



2 Corinthians 9:1-15

God Loves a Hilarious Giver

The apostle Paul in his Second Corinthians letter stresses the principal of giving out of grace. Grace giving will revolutionize your life. It has an amazing way of clarifying our motives and principles of giving.

God has reached down and saved us by His amazing grace. Grace is a beautiful thing. It always emphasizes the beauty of the object in view. It brings to others beauty, love and charm. God in His matchless love reached down to us in our sinning state and demonstrated that love by sending His Son to die in our place on the cross. "We love Him because He first loved us." It is in response to this grace that we do everything as believers in Jesus Christ. He has blessed us in His grace and out of His grace we reach out and bless others.

The ministry of giving is centered in the beautiful word grace. It is an expression of that lovely sacrifice of Christ.

THE PRINCIPLE OF GRACE GIVING (8:1-9)

The apostle Paul uses the word for "grace" seven times in chapter eight where he lays down this principle of giving out of grace (cf. vv. 1, 4, 6, 7, 9, 16, 19).

An Example of Grace Giving by Some Extremely Poor Christians

The churches in Macedonia were going through extremely difficult economic times. They were all in poverty. They were so deep in abject poverty that Paul didn't even ask them to give toward the offering for the poor saints in Jerusalem who were being persecuted by the Jewish religious leaders. He knew they couldn't afford it. They embarrassed Paul by "begging" for the opportunity to be a part of the project (8:1-4). "For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability they gave of their own accord, begging us with much entreaty for the favor of participation in the support of the saints . . ." They saw a great need and didn't want to be left out. They were so moved by the Holy Spirit's promptings they insisted on being a part of the "support of the saints" in Jerusalem.

How did they do it? "They first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God" (v. 5). That is always where stewardship must begin. "They first gave themselves unto the Lord." They had an intimate love relationship with the Lord God. They loved Him from the depths of their heart. When you fall in love with the Lord Jesus you will give from the heart, because He is first in everything. He owns it all because He went to the cross and died for us. It is out of love for Him that we give of our very best.

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These Macedonians, Paul says are an example to us of those who give by the principle of grace. Out of their love for the Lord they gave "according to their ability, and beyond their ability they gave of their own accord." There wasn't any put on. There was no show, and no competition. No one applied any pressure to them. It was giving out of poverty; it was giving with out pressure; it was giving that comes from a pure heart. They gave because they first gave themselves to the Lord.

If these Macedonian believers are an example of extremely poor Christians giving as the Lord enable them, then the Lord Jesus Christ is an example of one who was exceedingly rich who gave up everything so others could be made rich.

An Example of Grace Giving by One who was Exceedingly Rich

"You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich" (v. 9).

Remember the Lord Jesus Christ, as the pre-incarnate Word of God was rich, rich in possession of the whole universe. He owned it all. All He had to do was speak a word and it was done. "By Him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible, and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by Him and for Him: And He is before all things, and by Him are all things consistent" (Colossians 1:16, 17). Angels bowed down and worshipped Him. He was rich in honor, praise, glory and adoration. He was rich in His Father's love for Him.

He chose to give up the manifestation of His eternal glory, and take on all the abject poverty of a slave. He became man. He was God man. Because of His humble obedience "we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15). Jesus did not empty Himself of His divine nature or His attributes. It was a self limitation of His outward visible glory. He was still God in the fullest sense. He took on a servant's role. "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 bondservant, and being made in the likeness of men. And 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). That is poverty!

Moreover, He did it because He loves you. He did it so you could become extremely rich! Paul had already told the Corinthians, God "made Him [Jesus] who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Rich! You are rich! You are rich in His grace. He who was exceedingly rich for your sake became extremely poor, that you through His extreme poverty

for your sake became extremely poor, that you through His extreme poverty might become exceedingly rich. Rich in His love, rich in a right relationship with God, rich in the Holy Spirit, rich in promises, rich in power.

Jesus Christ left heaven's glory to become like us that He might make us like Him.

Why? Why would He extend such grace to those who are so unworthy? That is what grace is all about. Grace is God's free, divine, unmerited favor bestowed upon sinful and undeserving individuals who could never merit a right relationship with God. God in His mercy gives us what we do not deserve. It is an act of pure love on the part of God and emphasizes the helpless abject spiritual poverty of man. It is always undeserved, opposed to works and absolutely free.

When you are the recipient of this kind of grace you cannot help but respond in kind.

Don't miss what happened in the heart of the Macedonian believers. God made them exceedingly rich in His grace, not financially rich. This is not "prosperity gospel" nonsense. This is not some religious get rich scheme! God made them rich in His grace. They had a right relationship with God. They had an intimate love relationship with Jesus Christ, and that made them exceedingly rich spiritually. Out of that rich relationship with God they made other people exceedingly rich in return. They first gave their own hearts to the Lord Jesus. It is beautiful. You put Christ first in every area of your life and give financially as He enables you and you will be enriched beyond measure. God made them rich so they for the sake of others could become poor again by making other people rich. That is the principle of grace giving. We have become rich; so that we too might become poor in order to make other people rich.

This is exactly what we have discovered in our miniseries on stewardship in Second Corinthians. God owns it all. Since He owns it all He can do whatever He wants to with it. Once we come to terms with that basic principle then we will be open to handling our finances God's way. This is why the Macedonians would give beyond their means. They gave sacrificially because God had first given to them sacrificially.

Paul could challenge the Corinthians in similar fashion because of the majestic grace of God revealed in the person of His Son Jesus Christ.

Do you know that joy?

THE PRACTICE OF GRACE GIVING (8:10-24)

Paul reminded the Corinthians that they made a pledge to give to the Jerusalem missionary offering (vv. 10-11). A year had now gone by and they had not fulfilled their promise. They have been caught up in bickering and fighting with one another. There were divisions within the body. They were sidetracked with dissensions, immorality, and drunkenness, quarreling over spiritual gifts rather than keeping their eyes on the Lord Jesus Christ. Carnal preoccupations kept them from fulfilling their pledge to God.

He encouraged them to give according to their ability, just as the Macedonian churches did. In essence, Paul says, "The standard is grace and love. Because I am altogether His, then nothing I have is my own. I give according to what I have."

Missions is the one area we can never work ourselves out of a job. We owe everything we possess in our spiritual life to someone else. There are no self-made Christians.

Are making pledges wrong? I doubt it. We live everyday on the principle of pledges. Every time I turn on an electrical appliance, pick up my telephone, or flush the commode I am living my life based upon pledges. I have pledged to pay the utility companies at the end of every month. I drive my cars on the promise that I will pay my car notes on time. I live in a house in which I promise to pay my mortgage monthly. How strange that some individuals think it is wrong if we make a sincere promise from the heart to give to God from what He has provided for us when we have already made pledges to hard hearted human creditors.

God is not interested in what you don't have. He is only interested in our giving from the heart as He provides. "For if the readiness is present, it is acceptable according to what a man has, not according to what he does not have" (v. 12). God gives you an "abundance" to supply their want. There might come a day when "their abundance also may become a supply for your want, that there may be equality" (v. 14).

The apostle Paul went on to illustrate God's provisions by reminding them of the manna in the wilderness (v. 15). The Israelites went out every morning and gathered enough of the manna for one day. If they got greedy and gathered too much it spoiled on them overnight. That was the way God planned it. He intended for them to help one another. If a person was ill, or aged, those who gathered more than they needed were to share with others so no one was left out. God met the needs by sharing with others out of their abundance. That is the way He still works. God provides you with opportunities to earn much so that you can reach out in grace and help those who are in need.

In verses-16 24, the apostle gives some very helpful guidance in the handling of God's money. We employ these practices in our church. Know who gets your money in the name of religion. Know what happens to your gifts when you give. This is why we constantly encourage you to attend business meetings and be active in decision making in your church. There is always a fully itemized disclosure in every monthly business meeting.

When you give to mission organizations and charities find out who get the money and how it is used. Ask how much goes to the administration of your gifts. Make sure the organization is listed with the ECFA — Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability.

Paul admonished them to take "precaution that no one should discredit us in our administration of this generous gift; for we have regard for what is honorable, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men" (vv. 20 24). He encouraged "the messengers of the churches" to take care of the missionary offering (v. 23 24).

In every church where I have pastored I do not touch any money that is received in Sunday School and worship services. I do not know who the givers are, and I don't care to know. Tellers count the money and deposit it in the bank. The church treasurer uses strict accounting procedures and writes all the checks. I do not write checks on any church account. I am accountable to the treasure and the church body. We insist on a receipt for every item purchased with church money.

The church budget is discussed and voted on in a public business meeting, which determines how the money is to be spent on various expenses and mission programs of the church.

Paul encouraged the churches. He says, "I am proud of you" in the opening verses of chapter nine. "I know your readiness, of which I boast about you to the Macedonians, namely, that Achaia has been prepared since last year, and your zeal has stirred up most of them" (v. 2). He goes on, "I have sent the brethren, that our boasting about you may not be made empty in this case, that, as I was saying, you may be prepared" (v. 3). Paul doesn't want them to be ashamed when the men arrive to take the offering to Jerusalem (v. 4). He calls

Paul doesn't want them to be ashamed when the men arrive to take the offering to Jerusalem (v. 4). He calls the missionary offering a "bountiful gift" in verse five. It is bountiful, a gift freely given and spontaneous bestowed. It constitutes a blessing to the recipient because it is a generous gift.

Those kind of responses will make any pastor's heart rejoice.

IT IS ALL IN THE ATTITUDE (9:6 7)

The apostle Paul gave us another life principle in verse six. "He who sows sparingly shall also reap sparingly; and he who sows bountifully shall also reap bountifully." "Sparingly" denotes what ought to be given. On the other hand, "bountifully" in this verse indicates a gift freely and spontaneously given and therefore a blessing to the recipient.

There is a law in life that says if you sow sparingly you will reap just enough. If you sow bountifully, you will reap bountifully. Whether you are farming or dealing with relationships this principle is true. It is true in life materially and spiritually.

Now with this principle in mind, "Let us each one do just as he has purposed in his heart; not grudgingly or under compulsion; for God loves a cheerful giver" (v. 7). Go ahead and do as you sensed God leading you. Since He has blessed you bountifully go ahead and give as you purposed in your heart to do. Follow through with your pledge.

Don't do it "grudgingly." The word means out of grief, sorrow, and pain of mind or spirit. Don't do it as if it were killing you. Don't give reluctantly as if you are grieving over what you have lost in the process. "Oh man I gave that ten dollars and I could have kept it and rented a couple of movies, eat out or gone out on a date. Why in the world did I do that?"

One of my deacons was giving his testimony in church one morning. He said, "If you feel like you are giving too much, and are unhappy about giving so much, ask God to reduce your income."

Don't give "grudgingly or under compulsion." Let it come from a heart that is overflowing with God's wonderful grace and love.

It is all in your attitude. "God loves a cheerful giver." The English transliteration of the word for "cheerful" (*hilaros*) is hilarious. God loves a hilarious giver (v. 7). He desires our giving come from a heart that is cheerful, joyous, prompt, ready to do anything. Is there a readiness and a joy in your giving? Or is there the attitude of an old gripe, grudgingly holding on to every penny? But neither does God want us to be like a drunken sailor who throws his money away on drinks for everyone. He wants us to be responsible givers who give out of a heart that is overflowing with God's grace.

GOD'S PROMISE TO THE GRACE GIVERS (9:8 15).

"God is able to make all grace abound to you, that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed; as it is written, 'He scattered abroad, He gave to the poor, His righteousness abides forever'" (vv. 8 9).

Who provides? God does. How does He provide? Abundantly. He is "all sufficient in everything." The believer by divine grace is rendered self sufficient and competent to meet the demands made on his generosity. God supplies out of His abundance to make every believer all sufficient. He does it in order that "you may have an abundance for every good deed."

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We are back at that great principle in 8:9. God makes us exceedingly rich so we can make others rich.

Now if you are thinking this is a scheme to make you financially rich for your own self-interests, you are dead wrong. God does not bless us to enrich our own selfishness. He does it that His name will be glorified and that His eternal purpose will be accomplished. God is not in the modern American "prosperity gospel" movement. Often, in His all sufficient wisdom He works just the opposite to accomplish His purpose in our lives.

"Now 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; you will be enriched in everything for all liberality, which through us is producing thanksgiving to God" (vv. 10-11). God blesses us abundantly so we can bless others abundantly.

Have you ever had the privilege of giving and seeing God use that gift in a most amazing way that produced thanksgiving to God? Have you seen God take your gift when you have given it from a generous heart and use it to touch lives for all eternity? He wants our giving to be a blessing, a means of producing thanksgiving to God. "For the ministry of this service is not only fully supplying the needs of the saints, but is also overflowing through many thanksgivings to God" (v. 12). He takes your gift and uses it that His name will be glorified repeatedly. People see your gift and they offer up thanksgivings to God. Those who are recipients praise God and pray for you. Your gift keeps repeating itself in people's lives.

God makes us exceedingly rich so we can become paupers again by making others rich. The Lord owns it all; we are His stewards. May the Lord bless you spiritually as He has blessed you financially.

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