

Bible Spotlight: The Believer & Giving • 2 Cor. 8 & 9

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Deacon Jones

1. There are some churches where the congregation really gets in to the sermon and echoes their calls of support and agreement with a hearty "Amen," or "uh-huh" or even an occasional, "Preach it, brother!"
2. In one church, as the preacher was well into his message and had the group really fired up he said, "Now let the church walk."
3. Deacon Jones, who was the loudest of the group answered, "Amen. Let it walk!"
4. The preacher said, "Let the church run."
5. "Let it run!" echoed Deacon Jones
6. "Let it fly," said the pastor
7. "Amen, brother, let the church fly," said Jones
8. The preacher went on, "Now, it's going to take money for the church to fly."
9. To which the deacon replied with a bit less zeal, "Let it walk, then. Let it walk."

B. Today

1. We're wrapping up our 4 week series on the *Believer and Money* today
2. We spent the first two weeks considering the *Call to Stewardship*
3. Then in our last study we considered the *believer's relationship to money* and the thorny issue of materialism
4. Today we wrap it up with a look at the subject of *giving*
5. As I was preparing for this morning, I ran across something John Wesley had written over a hundred years ago
 - a. Wesley was the founder of the Methodist church
 - b. and an incredibly godly man
6. I realized that what he wrote is a good way to tie our last study to today's message
7. He wrote . . .

I fear, that with few exceptions, wherever riches have increased, the essence of religion, with the mind that was in Christ, has decreased in the same proportion. Therefore I do not see how it is possible, in the nature of things, for any revival of true religion to continue long. For genuine religion must necessarily produce both diligence and frugality; these then give rise to wealth. But as riches increase, so will pride, anger, and love of the world in all its branches.

What way then can we take that our money may not sink us to the nethermost hell? There is one way, and there is no other under heaven. If those who "gain all they can," and "save all they can," will likewise "give all they can," then the more they gain, the more they will grow in grace, and the more treasure they will lay up in heaven.
8. The more I ponder these words, the more convinced of them I become
9. And I see them as a perfect reflection of not only Matthew 6, which is the

passage we looked at last time, but also our passage today

II. TEXT

A. 2 Cor. 8:1-9

1. Chapters 8 & 9 of 2 Corinthians are the second major section of the Paul's letter
2. They deal with the collection that was being made to help relieve the needs of the believers in Jerusalem
3. You see, hard times had settled on the church in Judea
 - a. a famine had devastated the food supplies
 - b. and the persecution of Christians by the Jews and Romans had become so severe that many had lost their jobs, homes, and lands
 - c. many had been put into prison
 - d. and in those days, the only way prisoners survived was by the gifts of food and clothing of their friends and relatives
 - e. as a result of lack of employment and the confiscation of their property, the believers in Jerusalem were in a desperate straight
4. Paul saw this need as a perfect opportunity for the Gentile believers to prove their unity with their Jewish brothers by sending them relief
5. Remember that there was a general Jewish distrust of Gentiles, even among the Jewish Christians
6. So Paul sees this as a great opportunity to heal the lingering rift between Jewish and Gentile believers
7. A year before, the need had been made known to the Corinthians by Paul [v. 10]
 - a. and they had expressed a ready willingness to give
 - b. but Paul had left and gone north to visit the churches he had planted in Macedonia
 - 1) Philippi
 - 2) Thessalonica, &
 - 3) Berea
 - c. it is from there that he writes this letter to Corinth
 - d. it seems word had reached him that while the Corinthians had at first shown a readiness to give, they had not followed through

- {1} Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia:**
- {2} that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality.**
- {3} For I bear witness that according to *their* ability, yes, and beyond *their* ability, *they* were freely willing,**
- {4} imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints.**
- {5} And not *only* as we had hoped, but they first gave themselves to the Lord, and *then* to us by the will of God.**
- {6} So we urged Titus, that as he had begun, so he would also complete this grace in you as well.**

{7} But as you abound in everything; in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all diligence, and in your love for us; see that you abound in this grace also.

8. The churches of Macedonia where Paul was at this time, had responded to the needs of the believers in Jerusalem with great excitement and dedication
 - a. though things were very difficult for them too, they still gave what they could to help their brothers and sisters in Judea
 - b. we know that many of these Gentiles believers had lost their jobs because they could no longer participate in the idolatry associated with their union meetings
 - c. Paul describes their situation in Macedonia as being
 - 1) "a great trial of affliction"
 - 2) & "deep poverty"
 - 3) these words describe someone who is at the very bottom and has no ability to look up
9. And yet, they gave
10. And their giving was an expression, not just of something convenient or easy, but of themselves
11. Because they had given themselves to God, it was an easy thing to give themselves to others
12. The Macedonians understood something about the Christian life the Corinthians and we need to learn
13. What they knew is revealed to us here: We find it in three places . . .
 - a. v. 1

Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia

- b. v. 6

So we urged Titus, that as he had begun, so he would also complete this grace in you as well.

- c. v. 7

But as you abound in everything; in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all diligence, and in your love for us; see that you abound in this grace also.

- d. the grace of God bestowed on the Macedonians in verse 1, and the "this" grace mentioned in vs. 6 & 7 is the grace of giving

B. The Grace of Giving

1. Biblical giving is a grace
 - a. it is one of the virtues that God works in us as we grow in Him
 - b. to be spiritually mature means to be a giver
 - c. it has to mean this because of what Paul says in Ephesians 4
2. There we get the perfect picture of the spiritually mature person
3. And Paul says the picture is none other than Jesus Christ
4. In Romans 8:29 we see that the goal of spiritual growth is be conformed to the image of Christ
5. And I think we can all easily acknowledge that Jesus is not just a giver, but **THE GIVER**

6. John 3:16
7. Verses 8 & 9 confirm this . . .

{8} I speak not by commandment, but I am testing the sincerity of your love by the diligence of others.

{9} For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.

8. Paul is not commanding the Corinthians to give
9. But he is testing the level of their spiritual maturity
10. The standard is Jesus, who gave all He had to give so that others would be enriched
11. If the mind that was in Christ is being formed in us, then this same attitude of giving will mark our lives

Shortly after World War II came to a close, Europe began picking up the pieces. Much of the Old Country had been ravaged by war and was in ruins. Perhaps the saddest sight of all was that of little orphaned children starving in the streets of those war-torn cities. Early one chilly morning an American soldier was making his way back to the barracks in London. As he turned the corner in his jeep, he spotted a little lad with his nose pressed to the window of a pastry shop. Inside the cook was kneading dough for a fresh batch of doughnuts. The hungry boy stared in silence, watching every move. The soldier pulled his jeep to the curb, stopped, got out, and walked quietly over to where the little fellow was standing. Through the steamed-up window he could see the mouth-watering morsels as they were being pulled from the oven, piping hot. The boy salivated and released a slight groan as he watched the cook place them onto the glass-enclosed counter ever so carefully. The soldier's heart went out to the nameless orphan as he stood beside him. "Son, would you like some of those?" The boy was startled. "Oh, yeah--I would!" The American stepped inside and bought a dozen, put them in a bag, and walked back to where the lad was standing in the foggy cold of the London morning. He smiled, held out the bag, and said simply: "Here you are." As he turned to walk away, he felt a tug on his coat. He looked back and heard the child ask quietly: "Mister, are you God?"

We are never more like God than when we give.

12. We know how central grace is in our salvation
 - a. many of us can quote Ephesians 2:8 & 9

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.*

- b. we know that our relationship with God is based on grace, not works
 - c. but do we take it to heart that grace isn't something we merely enjoy
 - d. it is to be something that takes hold of our lives and changes us so that we become *gracious*
13. The root idea of grace means "to give"
14. The heart genuinely touched by grace becomes gracious
15. The mind opened by grace, shows grace
16. The life freed by grace, lives gracious

17. That is what Paul says to the Corinthians here
18. And he uses the example of the grace of giving in the lives of the Macedonians

C. The Macedonian Example

1. Notice the character of the Macedonians' giving:
2. In v. 2, Paul says that it was *in spite of their circumstances*
 - a. they were enduring intense persecution and suffering
 - b. their poverty was desperate
 - c. there is a formula for giving revealed in verse 2 that defies all math
 - d. Great affliction + Deep poverty X Grace = Abundant Joy and Abounding Liberality
 - e. let's face it; circumstances are rarely an encouragement to giving
 - f. the Macedonians didn't look at the circumstances; they looked at who they were
 - g. and they understood as Christians that they were givers!
3. In v. 3 we see that they gave *willingly*
 - a. in, fact, their *willingness* to give exceeded their *ability* to give
 - b. the grace of giving is marked by a ready willingness to give
 - c. this is very different from the popular idea of giving
 - d. many see giving as the result of simple and naïve people being cleverly manipulated by slick religious shysters who greedily hide behind a thin veneer of sappy appeals
 - e. Charles Spurgeon was once asked by a wealthy preacher to come to a country church to help raise funds to pay off a debt
 - 1) the man told Spurgeon that when he came he was free to stay in either his country house, his town house, or his seaside retreat.
 - 2) Spurgeon wrote back and said, "I shall not be coming. Sell one of your places and pay the debt yourself."
 - f. most of us have heard the overborne appeals to give:
 - 1) the guilt they try to bring
 - 2) the threats they use
 - 3) the playing of the sentiments
 - 4) the use of jokes to try to make you feel better about parting with your money
 - 5) the incentives that are used to try to get you to give: "Our love gift this month for any gift over \$25 is a lovely glow in the dark bookmark. And if your gift is \$100 or more, we'll also send you a rock from the Holy Land"
 - g. the grace of giving does not bend to these carnal motives and manipulation
 - h. the only giving that God accepts is willing giving
 - i. let's never forget that God looks on our hearts
 - 1) 2 Chronicles 6:30 says, "You alone know the hearts of the sons of men"
 - 2) what the heart gives may not be the same as what the hand gives

- 3) I must tell you that there have been times in my life when I have written out a check for more than I was willing to give
- 4) I gave what I gave because I had made a commitment to do so
- 5) but my heart wanted to give less
- 6) I thought, "Half of this would be much easier. I wish I could only give half this right not."
- 7) I've come to realize that even though my check was for more, the Lord only received what my heart was *willing to give*.
- j. a rather careless man tossed a silver dollar into the collection plate thinking it was a nickel
 - 1) when he realized his mistake he asked to have it back
 - 2) the usher refused, and the man grunted, "Oh well, I'll get credit for it in heaven."
 - 3) The usher responded "Nope you'll only get credit for the nickel."
- k. conversely, as we see here with the Macedonians, the heart can also be willing to give more than the hand is able to
- l. God sees this too, and accounts the *willingness* of the heart as the true gift
4. Verse 4 tells us the Macedonians gave *enthusiastically*
 - a. they went so far as to plead with Paul to take their offering
 - b. it appears that Paul may have been a bit reluctant to take their gift when he saw their own circumstances
 - c. but they pleaded with him so strongly that he felt compelled to receive it
 - d. it is possible to be generous without being enthusiastic
 - e. but the grace of giving is marked by genuine enthusiasm
 - f. and here is where we see a glaring difference between the Corinthians and the Macedonians
 - 1) when the Macedonians heard about the need, they responded, not only with enthusiasm but they followed through and actually *gave*
 - 2) the Corinthians had shown a willingness and enthusiasm, but that is as far as it went
 - 3) Paul wrote this letter to remind them to follow through and actually be diligent to give!
5. That then leads us to Chapter 9 . . .

D. 2 Corinthians 9

- {1} Now concerning the ministering to the saints, it is superfluous for me to write to you;**
- {2} for I know your willingness, about which I boast of you to the Macedonians, that Achaia was ready a year ago; and your zeal has stirred up the majority.**
- {3} Yet I have sent the brethren, lest our boasting of you should be in vain in this respect, that, as I said, you may be ready;**
- {4} lest if *some* Macedonians come with me and find you unprepared, we (not to mention you!) should be ashamed of this confident boasting.**
- {5} Therefore I thought it necessary to exhort the brethren to go to you ahead of time, and prepare your generous gift beforehand, which *you had* previously promised,**

that it may be ready as a *matter of generosity* and not as a *grudging obligation*.

1. Paul had told the Macedonians about the earlier Corinthian readiness to give
2. Now Paul was a bit concerned of being embarrassed when he arrived in Corinth with representatives of the churches of Macedonia and the large gift they had made, only to find that the Corinthians hadn't given anything
3. So he sent Titus and some others on ahead with this letter so the Corinthians could get on the ball and follow through, otherwise, they too would be embarrassed!
4. Now, we have already seen some important principles about giving, but here we find some more . . .

{6} But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.

5. Paul uses an illustration from agriculture to illustrate the principle of *measure* in our giving
 - a. if a farmer buys a sack of seed, but only plants a handful from the whole sack, his harvest will be small
 - b. but if he plants the whole sack, the harvest will be plentiful
6. What is true of farming is true in the realm of the Spirit
 - a. the measure of our receiving is determined by the measure of our giving

A hiker was thirsty for a drink, but could not find water, until he came to an abandoned house. There he found a pump, and proceeded to pump with all the strength he had remaining. No water came forth. Then he saw a small jug with a cork at the top and a penciled note, directing that the water in the jug be poured into the pump to prime it. At first the thirsty man questioned this, but when he followed directions he obtained satisfying water. Before going his way, he filled the jug with water so the next thirsty person could secure water. He added to the note, "Believe me, it really works. Use the entire contents of this jug, and if you do, you will have abundance."

b. in Luke 6:38 Jesus said,

"Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you."

- c. understand this: the idea of sowing little or much has nothing to do some external standard or measure
- d. it is totally proportionate to each individual
 - 1) what is much for me may be little for you
 - 2) and what is little for me may be much for another
 - 3) the critical issue is the proportion of what we have that we give

{7} So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.

6. There are two critical principles found here
7. First, our giving should be *purposeful*
 - a. he says, "Let each one give as he purposes in his heart"
 - b. our giving should not be haphazard or unplanned
 - c. each of us needs to take some time to prayerfully reflect on what we should give

- d. far too many Christians are like the Corinthians:
 - 1) they *intend* to give
 - 2) they are excited at the *prospect* of giving
 - 3) but because they aren't purposeful about it, they rarely if ever actually give
 - 4) they think that because they *intend* to, that's good enough
- e. let's not just be convinced of the need to give, let's give
 - 1) let's not just be excited about giving
 - 2) let's follow through
- f. let's be purposeful in our giving
 - 1) each of us need to sit down with our records and exercise good stewardship in making a budget
 - 2) then we need to prayer fully consider what God wants us to give
 - 3) then, once deciding how much, we need to give it
 - 4) we should even decide *when* we will give, what the frequency of our giving will be
 - 5) in 1 Cor 16:2 we read Paul had told them . . .

On the first *day* of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper.

- 8. The Second thing we see in verse 7 is that our giving needs to be *cheerful*
 - a. this is an amplification of the principles of our giving being willing and enthusiastic
 - b. our giving shouldn't be done grudgingly or merely as a thing of obligation
 - c. it should be an expression of joyous worship
 - d. that's why we include the offering during the worship service
 - 1) we've done other things in the past
 - 2) taken it during announcements
 - 3) just left a box in the back
 - 4) some years ago the elders realized that giving is a part of corporate body life and an act of worship
 - e. I once attended a church in Orange County that when they announced it was time to take the offering, people jumped to their feet and began to yell out their hallelujah's and PTL's [Eagle's Nest]
 - 1) this response came from the idea that the word used for "cheerful" here in verse 7 is the word 'hilaros' from which we get our word "hilarious"
 - 2) now, the word doesn't carry the idea of uncontrolled laughter and gaiety
 - 3) it doesn't picture people rolling in the aisles with laughter
 - 4) it simply means to be *merry*; it's a word which conveys the idea of deep-seated happiness
 - f. I'm sure you've heard it said that you should give till it hurts
 - g. this verse tells us that we should give till it feels good, till our giving is marked by a merriness that allows us to look at life from the perspective of happiness and joy

{8} And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work.

{9} As it is written: "He has dispersed abroad, He has given to the poor; His righteousness endures forever."

{10} Now may He who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food, supply and multiply the seed you have sown and increase the fruits of your righteousness,

{11} while you are enriched in everything for all liberality, which causes thanksgiving through us to God.

9. Paul echoes these words in Philippians 4 when he writes . . .

{19} My God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

- a. this verse is often claimed as a favorite promise by those who are seeking something from God
- b. but they neglect to notice that the verse begins with the word "AND", which links to the prior verses which read . . .

{16} For even in Thessalonica you sent aid once and again for my necessities.

{17} Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that abounds to your account.

{18} Indeed I have all and abound. I am full, having received from Epaphroditus the things sent from you, a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God.

- c. the promise of God's provision was based on their faithfulness to use what He has given in the manner He directs
 - d. God will supply all our needs according to His riches in Christ Jesus as we are faithful with what he gives
10. Using the analogy Paul uses here, it is our duty to plant, it is God's duty to give the increase
- a. we plant by giving
 - b. and in His time, God will bring forth a harvest of good in measure proportionate with our planting

III. CONCLUSION

A. Two Young Girls

1. Let me tell you the story of two young girls
2. They lived in different places and at different times and didn't know each other
3. One day, one girl's father gave her 2, one dollar bills
 - a. and told her that she was to give one of them at church on Sunday,
 - b. the other she could do what she wanted with
 - c. she immediately ran to the corner store to spend her dollar on some candy
 - d. but as she hurried down the sidewalk to the store with her money clutched tightly in her hand, she tripped and fell
 - e. one of the dollars slipped into the storm drain in the curb and was lost
 - f. standing up, she brushed herself off and said, "Oh well, there goes your dollar God."

4. The other young girl was also given some money by her father, one penny
5. She took it to church and gave it to her Sunday School teacher who had told the children that she was making up a gift box for a missionary in India
 - a. that teacher took that penny, bought a gospel tract with it, and put it in the box
 - b. the box made it's way over several months to India where it eventually found it's way to the missionary
 - c. opening the box in his hut in the presence of the several of the children of the village, he handed the tract to one of them
 - d. excitedly they left the hut and began to look at the tract, oblivious to it's meaning since it was in English
 - e. the chief of the village saw their excitement and demanded to see what they had
 - f. he took it, looked at it and then walked to the missionaries hut and demanded to know what it said
 - g. the missionary translated it and the chief was brought to faith in Christ on the spot
 - h. within a few days, he had told his testimony to so many others that a brand new church of 1,500 people was born
6. I think if we're honest, we'll admit that one of these two girls represent us
7. May God give us the grace to give as He gives