

Life Together

Part 4: Giving

2 Corinthians 8:1-12

~ Delivered at Central Baptist Church on November 18, 2018

INTRODUCTION

- **(SHOW SLIDE)** The American industrialist, Henry Ford, was once asked to donate money for the construction of a new medical facility. The billionaire pledged to donate \$5,000 but the next day the newspaper headline read, ***“Henry Ford contributes \$50,000 to the local hospital.”***
 - Ford was irate and phoned the fund-raiser complaining that he had been misunderstood. After a few minutes of being torn apart, the fund-raiser finally interrupted him and said, ***“Alright we will print a retraction in the paper. It will read, “Henry Ford reduces his donation by \$45,000.”***
 - Needless to say, the hospital got their \$50,000.
- When it comes to the issue of giving money, the church has not always looked good to the surrounding culture. Donald Whitney writes,
 - ***“The standard stereo-type among non-attenders is that all preachers are little more than money-mad, religious racketeers, and that they see every church service as an opportunity to harangue about money and to call for your cash in the name of God.”***¹
- At least three things should be said in response to this. First, yes, there are bad examples that fit this stereotype. Giving has been abused in the name of Jesus. But secondly preachers who are ***“money-mad, religious racketeers”*** are more of the exception than the rule. But thirdly the Church must watch out for a danger that comes from this stereotype – the danger of avoiding the subject of money for fear of being labeled in this way.
 - Jesus himself talked more about money than he did about heaven or hell. He considered it vitally important that his people know what it means to use their money in a way that honours God.
 - So we must not avoid the subject but learn what it means to honour God with our money.
- So how do we do that? Well, we are doing a series entitled, “Life Together.” This series is founded on the conviction that when a person becomes a Christian they commit themselves to living out their Christian life in a local church. We love the church because Christ loves it. We are committed to its well-being because Jesus is committed to its well-being. We want to work to build it up because Jesus said he will build his church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.
 - So what does that practically look like? We have been unpacking that in this series. We have seen that to be committed to a church means we are responsible to love one another, to maintain the unity of the Spirit, and to be committed to the corporate life of the church.
 - Today we will look at one more way we love Jesus’ Bride, and that is to give generously of our finances. Our passage today is very practical because Paul outlines seven principles for giving.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- Now before we look at these principles, let me tell you the story of what is going on here in 2 Corinthians 8.
 - **(SHOW SLIDE)** The Corinthian church, which is here on the map, had heard about a famine in far off Judea, which is here. They heard how the church in Jerusalem was struggling through poverty. Under their pastor, Titus, the Corinthians had asked the apostle Paul for the opportunity to give money to help the church in Jerusalem.
 - But the Corinthians good intentions had failed to produce results. A year has passed. Paul is on his way to Corinth to collect the money but it is not ready. And so Paul writes 2 Corinthians to stir their intentions to action. Paul does this by outlining a series of principles for giving.

¹ Donald Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines within the Church*, 117.

GIVING IS MOTIVATED BY THE GOOD NEWS

- **(SHOW SLIDE) Principle #1: our giving is motivated by the gospel.**
 - Paul begins by telling the Corinthians about some other churches in the region of Macedonia. These churches were also impoverished but they had given sacrificially to this offering.
 - What was it that motivated the Macedonians to give in such an extraordinary manner? Look at verse 1. **READ 1** - *We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia.*
- It was the grace of God that motivated the Macedonians to give. They were a people who were so amazed by God's generosity to them that it flowed out in generosity to others. How has God been generous to us?
 - The heart of Paul's discussion on giving is in verse 9. **READ 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.*
- The New Testament does not seek to make us generous by hammering us with laws that say, **"God commands you to be generous, so obey."** God does not approach it this way because laws don't change hearts. Oh yes, I could hammer on you for 30 minutes about how you need to be generous, make you feel really guilty, and it would squeeze out some dollars.
 - But that is not true generosity. True generosity is motivated by joy.
- The Bible's approach to giving is to start with our hearts and then move to our wallets. You see, the commands of God are always, and without exception, set within the generous grace of God.
 - The message is always, **"look at the astounding generosity of God toward us as sinners. Look at how Jesus gave up everything, including his very life, so that you could inherit the riches of heaven. Now let God's radical generosity toward you change how you use your wealth."**
 - And this verse describes the good news of God's generosity toward us in Christ.
- Here we read first that Jesus was rich. He was rich in possessions for as the Creator of all things he owns everything in the universe. He was rich in honour as angels praised him. He was rich in love as he enjoyed a perfect relationship with His Father.
 - Yet, he who was rich became poor. He voluntarily gave up his rights as God and took on human flesh. When the Prince of Heaven came to this earth, he was not born in a palace or in the home of a royal family but was born in a stable to a lower class family.
 - The ultimate moment of giving up his riches to become poor came when he voluntarily went to the cross.
- Jesus had worn the royal robes of heaven. Yet we read, **"they stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him."**
 - Jesus had worn the crown of heaven. Yet we read that they, **"twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head."**
 - We read of Him who held the golden scepter of the universe that, **"they put a staff in his right hand and knelt in front of him and mocked him. 'Hail, king of the Jews!' they said."**
 - We read of Him who was richly honoured by billions of angels that, **"they spit on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again. After they had mocked him...they led him away to crucify him."**
- Here we must ask, **"Why did Jesus do this? Why voluntarily choose poverty when He was so rich?"** What does it say? **"The Lord Jesus Christ, though he was rich."** What is next? **"Yet for your sake he became poor."**
 - For your sake! Oh let those words ring in your ears. Make it personal. **"The Lord Jesus Christ, though he was rich, yet for Barton's sake became poor."**
 - Why do this for me? The last phrase tells us: **"so that you through his poverty might become rich."**

- Whenever a person comes to Jesus, he makes them rich. To come to Jesus means to receive forgiveness of sins, reconciliation with God, and the gift of the Holy Spirit. We are made heirs. One day we will inherit the entire universe and God himself. There is no wealth beyond this. To have God is to have everything.
 - This is the foundational principle of all Christian giving. God has given so generously to us. We are rich beyond measure. We did not earn it. We were simply given these riches through Christ.
 - When this message gets into your heart, it changes you. You no longer give because you have to. You give because you want to.

GIVE WITH JOY

- **(SHOW SLIDE) Principle #2: give with joy.**
 - Let's look again at the example of the Macedonians. **READ 2** - *for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part.* Even though they were poor the Macedonians gave with *"abundance of joy."*
 - They did not just say, *"Fine, we will give."* Paul says in verse 4 that they were *"begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints"*
 - As one author writes, *"Their devotion to God's kingdom, His local church, and to fellow believers they had never met was profound. Their joy rose above the pain, sorrow, and struggle of difficult circumstances as, for the sake of others, they were happy to divest themselves of what little they had."*²
- This teaches us that our *motivation* in giving matters a great deal to God. In 2 Cor 9:7 Paul writes, **(SHOW SLIDE 5)** *Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.*
 - According to these verses our Sunday morning offering should be one of the most joyful parts of the service. When people are at the debit machines there should be a great big smile on their face. When we give online or through our church app, we should be saying, *"Thank you God. It is my joy and delight to give to you."*
- Check your heart. Is it your joy to give? Our motivation matters. The evidence that you are growing into maturity is that you begin to take on the character of God in giving which is one of joy.

GIVE WITH GENEROSITY

- **(SHOW SLIDE) Principle #3: give with generosity.**
 - Again look at the example of the Macedonian churches in verse 2-3. **READ 2-3** - *for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part.* ³ *For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord.*
 - If anyone had an excuse not to give it was these churches and yet Paul says they *"overflowed in a wealth of generosity."*
- Generosity is first of all an attitude. Generosity is a way of thinking. It is not just based on material possessions or money. These people were poor but they were generous in heart towards others and that is why when the opportunity came to give they did so. Their minds and hearts were already there.
 - If your attitude in life is not one of generosity then you may give a small portion but you will always hold back. But that is not the path to joy. As Jesus said, *"It is more blessed to give than receive."* Generous people are always happier than greedy people.
- Look at what Paul tells the Corinthians in verse 7. **READ 7** - *But as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you—see that you excel in this act of grace also.* Paul is saying, *"You are doing well in other areas of Christian life but in this area you must improve. Excel in the grace of giving."* Before God, can you say that you excel in the grace of giving or do you hold on to your wallet?

² John MacArthur, *Whose Money is it Anyway?*, 86.

- Yale professor Halford Luccock tells of how 5th century armies of Franks were sometimes baptized in one afternoon. The warriors went into the water with their right hands held high, so that they did not get wet. Why do you think they did that? So that they could say, ***“this hand has never been baptized”*** and they could swing their battle-axes just as freely as ever.
 - Professor Luccock went on to say, ***“The modern counterpart of that partial baptism is seen in many people who have been baptized, all except their wallets. They held these high out of the water.”***
- Jesus teaches us and this passage teaches us that we are to be generous in our giving.
 - It is very hard to measure how patient or kind you are. But it is very easy to measure your generosity. Add up any giving that did not get a tax receipt to your charitable donations slips and then compare it to your income on your T4 slip.
 - Generosity cannot be faked. It is first an attitude and that attitude shows itself in action.

GIVE WITH PROPORTIONATE SACRIFICE

- All those are broad principles but the question people always ask is this: how much does God call me to give?
 - **(SHOW SLIDE) Principle #4: give with proportionate sacrifice.**
- How much does God call you to give? In the first place you are to give in *proportion* to what God has given you.
 - Look at verse 3. **READ 3.** ***“They gave according to their means.”*** **READ 11-12** - ***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.***
 - The biblical starting point is to give out of what God has given you. If He gives a lot, you are to give a lot. If little, then obviously not as much.
 - But how much? The NT does not mandate how much. The nation of Israel was required to give 10%, which is a good starting point but the NT does not give an amount. It simply says, ***“Be generous. As God prospers give and do it with joy.”*** The heart says, ***“Can I give more?”***
 - As someone once said, ***“It’s not what you do with the million if fortune should someday be your lot, but what are you doing at present with the dollar and quarter you got.”***
- So give in proportion to what God has given you but the NT goes further beyond this and calls believers to push themselves to the place where their giving can be called, ***“sacrificial.”***
 - This does not mean sacrificial like how my first-year college roommate’s father gave to the church. He took half the welfare cheque and gave it to the church forcing his children to miss meals and eat soup and crackers everyday.
 - That is not giving that honours God.
- However, out of joy, we should push ourselves beyond where we think we can go. Look at the Macedonians again in verse 3. **READ 3b** - ***For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord.***
 - C.S. Lewis wrote, **(SHOW SLIDE)** ***“I do not believe one can settle how much we ought to give. I am afraid the only safe rule is to give more than we can spare. In other words, if our expenditure on comforts, luxuries, amusements, etc., is up to the standard common among those with the same income as our own, we are probably giving away too little. If our charities do not at all pinch or hamper us, I should say they are too small. There ought to be things we should like to do and cannot do because our charitable expenditure excludes them.”***³
- Every time I travel to a third world country I feel like I learn more about this. I will never forget being in Kenya at 18 years old and having families of 8 give up their mud house, that was as big as my office,

³ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, Book 3, Chapter 3.

so that I could sleep there. They would all sleep in their cookhouse. I will never forget watching poor families bringing their offerings to the church and filling the plate.

- But the biggest thing I noticed was their happiness as they gave out of the little that they owned – proportionate sacrifice.

GIVE DELIBERATELY AND SYSTEMATICALLY

➤ (SHOW SLIDE) Principle #5: give with a plan.

- This is the contrast between the Macedonians and the Corinthians. In fact, this is the whole reason why Paul writes. This is his main point. The Macedonian churches decided to give, came up with a plan, and did so. Paul writes to Corinth because, for whatever reason, they have failed to follow through on their commitment to give.

- Look at verse 6. **READ 6** - *Accordingly, we urged Titus that as he had started, so he should complete among you this act of grace.*
- Look at verses 10-11. **READ 10-11** - *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.*

➤ Far too many Christians are like the Corinthians. They want to give but they do not plan well and it does not happen. How can you make sure that you actually give? Let me show you some principles that Paul gave to them.

- In I Corinthians 16 Paul writes, **READ 1-2** - *Now concerning the collection for the saints: as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do. ² On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come.*

➤ There are at least two principles here:

○ (SHOW SLIDE) First, set aside money as soon as you get paid.

- In Paul's day you typically got paid each day for your work. So Paul instructs them to set it aside so it is ready each Sunday. The principle is to set money aside when you get paid so you do not need to scramble later on.
 - Let's just be honest, if you don't set it aside you will spend it. To excel in giving you should not wait until you are inspired, you should plan for it by making this the first thing that you do when you get paid.

○ (SHOW SLIDE) Second, give systematically.

- Paul is saying that each person should bring what he or she is going to give on Sunday to worship and give it then. Some people, like farmers, get paid in huge lump sums when their crops come in. Obviously they give in large lump sums but if you get paid regularly then you should give regularly.

➤ When you give regularly you also have the chance to express your worship and childlike trust in God. Systematic giving provides regular moments to grow in your faith. When you give pause and express your worship to God saying,

- *“God I believe that all things come from you. I believe that you will provide for my needs. I never want money to be an idol. God, this is my act of worship to you today.”*

➤ So that is the fifth point – give deliberately and systematically. Do not give only when you feel led to, or haphazardly. Make a plan.

- Do you have a plan for giving? Budget from the beginning of the year how you are going to give and stay on top of it every time you get paid.
 - Two more quick points.

GIVE VOLUNTARILY

➤ (SHOW SLIDE) Principle #6: give voluntarily.

- The Macedonians decided that they wanted to give and they decided how much. **READ 3-4**. “*of their own accord.*” You see the Macedonians were convinced that giving was a privilege. They were a people who were generous and loved the cause of Christ. It was not duty. It was delight.
 - The proper Christian attitude is that we voluntarily give, that we seek out opportunities to give, that we see it as a privilege. That kind of attitude is essential to God-glorifying giving.

GIVE WITH WORSHIP

- The last principle of giving takes this whole subject far beyond normal human giving.
 - **(SHOW SLIDE) Principle #7: give out of worship to God. READ 5** - *they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us.*
- What an example these Macedonians are. Their giving was an act of worship. Giving was not their first priority – worship was. They were a people who gave themselves to God, to be used by him however they might be used.
 - They had their priorities right. They wanted all of their lives to be lived to his glory. This love for God and worship of God showed itself in practical concrete expression when they gave themselves to Paul’s ministry.
 - And so having shown the Macedonian example, Paul turns to the Corinthians and calls them to do likewise.

CONCLUSION

- Giving is the responsibility of every member but far more important, it is the privilege of every member.
 - Stand in awe of God’s generosity to you. Stand in awe of how rich you are in Christ. Give with a heart of joy. Give with a heart of worship.