is the Lord's way of providing for pastors and seminary extension courses and evangelism in depth workshops.

Without asking anyone for money we recently watched the Lord provide funds to purchase property for two mission churches in Honduras. Then when the time was right to build the buildings the Lord moved on the hearts of individuals and churches to provide the necessary funds and teams to go and do construction. All I can say is I saw God do it!

Grace giving means first giving ourselves to the Lord Jesus (v. 5).

Paul lets us in on the secret of their giving. They "first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God."

They first gave themselves to the Lord, and if you do not you will give grudgingly. Putting Christ first means abandonment of self to Him. Everywhere in the New Testament the impelling force to faithful service is based upon God's grace.

This is the only way to do it. It must always begin with an intimate love relationship with Christ. We give because we love Him. We give because we are the recipients of His abundant grace.

Grace giving involves humble submission to church authority (v. 5b).

Paul says, not only did "they first give themselves unto the Lord," but also "to us by the will of God."

There is the right balance. Paul didn't "lord it over them." Nor did they "lord it over" him. He was a humble servant providing leadership they needed. They recognized that leadership and were in submission to him. There weren't any power struggles in the Macedonian churches like there was at Corinth. Some individuals are never satisfied unless they are in control of others.

Grace giving is a deeply spiritual matter (vv. 6-8).

So we urged Titus that as he had previously made a beginning, so he would also complete in you this gracious work as well. But just as you abound in everything, in faith and utterance and knowledge and in all earnestness and in the love we inspired in you, *see* that you abound in this gracious work also. I am not speaking *this* as a command, but as proving through the earnestness of others the sincerity of your love also (vv. 6-8).

Paul could say, Go ahead and sign your commitment card. Fulfill your commitment to Christ. The Corinthians had made a previous commitment to help in "the support of the saints" in Jerusalem. They said they would do their part to relieve the suffering of the believers. Now go ahead and "complete in you this gracious work as well." "See that you abound in this gracious work also."

Paul commends the Corinthians reminding them that God has blessed them abundantly (v. 7). They have everything in Christ. They have faith, utterance, knowledge, all earnestness and love. Now go ahead and demonstrate it! Show your love to the Lord by fulfilling your opportunity to give.

Here is the evidence of your maturity. "I am not speaking *this* as a command, but as proving through the earnestness of others the sincerity of your love also" (v. 8). He wanted to motivate them by the sincerity of

earnestness of others the sincerity of your love also" (v. 8). He wanted to motivate them by the sincerity of their love for the Lord. You do not have to be commanded to give. Here is the evidence of "the sincerity of your love."

The word for "proving" is an assayer's word meaning "to approve by testing, to accept as proven, to approve." It would be certified as pure gold. Paul says go ahead and demonstrate the results of your pure love for the brethren.

THERE IS THE EXAMPLE OF CHRIST'S STEWARDSHIP (8:9-15)

Now if you think these Macedonian churches are an excellent example of the stewardship of grace, let me show you an even greater example.

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 through His poverty might become rich (v. 9).

Jesus was exceedingly rich.

"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich . . ." Jesus Christ, as the Second Person of the Godhead, shared the Father's glory in heaven before he became flesh. As the Creator He owned it all! He still does.

Jesus possessed the whole universe. He spoke and the universe was created. . "For by Him all things were created, *both* in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities –all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together" (Colossians 1:16, 17).

He was rich in honor, glory, adoration and praise. The angels bowed down and worshiped Him. When He came in the flesh "suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased'" (Luke 2:13-14). Yes, He was rich in praise, adoration, and worship.

In His priestly prayer to the Father the night before His death He said, "I glorified You on the earth, having accomplished the work which You have given Me to do. Now, Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was" (John 17:4-5).

He was rich in His love for us. Jesus was praying to the Father, "I have made Your name known to them, and will make it known, so that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them" (John 17:26).

The "grace of the Lord Jesus Christ" is demonstrated in "that though He was [exceedingly] rich, yet for your sake He became [extremely] poor."

Jesus became extremely poor.

"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor . . . "

The Lord of glory made Himself the worst kind of beggar, a cowering abject beggar. He left His throne of glory and became a common, household servant.

He became a servant. He was born in a humble home. He knew poverty. He could say, "I have nowhere to lay My head." He was always borrowing. He borrowed a coin to pay His taxes. He borrowed a donkey to ride into Jerusalem as the anointed of the Lord. He borrowed a tomb in which to be buried. As a humble servant He was stripped naked and placed on a cross and died for other people's crimes. He became a curse for you and me, and He died as our substitute on the cross.

Speaking of the incarnation of Jesus, Paul wrote: "although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, *and* being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:6-8).

Jesus makes the recipients of His grace exceedingly rich.

"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 through His poverty might become rich" (v. 9).

Just think of it. You through His extreme abject poverty have become extremely rich. The paradox is that we have become extremely rich through someone else's extreme poverty.

Remember Ephesians 1:3? "Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ . . ." We have become rich in possession of the glory that Christ concealed while He was here on the earth in His incarnate body. We are the recipients of His grace. We are exceedingly rich! Let us never forget that fact. All that He is is available to us in time of need.

Jesus said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (John 12:24). That principle is still true. Jesus went to the cross and died, bearing our sins, and rose from the dead. He is alive! Because He died and rose from the dead, He bears much fruit. If we die to self, then He lives in us to communicate His life and power through us. That is what made the Macedonians self-sacrificing. Alan Redpath said, "He became like us that He might make us like Him."

Because we are rich in His promises, we are rich in His power. "Lo, I am with you always to the end of the age." "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you . . ."

Those things that were gain to you, those you counted a loss for Christ –your reputation, education, religion, everything –but for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord. Out of that utter poverty of spirit you became rich. And in your riches in Christ you want others to become rich, too.

When we come to Christ recognizing our spiritual poverty and receive the riches of His grace we are free to give and give and give and give again. It is from them that you operate from grace to grace. It begins with a commitment to Christ without argument, without debate. "All I am is yours now and forever, Lord."

Grace giving is responsible stewardship (vv. 10-15).

Complete your responsibility of grace giving. Tactfully, Paul makes his application of these principles and examples by appealing to the Corinthians to be grace givers.

I give *my* opinion in this matter, for this is to your advantage, who were the first to begin a year ago not only to do *this*, but also to desire *to do it*. But now finish doing it also, so that just as *there was* the readiness to

2 Corinthians 8:1-15 When God Owns it All!

to do *this*, but also to desire *to do it*. But now finish doing it also, so that just as *there was* the readiness to desire it, so *there may be* also the completion of it by your ability. For if the readiness is present, it is acceptable according to what *a person* has, not according to what he does not have. For *this* is not for the ease of others *and* for your affliction, but by way of equality —at this present time your abundance *being a supply* for their need, so that their abundance also may become *a supply* for your need, that there may be equality; as it is written, He who *gathered* much did not have too much, and he who *gathered* little had no lack " (vv. 10-15).

Now is the time for you Corinthians to give because it may turn out that you may lose all you have and then it will be your turn to receive. God gives to some more than they need in order that they might have the joy of giving to those who are in need. I think there are times when God withdraws our possessions so we can understand how it feels to receive from others. God is a great giver. Perhaps He has given you the ability and opportunity to make money so you can have the joy of investing where He is at work.

The Corinthians had fallen behind in their goal of giving because of internal divisions and quarrels among themselves. Paul exhorts them to follow through to completion.

Paul quotes Exodus 16:18 when the Israelites were gathering daily the manna in the wilderness. Each day the people were to gather manna for their needs. Some would gather more than they needed, other less. However, when they brought in their baskets they put it together and measured out enough for each person. They received sufficient daily bread. If anyone was selfish and hoarded the manna it went bad. God provided daily. What they gathered was God's. They gathered it for one another. Whatever we possess is from God. He blesses us so we can bless others.

It may be that God has blessed our nation more than at anytime in history. If so, He has done it for a purpose. God is no respecter of persons. It behooves us to find out where God is at work and see if He will not invite us to come and join Him in what He is doing. He has blessed us for a reason. Let's get involved according to His grace.

Some Abiding Principles for Our Day

When our hearts are moved by the grace of God we want to give generously.

True giving always originates with the grace of God.

The only true motive for giving is the grace of God. We give because of God's goodness to us. If God has not done anything good for you please do not give a dime. However, if you are the recipient of His abundant amazing grace then pour it out according to the measure you have received. It is a privilege and opportunity to be involved in the stewardship of grace. It is not our duty; it is our privilege. God invites us to come and join Him in what He is doing. That includes our giving.

When you are blessed abundantly, you want to give abundantly.

The Macedonians outdid themselves in giving because God had blessed them. They gave beyond their means. They dug deeply into their pockets and begged for the privilege of being involved in what God was doing. They came to Paul saying, "Don't leave us out." Evidence that a heart has been touched by the grace of God is that it counts giving a great privilege.

When we first give ourselves to the Lord we have the right priorities.

That is where it always has to begin. That is the key to a giving heart. When you have first given yourself to the Lord, you have given everything you have –including your possessions. They realized that everything they had belonged to God. He owns it all. The right priority is always "they first gave of themselves to the Lord."

Have you ever noticed that tithing is not mentioned in the New Testament? God is not interested in your 10%, 20%, or 30%. He is entitled to it all. He wants 100%. What is your attitude toward His having 100? You don't give God 10% and keep the 90% for yourself. All 100% belongs to God. The Macedonians had the attitude of, "Lord it all belongs to You. It is not mine. I am just your trustee. I must distribute it for your sake in your name." That will change your whole attitude toward possessions. Grace givers are moved by the grace of God to give as He has provided. When our love is genuine we will give from the heart.

When the heart is right we give what we can.

God knows your heart and He does not require something that you do not have. He delights in the person who can give all that he can joyfully. Give according to what you have. Don't be overwhelmed with guilt if it is not as much as you would like to give, or as much as you said you would give. The important thing is to give according to your ability to give. How has God given to you? The Macedonians were poor, yet they gave like they were rich.

Do you really believe God owns it all? If someone rummaged through your checkbook, what would it reveal about your commitment to Christ? Would it demonstrate that you are a recipient of grace? In what ways does your giving demonstrate your love for Christ and His church? What does it say about the condition of my relationship with Jesus Christ?

How we walk in grace affects how we give to God.

Our salvation is by grace through faith alone in Jesus Christ. Let me make it very clear. Our giving has nothing to do with our salvation. As a friend of mine says, "Salvation is by grace through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone."

Do you know Jesus? If you stood before the Lord God today and He said to you, "Why should I let you into my heaven?" What would you say? Forget about giving your money to the church, or the ministry, or missions if you have never received the free gift of eternal life. Salvation is freely given and received. You can't purchase it. Christ did that for you on the cross when He died in your place. Salvation is God's free gift to you. It is an insult to Him to offer Him anything other than yourself. However, if you are the recipient of His grace you are free to respond in grace. For more information on how to receive Christ as your personal savior please checkout [A Free Gift for You](#).

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Series: Stewardship Principles

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