

2 Corinthians 8 Commentary-Wayne Barber

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2 Corinthians 8:1-5 The Miracle of Grace Giving

Turn with me to 2 Corinthians 8. We're going to be talking about a brand new subject, as Paul brings it up in chapter 8 and chapter 9. We're going to be talking about the grace of giving, and this is part 1. Our first message is going to be on the miracle of grace giving. You know, it is a miracle when the human heart is turned to giving towards others. And we want to see this today, the miracle of grace giving.

Now let's go back and let me get you into this. The apostle Paul has said something to us in 6:1 that's very important for us to remember. He says, "Being workers together with God, we urge you," and he speaks now to the church of Corinth, "we urge you not to receive the grace of God in vain." Now what is he talking about when he says that? And hopefully we're understanding this. What he's saying is there are many people who get excited about receiving Christ into their life and they overlook the fact that He is to live His life through their life.

You see, the reason Christ came to live in us, to do through us what we could not do is because He's the only one that can live the Christian life. No one has ever lived the Christian life but the Lord Jesus. And for a believer to think that he can live the Christian life in his own strength and ability is to receive the grace of God in vain. Christ is the grace of God. He's the divine enabler of all that He demands in us. In other words, He enables whatever He demands of our life.

I have a friend that preaches this message of Christ in you, the hope of glory and he said a woman came up to him one day and she said, "You know, you preach a God that's out to hurt us." And he said, "Oh no, you're mistaken. He's not out to hurt us. He's out to kill us." He says, "Until we learn to die to ourselves we will never know the fullness of His living through us." There cannot be two masters here. There's got to be one living in the life.

Paul says this in Galatians 2:19-21. He says "For through the law I died to the law so that I might live unto God. I have been crucified with Christ." And, by the way, that word "crucified" is not a nice word. He says, "And it's no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me, and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. I do not nullify, I do not set aside, I do not frustrate the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law then Christ died needlessly."

Well, His enabling grace has been seen in the life of Paul all the way from chapter 1 through chapter 7. In chapter 1 we saw how when Paul was falsely accused and maligned the grace of God in him caused him not to try to handle it by himself. The grace of God, Christ in him, turned him rather to the God of all comfort, and he not only understood that, but he experienced for himself the comfort that only God could give.

In chapter 2 we saw how Paul experienced the grace of God in having a walk that matched his talk. You see, when we yield to Him then our testimony is clear. And this resulted in Paul's having a clear conscience when he was falsely accused there in chapter 2.

In chapter 3 Paul explains how the glory of God, Christ Himself has come to live in him. He says, "My adequacy is no longer of myself." He says, "I find my adequacy in the Lord Jesus." He said, "I don't consider anything as worthy as coming from myself." And because of this his ministry was authentic. You see, he was adequate as a minister because of Christ. Therefore his ministry could be authentic.

It was also because of this new covenant living that in chapter 4, Paul never lost heart. Paul had learned the basics. And one of the basics he tells us is we're earthen vessels. There's a treasure within us, but we're just earthen vessels. And that word means an empty clay pot, longing to be filled. With this message pounding in his heart, and with Christ living His life through him, Paul became an ambassador for Christ wherever he went, an official representative of the Lord Jesus. He says he now has a ministry of reconciliation, not just with the lost, but with the believers in the church, because that's why he's writing 2 Corinthians is to try to right

that relationship that had been broken between those and with him.

I hope you're seeing this. When we live allowing Christ to be our adequacy, our comfort, our testimony, our ministry, our message then what happens is it's going to start showing up in our relationships with each other. You see, when you hear a person talk about how they love God and then look at their relationship something's missing. But when we walk the way we're supposed to walk then our relationships are what God says they ought to be.

Well, that's what we saw the last four times. And today we enter into the 8th chapter of our study in 2 Corinthians. And Paul's going to show the Corinthian church that giving is a result of the grace of God working in a person's life. What Paul is about to bring up he's already brought up in his first epistle to them that we have in our Bibles of 1 Corinthians. He said something to them in 1 Corinthians 16, and he said, listen, when I see you the next time I want you to be prepared to give an offering to the poor that are over in Jerusalem and all of Judea. And he hasn't been back yet. Obviously they have done nothing about what he requested, and so therefore he's bringing it up again in 2 Corinthians 8.

But in doing so he's going to help you and me see that giving is a part of the grace of God, of Christ living in us. He produces in us a giving heart. "For God so loved the world that He gave." This is the heart of God that He wants to produce in you and within me. Giving is not an investment program as some people try to make it in the Christian world. Giving is not a guilt trip that we get on, but it's the evidence of Christ living His life in and through us. In fact, there's no other way to see the evidence in our life. I mean, we can see it in evangelism. We can see it in all these other things, but this is one of the key ways. Jesus mentioned more about treasure than He did hell in the things that He said while He was here on this earth. It's important for us to understand this. And when a person is willing to give graciously and generously that's a work of the Holy Spirit of God within that individual's life. There's no way in the world a person can say I'm walking with God and be stingy at the same time. That's an oxymoron. You can't do that. Living grace is giving grace. All that Paul's been talking about has been about God's grace.

Now, for him to bring up giving at this point as we've studied through chapter by chapter and verse by verse it shouldn't surprise us whatsoever, because it's a part of the whole message. It's a piece of the puzzle when we try to put it altogether, it fits the Christian life. Giving is another form of God's enabling power in the yielded believer who knows that his adequacy is in Christ.

The proof of giving grace

Now, there are three things that I want us to see that he begins to teach us in 2 Corinthians 8. It's all about giving, but I want us to understand it from the perspective that we have been studying for so long. First of all, I want us to look at the proof of giving grace. Now he has an illustration here that there's absolutely no way to get around. This illustration is powerful. He says in verse 1, "Now, brethren, we wish to make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia, that in their great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality."

Now what a picture Paul paints for the wealthy believers who are over in Corinth. He's going to contrast the stinginess of the wealthy believers in Corinth with the tremendous grace giving of the poor and destitute Macedonian churches. He says, "We wish to make known to you." The Greek word for "known" there is the word *gnorizo*, and it means that if I didn't tell you this you would never know it any other way. It's kind of, Paul uses it a lot in his epistles. He says, I want you to know brethren. I do not want you to be unaware, he says in other places. There's something he wants these Corinthians to get a hold of that evidently has gone over their heads. Paul wants them to see what true giving is all about. He wants them to realize that giving is a consequence. It's a consequence to Christ living His life in and through the believer. It's a consequence. It's not something we come up with. It's something God comes up with in our hearts.

He says, "Now, brethren, we wish to make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia." When Paul mentions the churches of Macedonia there are three specific churches that he had something very clearly to do with. The church of Philippi was one, the church of Thessaloniki or Thessalonica as we would say, and the church at Beria. God had done a great work in these churches and with a great expense. There was a lot of persecution that went on with these three churches. But the way it was evidenced in their life was through the generous giving that came out of them. Remember Philippians and Paul, they had sent their man over, Epaphroditus, and he came just to bring a gift to Paul. You just see the giving, the generosity of these churches. Paul says, "we wish to make known to you the grace of God." He wants to show you that this is the enabling power of God. This is God doing something in these people's lives.

Now how was this grace of God illustrated? Why is he bringing this up? Verse 2: "that in a great ordeal of affliction," and notice the words carefully, "their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality." You see, it wasn't just giving. That wasn't the key. But it was in giving in the midst of the very worst of circumstances. When Paul says "that in a great ordeal of affliction" he's describing the worst of times. Now our fleshly minds tell us, doesn't it, that people don't give in bad times. "Oh brother Wayne, I mean the Social Security is dying, brother Wayne. The country's in a recession and we've had hurricanes and we've had 9/11 and we just can't give anymore." That's what our minds tell us. Typically that is true in the fleshly mindset of

believers. But if we're letting Jesus be Jesus in us giving is never a problem no matter the circumstances that are around us.

The word "great" in the phrase "great ordeal of affliction" is the word *polus*. It's the word that means great in number. The word "ordeal" is the word *dokime*, which means a severe test that somebody goes through, but is being proven genuine in the midst of that test. And then the word "affliction" is the word we've seen several times in 2 Corinthians, it's the word *thlipsis*. *Thlipsis* refers to the inner stress that a person is under when the difficult times come his way. So it was in the midst of several different kinds of terrible situations in their life when the believers at Macedonia were suffering that they gave, they gave to the needs of others, and this is what Paul is trying to bring out.

Their giving stands in contrast to the wealthy Corinthians who got all they could, canned all they got, sat on the can, poisoned the rest. Quite a difference in the spirit of the two groups of believers. Both of these groups are believers. He says again "that in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality." They overflowed with joy even in the midst of terrible times. That's one of the first signals that God's doing a work in their life. You see, times had brought them to the point of destitute poverty. Now probably these tough times came because of their Christian testimony. And several things could have happened and that we don't know. Because of their Christianity they lost their jobs. Because of their Christianity they were denied the right to buy food for their families. They were at a point of poverty.

The word "poverty" here is the word *ptochia*. It's the word which means total destitution. It's the word used in Matthew 5 in the Beatitudes, "Blessed are the poor in spirit," those who cannot help themselves, those who understand that they're up under a standard they cannot live up to, those who realized that their need for God's grace. The word "poverty" has the idea that a man is in a situation to where he cannot dig himself out of it. He is so low, he's in such destitution at this point. And it was in the midst of this, in the midst of the worst times you can possibly imagine, that they gave to the needs of others. "That in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality."

The word "overflowed" in the phrase "overflowed" is the word *perisseuo*. *Perisseuo* means to be in excess, to exceed what was even needed. They went over and above. The word "wealth" is the word that doesn't mean riches as we would think of it. It means abundance. And yet, they didn't have any money. So in the abundance, out of the goodness of the heart of God within them they gave. And this is so exciting to me. You can seek evidences of Christ working in a person's life in many ways, but this is a way that the world steps back and they just don't know what to do when they see this kind of giving regardless of the circumstances of one's life.

The word "liberality" is the word *haplotēs*. It's used over in Romans 12 when he talks about the gift of giving. It means without any double motive. There was no string that was attached to their giving. They didn't use their giving as a sense of power to manipulate people to get what they wanted. They had no double motive. Their motive was absolutely pure before God. The believers in Macedonia gave with a pure motive. There was no strings attached to what they gave. Now Paul is overwhelmed at the generosity of these people in Macedonia. Their giving was much beyond what was even needed and they gave with no strings attached. Paul wants the church of Corinth to understand this. He wants them to understand what grace giving really is. It was a part of the stewardship of a man's life.

You know, it's interesting in the 21st century among Baptists for sure. We think stewardship means money, and you mention stewardship and people hit the backdoor as fast as they can, scared to death. Oh no! Preacher's going to talk about money. Stewardship, folks, is much more than money. Money's on the list, but stewardship involves everything: my time, my efforts, my emotions, everything about me it involves a stewardship of living. And money is a part of it. Grace giving is a product of God's grace working in the hearts of His people.

Several years ago I was on the International Congress on Revival and we preached worldwide for about 11 years. And I was over in Austria and it was right before Kosovo, or during Kosovo. And I don't know if you know this or not, but there were a lot of believers there in Kosovo and we had five different translation booths that we were speaking to there in Austria and one of them happened to be the Romanians. And for all of these people that came to the conference we raised the money in the states and we paid their gasoline, we paid their food, we paid their hotel, we paid their gasoline back because they don't get to do this ever. This is the greatest thing in their life is to come to a conference like this.

And one day one of the Romanians, the poorest people in the group, stood up and said to our translator in Romanian, "Can you ask the people if we can take up an offering for the folks in Kosovo?" And I couldn't believe this. These are the poorest people in the whole conference and they were the ones who brought it up. And those precious little people gave everything that they had. That really challenged the Americans that were there, the "rich Corinthians" that were there. And as a result of it the offering was staggering. But it was led by people that were the poorest in the group.

This is exactly what Paul's saying here to the church of Corinth. He says, look what you have. Look what you have and look what they don't have. And look what you're not doing, but look what they are doing. And he draws the contrast as clear as anything that

you could possibly see. You see, when you say that you're walking with God and you're a stingy individual, that's an oxymoron. You can't do that. A person who walks with God gives because that is the heart of God.

The passion of grace giving

Secondly, I want you to see the passion of grace giving. They didn't just give, folks, they gave with a passion. This takes it far beyond what the human being can do in his own flesh. It says in 2 Corinthians 8:3, "For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability, they gave of their own accord, begging us with much urging for the favor of participation in the support of the saints." Man, what a picture he draws for us here. Paul presents himself as standing before a tribunal that's hostile. And he's giving defense of what giving really is. He says, "For I testify." The word "testify" is *martureo*. It's the word that means I'm a witness in a courtroom and I'm giving witness to a truth that needs to be heard in order for that case to be solved. The poor Macedonians were living examples to them and to us about how God works in the heart of a believer. Paul says that "according to their ability they gave."

Now the word for "ability" is the word *dunamis*. It expresses the ability to accomplish or to do something. Now if he stopped right there some people would say, well, there isn't much to that. They gave what they could and that's okay. Some people would say, yeah, big deal. I mean, my goodness, they gave what they were able to give. So what? What do you mean, so what? In the Christian world today if God's people gave only according to what they could we would never have a need again for ministry anywhere in the world. You see, even giving according to what one can is still an act of God's grace working in a person's heart.

But God's grace is abundant. It goes far beyond that. Paul says, "For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability, they gave." The word "beyond," *huper*, is the word that means that which is over and above what they were able to do. When God's grace is working in the believer's life it's overwhelming how that person will give. He doesn't just give out of his economy. He gives out of God's economy. He gives over and above that which he is able to do. Now this again is stunning to the lost world. They can't figure this out. Matter of fact, you start giving and you watch the IRS start checking your income tax records. They think something's wrong with you. Why in the world would a person do that? You check it out.

But this is the thing that's a testimony for us. You see, when we say that we're believers, we say that Christ lives in our life and the world looks at us and says show me, show me. And you can say, well, I went on a mission or I sung in the choir. People don't even turn their head. But, buddy, when they see this kind of giving in a believer's life it turns their head. They know that this is not natural. They know this has to come from the very heart of God.

Now, I can hear somebody; I guarantee you, somebody's out there saying, "yeah, I bet they pressured him. I bet Paul put the pressure on them, that's why they gave." Well, Paul figured somebody would say that so he says, "For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability," listen to this, "they gave of their own accord." They gave of their own accord. Paul means that no one, including Paul, coerced them to give anything. It was Christ in them that caused them to give like they gave. In fact, Paul shows how Christ was behind all of this because of the way they turned around and the passion that was in it. He says in verse 4, "begging us with much urging for the favor of participation in the support of the saints."

You know, this is hard for us to understand in the 21st century, isn't it. We live in the greedy 21st century. Somebody said a long time ago, very wisely, we live such subnormal lives we see something that's normal and we think it's abnormal. We don't even understand it. Many believers do not live yielded to Christ. They've fallen into the trap of fleshly greed and they think that money is power or money is a tool or that at least money is for themselves. When will we finally learn to yield our whole lives including our wealth to Christ, to the point where giving becomes a natural reflex of our life? And I'll guarantee you it gives a witness, it gives a witness. Grace giving is a passion to those who love Christ and seek to walk with Him.

I'll never forget years ago when I was pasturing in another city, we grew so much we had a 155 people in each service for four times on Sunday, so finally we said we've got to build a building. Well, when we started building the building we didn't know how to do it, not a one of us knew what to do first. And so we asked our people. We said, listen, why don't you just trust the Lord and give something to help us get started like they did in the Old Testament and the people gave and they had to just stop them finally, they had so much that was being given. He said why don't you do this? And so we asked them to do that. All of a sudden people started bringing all kinds of things. Man they gave cars. They gave houses. They gave land. They gave everything. Most of them would give it to us and we had to sell it. We learned a lesson—you sell it and give us the money. It's a lot harder to get rid of. But I mean it was amazing.

And one night we had an evangelist in our church and somebody had given him a diamond ring. And I don't know how much it's worth, but more than I have. I mean, it was a lot of money. It was a big diamond. I mean a big diamond. And during the service one night he came forward, this evangelist who happened to be in that weekend. And he said, "Listen, I want to give this to the church. If somebody wants to buy it they can take the money and give it to our building program." And the people were so excited. And there was one of the ushers in front. I said, "Does anybody want to buy this and then turn around and sell it and we can give it twice to the

church?" And one of the ushers was standing there in the front. And he said, "I'll buy it." And I knew him, and I knew he didn't have it. And so I just ignored it. And I said "Does anybody want to buy it?" He standing there with his hand up. "I'll buy it." And I didn't pay him a bit of attention. I kept looking. And finally the third time he said "I'll buy it." I said all right, you can buy it. I didn't know he had a little bit set aside. And he bought that, and that money went to the church. Then he turned around and sold it and took that money and then gave it to the church. And it was amazing to watch people who said, how can we give more? How can we give more?

How can we give more? That's what he's trying to tell you. That happened at a church in Macedonia. Poor churches, destitute churches. They don't have what we have. They don't have a three-car garage. They don't have money in the bank. They don't have food on the table. But these people were touched by the grace of God. And when the grace of God touches a person's heart he changes, not from without, but from within and there's a desire, there's a desire to give particularly when it comes to ministering to the saints of God. So the proof of grace giving was the churches in Macedonia, those three churches. They were destitute. They were at the lowest point of poverty and the passion of that grace giving was such that they begged to be able to give more. And they gave far beyond what was even needed.

The priority of grace giving

Well finally, the priority of grace giving comes in here in verse 5. The apostle Paul begins verse 5 and says, "And this, not as we had expected." Paul was taken back. Paul knew the limited resources they had. He knew how they were overwhelmed in the situations they were facing. And Paul said this wasn't what we expected. I mean, this is something beyond that. But Paul also realized that this kind of gracious, generous giving was the result of surrendered believers living under the Lordship of Christ.

Paul knew that a believer does not begin with giving his money. You know, don't hear that wrong. I'm just telling you what he said. But don't ever think that if you start giving your money you'll have a better relationship with God. That's not it. You start with a relationship with God and then the giving flows out of that walk that you have with Him. "And this, not as we had expected," he says in verse 5, "but they first gave themselves to the Lord."

Now Paul shows you the secret right here. This is the key to giving. This is the key to giving anywhere you go. It's got to be first of all a giving of yourself to Him and surrendering to the Lordship of Christ in your life. He says, "And this, not as we had expected, but they first gave themselves to the Lord." This is the priority that we're talking about. It has to be there. It starts this way. When a believer gives himself to the Lord he gives everything. And the word "Lord" is used here to show you the sovereign control He has over everything in our life. If I say that Jesus is my Lord then that means He owns me. He doesn't just own me, He owns everything that I thought I owned, everything. I don't have my money in the bank; I have His money in the bank. I don't have my money in my billfold; I have His money in my billfold and He is Lord of all. That's where it starts.

Again the word "Lord" is a special word used here. Giving is never an emotional reaction to a need. I've watched this and I've wondered in our country how people quickly respond and give before they even hear from God as to what they're supposed to do. It's not a gamble like we see on television, that if we'll give we'll get something back. No, it's a direct response of obedience to the One who has given everything to us and now owns everything that we have. In Philippians it says that Christ lives in us to will and to work. He's the One who gives us the directive as to what to do with that which He owns, which is in our lives. The desire to give is His desire, and the resource that He demands is His to begin with. Do we understand if we're going to walk with God we can't help but give because God is the greatest giver that ever lived? And if He's living in us then we're going to want to do what He wants to do.

Well, perfect love cast out any kind of fear that we have of this kind of lifestyle. Some people are afraid to get into it. They don't understand faith. And they don't understand that perfect love cast out that fear. But you say, "Well, there's one thing bothering me. Paul and those leaders were the ones who told them what they needed to give, that they needed to give, not what, but that they needed to give. And, Wayne, we just can't trust people anymore. We live in the 21st century and we can't trust men because men are fallible and we're not going to give just because men tell us to give." Paul anticipates that reaction, so he says, "And this, not as we had expected, but they first gave themselves to the Lord," and look at this, look at this, "and then to," what? "To us." Who's he talking about? Who are the "us?" That's the leaders of the church in that day. Once they surrendered to Christ; see something happens when you surrender to Christ. Once you surrender to Him, He owns it all, and you're not really giving because a man said it. You're not giving to, you're giving it back to Him and He does with it what He chooses to do with it.

You can trust God's people because you trust the God that lives in people. That's what he's trying to get across to them. It wasn't blind submission. It was by the will of God. The divine intention of God was that He wanted to communicate a need of what people needed to do with what He owns to start with, but He wanted to communicate it through the leaders that He had placed over the people. The word "will," again, is His divine intention that He wants to see done in our lives. So the submission to the leadership was submission to Christ to start with. That's why they could trust the leaders, they trusted the Christ in the leaders. True giving which involves one's money, one's total resources, is absolutely the result of one's surrender, one's surrender to the Lordship of Christ. It is then and only then that we can respond to leadership that's put over us.

You know, I kind of understand some things that are going on here. I kind of hear what people say from time to time. "Wayne, we don't have a trust of leaders. We don't trust you. We don't trust anybody". Well, listen folks, I'm not asking you to trust me, and our leadership is not asking you to trust them. We're asking you to trust God and do with what He owns in your life what He tells you to do. By the way, let me ask you a question. Do you think He might be able to cover the base if a leader uses it the wrong way? I want you to understand, folks. I'm not out to get anybody. I'm just trying to help you understand that when God brings us into situations that He's brought us in He's just trying to test us. "Do you trust Me? Do you understand that I have the resources for everything you're supposed to be? I have it and it's sitting right out here." And what he's simply saying is listen, just do what I tell you to do and rejoice in what you'll see comes forth. That's all he's saying.

It's not a matter of, boy, I'd better give. No, it's a matter of I love Jesus and therefore I want to do what He wants me to do. That's what it's the matter of and I'll guarantee you if down the road it doesn't come in for whatever reason, I guarantee you that's going to be the root of it right there. Now you may use the fact I don't trust the leadership and God says I'm not impressed with that answer. I'm asking you do you trust Me? And do you understand that your money is not yours to start with? Now if you'll just walk with Me I'm going to show you something that you've never experienced before in your life. I'm going to teach you what giving really is all about.

So what have we learned so far as we inch our way through this chapter? First of all we've learned that giving is an act of God's grace working in the heart of a believer. Secondly we've learned that when God motivates the heart giving takes place, no matter how tough times may be, no matter how tough times may be. We've learned that we don't own anything. Everything we have is His. We're just stewards of it and we need to hear Him. We've learned that accompanying our giving will be His joy even in the midst of destitute poverty. We have learned that before we ever start thinking about giving our money we need to learn to give ourselves to God. And when we give ourselves that means everything, lock, stock and barrel. We have learned that it is God's will that we trust those that He has put over us. He's the one who does that. I know you think you got the shafted. But God's the one who puts people over others. I didn't set this up, God did. He will many times communicate the need of what He wants to give, people to give by the leadership that He puts over them. But it's really Him, of what He wants to do in the individual's life.

Giving, grace giving is an absolute miracle and to me is one of the greatest evidences that a person, first of all knows Christ and secondly is walking with Christ. It's an oxymoron to say I'm letting Jesus be Jesus in me and be stingy at the same time, distrustful at the same time. There's no possible way because you're not really trusting men. You're trusting God who lives in men. Living grace is giving grace. We can never say Christ is living through us and at the same time be stingy or manipulative with the money that He's loaned us.

2 Corinthians 8:6-12

The Principles of Spontaneous Giving

Turn with me to 2 Corinthians 8:6-12. We've been talking about the "Grace of Giving" and this is part 2 as we study through 2 Corinthians. When you study verse by verse you just can't skip things. And Paul brings this up. It's an uncomfortable subject to some, it's a sensitive subject to many, but yet Paul brings it up and so we deal with it. He wrote it; God wrote it through him.

So 2 Corinthians 8:6-12 is what we're going to look at today and our title is "The Principles of Spontaneous Giving." I tell you what; it's so encouraging and downright thrilling to watch a believer choose to live under grace. How many times have I said this: that grace is the transforming and enabling power of God in an individual's life that is a believer. It is Christ living in and through us; living His life in and through us.

It hasn't been that long ago when Michael Jordan absolutely raised the level of how basketball ought to be played. How many of you remember Michael Jordan? How many people say, "I want to be like Mike?" And everybody tried to be like Mike and they went out and bought Nike tennis shoes and they even bought the cereal on it; they want to be like Mike. And some even went out and bought some Haines underwear, but they were trying to be like Mike. But for whatever reason they just couldn't do it. You know why? Nobody can play basketball like Michael Jordan. Michael Jordan plays like Michael Jordan. If I wanted to play basketball like Michael Jordan, Michael Jordan would have to get inside of me and play through me because I just can't play like Michael Jordan.

And it's the same way with the Christian life. Have you ever tried to live like Jesus? Give like Jesus? Love like Jesus? Witness like Jesus? Help yourself; none of us can do it. That's why Jesus came to live in us, because only He can do through us what He demands of us. Christ living in us will not only motivate us but enable us to witness, to pray, to live a holy life, to love unloving people, to repent when we're wrong, when sin is in our life. But in our context, Christ living in us will manifest Himself through the giving generosity of His people. That's Christ in the life of a believer.

This is exactly what Paul is illustrating to us and to the Corinthian church by using the example of the impoverished churches of

Macedonia. These three churches, the church of Philippi, the church of Thessalonica, and the church of Berea, had undergone severe persecution for their faith. Some scholars say that they were fired from their jobs which caused their poverty; they weren't allowed to buy food when they went to buy food for their families, all because of their Christian testimony. They were destitute for all practical purposes.

But this miserable circumstance in their life had absolutely no effect whatsoever on their giving. And that's what Paul is bringing up. That's what grace giving really is. In 2 Corinthians 8:1-2, "Now, brethren, we wish to make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia, that in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality."

That word "poverty" that we saw last week is the word *ptochēia* it means a situation where one is totally unable to help himself. But this just drove them to Jesus. You see, that's the way a believer responds to difficult times. It just drives him to Jesus. This is where his desperation now enacts faith in his life and he's now able to trust God and so Christ in them, being allowed to live through them simply caused them to give to the needs of others. And they gave and they gave and they gave some more and they even begged to be able to give more to the needs of others.

Verse 3 says, "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." Now this grace giving that was seen in the Macedonian believers I want you to understand, will never, ever be evidenced in a self-centered, selfish, stingy believer's life. You'll never see that because that's Christ in them. We take so many times to praise men, no, no, no. It's Christ in men and when men are allowing Him to be the Lord of their life, in living that way then He produces that kind of giving in their life.

Verse 5 Paul gives us the secret of this grace giving. What in the world caused this, what are the steps that you go through to have this happen? They were living under the absolute lordship of Christ. It says they first gave themselves to the Lord. Verse 5 says, "and this, not as we had expected," the apostle Paul was stunned by the giving of these impoverished believers, "but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God." You see, a believer must learn to live under the Lordship of Christ. He must learn to give himself without any question before giving will ever be a part of his life. His money, his resources, his time, everything else, it happens, it's a consequence. He's first of all got to learn to surrender to the Lordship of Christ.

Now for us to do that we have to understand what Lordship means. And the Macedonians got it; they understood that Lordship meant ownership. That's what they understood. Jesus owns all of it; giving was simply a matter to the Macedonians of Christ in them directing them how he wanted His money to be given. That's all it was; and they did what He said to do. What a contrast to that stingy, self-centered and wealthy Corinthian church. It wasn't as if they didn't understand. They understood ownership. They understood Lordship because Paul had taught them. He told them in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, "Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price; therefore, glorify God in your body."

But you see the Corinthians didn't get it. They still wanted to please their flesh; but the Macedonians got it and they first gave themselves to the Lord. The word "give" there in the phrase, "they first gave themselves" is the word *didomi*, which means to give without any questions asked, without any argument whatsoever. It is aorist indicative active: they gave of their own will, of their own choice. Nobody coerced them to do what they did. And when you and I learn to surrender to Christ this way, then and only then do we begin to experience His giving nature in us. Giving will become a reflex, never a sensitive subject, never a frustrating matter, never a burden to anybody that is walking in the fullness that God offers to us.

Well, in our study today it's time for the wealthy Corinthian believers to put up or shut up. That's the way it is. And Paul is about to tell them something here that they really needed to hear. Like the man that went fishing from time to time and he always came home with a huge catch. But the only problem was he never took a fishing rod. And this became very suspicious to the game warden and he couldn't understand how he could catch that many fish without a fishing rod. He had a little box; he figured it could be his tackle box.

So the game warden said to him, "Listen, can I go with you next time?" "Sure, sure." They went out together, the game warden had his fishing rod, and our buddy didn't have his. They got out to a certain place, his little hunting hole, and dropped the anchor and he opened up his box that the game warden thought was a tackle box and it was a box filled with dynamite. He took one stick, lit it, through it over in the water and hundreds of fish came to the surface and he just went over and picked up as many as he could, put them in the boat. The game warden was just aghast. He looked at him and said, "You can't do that. That's against the law." The man didn't even flinch. He just took another stick of dynamite and lit it and handed it to him and said, "You going to talk or you going to fish?"

In other words, put up or shut up. Are you going to fish or are you going to cut bait? Let's go, move! That's exactly what Paul is telling the Corinthian church. Are you going to fish or are you going to cut bait. Put up or shut up. Now he's about to send Titus to

pick up the offering they were supposed to have been taking up every single week since Paul first told them about it. Titus is coming now to collect the offering.

He says in verse 6, “consequently we urged Titus that as he had previously made a beginning,” in other words, he told you about it when he was there, “so he would also complete in you this gracious work as well.” So when he took that third letter, evidently we have to read between the lines, he encouraged them. “Don’t forget the offering Paul told you about. Don’t you remember the one you desired to give? Don’t you remember the commitments you made to that offering? I’m coming to pick it up.” Paul says he’s sending him back; he’s going to take up that offering.

Paul wanted so much for the giving of the Corinthian church not to be a pain, not to be something they had to do. He wanted it to be spontaneous. He wanted giving in the Corinthian church to be something they got to do rather than something they had to do. And I’ll tell you what, for you and me and the Corinthians to ever, ever be spontaneous in our giving there are some principles we’re going to have to understand. We’re going to have to understand them, no matter; you’ll never enjoy a message on giving until first of all you start learning that living is giving, you’ll never see it.

These things have got to be anchored in our lives. We’ve got to make some decisions in our lives for the giving to be what God wants it to be. Three things I want you to see in our text today, verse 7 down through verse 12.

Giving is equal to all that grace offers

First of all giving is equal to all that grace offers. Now what he’s about to do is to emphasize the high spiritual status of giving. He wants to make sure it’s on the top list of all the things that grace does in a person’s life. The Corinthians had a warped view of spiritual gifts and if you’ve ever studied 1 Corinthians you know that. They loved the emotional gifts. They tended to rank the gifts: these are greater and these are lesser. And the apostle Paul spent in his first epistle that we have to them, he had spent three chapters trying to straighten their minds out on the fact that all of the gifts are necessary. And it’s so important for what he does in those three chapters.

But with this in mind you can understand what Paul is doing in trying to show them giving ranks with every one of the rest of them. Giving is right there with them. There is no gift of God’s grace that outranks the gift of giving. He says in verse 7, “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.” Now, Paul doesn’t mention them all but he mentions a few that he has talked about back in 1 Corinthians. You see, in 1 Corinthians he said “you don’t lack in any gift.” Let me read that to you: 1 Corinthians 1:4-7, they already had this in the letter that Paul had written to them. Verse 4 says, “I thank my God always concerning you, for the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus,” so he’s referring to that enabling, transforming grace and power that is in the Lord Jesus that they have. He says in verse 5, “that in everything you were enriched in Him,” and then he begins to mention some of those things, “in all speech and all knowledge, even as the testimony concerning Christ was confirmed in you so that you are not lacking in any gift, awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

So what he does over here in 2 Corinthians in verse 7, he doesn’t mention them all, he mentions a couple, adds a few, but then what he’s doing is he wants to show that grace is equal to everything that flows out of the Lord Jesus Christ. There is no greater, no lesser, and giving is right there with the rest of them. He mentions faith, which is the ability to believe God and obey His Word. Now faith is the root of all of these gifts. All of these things that grace manifests itself in a person’s life, faith begins it, it’s the spark that ignites it. It says in Hebrews 11:6, “And without faith it is impossible to please Him.” So he starts there and it’s not our faith, it’s God’s faith in us. When you see faith operating, you don’t praise the individual, you praise the God that lives in the individual.

Next we see the word “utterance.” Some people who carelessly translate Scripture think that this is referring to the unknown tongue that the Corinthians were speaking in; not at all. That’s a terrible hermeneutic. He’s not talking about gibberish. It’s the word *logos*, and *logos*—and I want to make sure you understand this—*logos* is the intelligent, communicable, and understandable word that somebody speaks. It’s never not understandable. Jesus is the living *logos*. He’s the fleshed out intelligence of God. So what he’s referring to the gift of those in the body that would speak intelligent truth, right doctrine.

The word “knowledge” that he uses there in verse 7 is the word *gnosis*. It’s from the word *ginosko*, which is the spiritual ability to understand deep truths and to be able to without in any way compromising it, making it simple enough for the whole body to understand. Next he mentions “earnestness.” It’s amazing he puts this in the list. He says, “But just as you abound in everything, in faith and utterance and in knowledge and in all earnestness.” The word is *spoude*, and *spoude* is the diligence to be about the things of God. It’s a divine urgency and it’s the divine capability to make a person dependable so that he’ll follow through with what God has said.

Next he mentions love and he said, “and in the love we inspired in you.” He’s talking about the love that God had put in their hearts for Paul and for his team. And love is the fruit of the Spirit of God. You can fake the other gifts but you can’t fake the love; the love is something that only the Holy Spirit of God can produce. And then he says in the same breath, “see that you abound in this gracious

work also.”

He calls it a gracious work but literally “in this grace also,” giving is a grace, it’s a work of grace. It’s Christ in an individual when we allow Jesus to be Jesus in us. He uses a definite article which points specifically to the giving that he’s talking about here. Giving is a part of the grace package and should never be put down here somewhere. Over the years, and I’ve even been guilty of it, money is such a sensitive subject to so many people, they use it for power, they use it to manipulate people, they use it for the greed that’s in their own life, and you just don’t want to bring it up. It’s almost as if we apologize for taking an offering. And the apostle Paul says, “What are you doing? This is up with everything else. If a person witnesses, if a person does miracles, if a person prays, that’s wonderful, but giving is right there. And if you take giving out of the equation then whatever they’re doing is not spiritual at all.”

Giving has to be there. If Jesus is going to be Jesus in us, giving is a part of that. Generosity of one’s heart; that is Christ living in us. And that’s what he’s trying to tell the Corinthians. Look at the Macedonians, he says, and he doesn’t say it but you can almost read between the lines, “Aren’t you ashamed of yourself? That you would not with all the wealth that you have, that you would not be a giver and not even understand how this fits into the equation of what grace does in a person’s life?” Giving is just as much a spiritual expression in a person’s life as preaching, as witnessing, as anything else. And if it’s not there, there is something desperately wrong in a person’s walk with God.

So again, giving is equal to all that grace offers. And when spontaneous giving is going to take place, we’ve got to understand what it is and where it comes from. A lady last week came to me between the two services and she said, “I so agree with what you’re saying. I was in a church and when they took up the offering, the people started clapping and they started saying, “Hallelujah, Hallelujah.” And I’m thinking, give me the name of that church, I want to find that. That’s like a weird sound at the 21st greedy century that we live in. You mean to tell me people get excited about giving? And the apostle Paul says, “See, you don’t talk about it; therefore people tend to look down on it and it’s equal to everything that grace offers to a person’s life.”

Giving is an example of God’s love in us

So first of all, giving is equal to all that grace offers. Secondly, we have got to learn this: that giving is an example of God’s love in us. You want to get a message across to the world? They’ll see it quicker by your giving than by you handing them a tract. They want to see it in our lives: that’s God’s love working. Verse 8 and 9, “I am not speaking this as a command, but as proving through the earnestness of others the sincerity of your love also. For 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.” Boy, these are powerful words he’s speaking here.

Paul says the most unusual thing here and he helps us find a balance in preaching this message of grace and it’s certainly helping me. He says, “I am not speaking this as a command.” What’s so odd about that? If you studied 1 Corinthians then you understand that when Paul first brought this offering up for the poor people in Jerusalem and wanted them to give, you have to remember that it was a command, not an option. First Corinthians 16:1-2, let me show you when he first brought it up. “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 let each one of you put aside and save, as he may prosper, that no collections be made when I come.”

Paul says, “When I get there, I want the offering to already be there. We don’t want to make a big deal out of it. You’ve been doing it on a consistent basis.” Now in that passage, Paul not only instructs them to give, he even instructs them on how they’re to go about giving. He says, “on the first day of every week each one of you is to put aside and save.” Now that’s a great way. If you’re here today and you don’t know how to give or where to start, that’s a great place to start. Every week put aside and begin to understand it’s a plan, the purposeful thing that you’re doing in your life. It’s a great plan.

He says, “on the first day,” on every Sunday which is our first day of the week, which is the resurrection Sunday, that’s when the church meets, they were to put aside money for this offering. Now when he says “put aside,” that’s an interesting verb, present tense, active voice, imperative mood. Present tense means continually, week by week. This is not a one time thing. This is why he said “When I come I don’t want a big splash out of one offering. I want it to be done consistently. Every week you set it aside. Active voice means do this of your own choice. Don’t make me feel like I’ve got to hit you over the head with a baseball bat. Imperative mood means this isn’t an option. This is not a great thought: this is a command.

But here in 2 Corinthians he says, and this is the same church, he says, “I am not speaking this as a command.” What is the uniqueness of that? To me it’s special. You see, in 2 Corinthians the believers in Corinth had finally responded to what Paul had written to them and they had repented of their sin. There is now evidently in Paul a brand new, renewed confidence that has been restored in them. And I began to think about the fact, have you ever realized that when a person is walking and living under grace, he really does catch it? It’s not something that is taught as much as it’s caught and he begins to realize that if he just abandons himself to God, then he can live in all the fullness that God says is his. But the more there is of me, the less I experience of Him. And when a person lives that way he will evangelize, he will pray, you never have to coerce him to give. That’s the echo of his life: that’s Christ living in him.

But if a believer is not living that way, you have to bring it up over and over and over again as a command, not as an option. You see the sad fact was in Corinth and today in the 21st century, most believers do not live under the Lordship of Christ. They love to come to church, they love the fellowship, they love the fun, they love the games, they love to be entertained, they love to sing, they love the feelings, but they're not living under the Lordship of Christ. That's why when you mention giving something inside of them just sort of shrinks up. It's amazing the feelings in a person that is not walking with God has when you mention money to him. People like this, they want the grace, they want the good feelings, they want to feel like they're right, but they don't want to go through the process of being right. They don't want the responsibility. Don't give me the responsibility. Don't you preach to me the commands, don't you tell me what I need to do. I want to feel good when I come to church. I want to live under the license of what they think grace is.

Well, the church of Corinth, when Paul first wrote them and had to command them to give, he called them spiritual babies in chapter 3. He said, "You won't come out of the nursery, you just won't grow up." And so to a church like that he had to command them to give. But now there's been a change. Now there's been like an awakening and a revival has taken place in the people and his confidence has been completely renewed and so he doesn't command them this time when he brings it up. He simply wants them to allow Christ in them to prove Himself in them through their giving. He wanted Christ's heart to be seen in them. And that heart that he wants to be seen in them is echoed here in verse 9.

He says, "For 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." He says, "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ..." The word "know" is the word *ginoskoyou* experientially know this. You Corinthians, you wouldn't be a Christian if you hadn't experienced the grace of God. What He did for you has caused you to be what you are today. You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. And the word "grace" is obviously the word *charis*, but it's the word that means to us, that none of us deserved any of it.

Can you imagine God who is sinless, perfect, holy, was willing to come down and stoop down for people such as you and me? That He would actually do that? We didn't deserve a thing, we deserved hell and that's all that we deserved, and yet by His grace He did for us what He did on the cross. And then he tells us what He did, "That though He was rich." That refers to His divine recognition as the Son of God. This gets so rich. It shows that in no way did who He was, or what He had, in no way did that stop Him from doing what He did for the sake of all mankind. "Though He was rich" describes the estate He held before He came to earth.

In John 17:5 in His high priestly prayer He says, "And now, glorify Thou Me together with Thyself, Father, with the glory which I ever had with Thee before the world was." Christ left His throne of glory; He stooped down, He humbled Himself for the sake of others. Philippians 2:6 says, "who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped." The word "grasped" means to attain and then to hold on to, to be unwilling to let go of. He was willing to let go of it. All that He had He was willing to release for the sake of others.

Man, I'll tell you what, when you put that unselfish attitude of the Lord Jesus and Paul says in Philippians 2:5 that you have this same attitude in you that Christ had in Himself, and you put that in the context of giving, it screams at us in the greedy world of the 21st century that we live in. Have you ever heard this kind of remark, it's an ignorant remark? It's somebody who thinks they know what a Christian is but has no clue. Have you ever heard this statement: I'm not giving them a dime of my money because they just don't deserve it? Interesting, isn't it? Do you think we deserve what Jesus did for us when He stooped down and went to the cross for you and me? I tell you what, that song when it says, "What is man that Thou art mindful of him?" And every day I come to Him and as I come to Him I understand the wickedness and the filth of my flesh and it overwhelms me. It overwhelms me that He was willing to do that for somebody as undeserving as me and yet he says here, "Now listen, I want that same heart to be in you, in your giving. You give it whether they deserve it or not. You give it because Jesus has given to you. You give it because He's directing your life." That's what Paul is trying to say to them.

"Christ, though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor." You see, He still lives in us and He hasn't changed. He's the same yesterday, today, and forever. He was clothed with the garment of frail human flesh, with no reputation among men, and because of His grace, His willingness to stoop down and lower Himself for the sake of others, many, including the Corinthians and including us today, were made spiritually rich in Him. Now He continues to live in us to continue to enable us to do what we could not and would not have done without Him.

The Corinthian church was a wealthy church. On top of that they were a stingy church. So Paul says, "I'm not commanding you this time. I've seen Him working in your life and I want you to prove it to other people. I want you to prove it by your unselfishness and your generosity in the spontaneous giving. That's what I want you to do."

We've got to get some things down in our minds. It's not fun to even talk about. But I'll tell you what, on the flip side, that's where the joy is. Giving is equal to all that grace offers. You can witness, you can preach, you can whatever you do until you fall over in the floor, but giving flows out of the love of God. If that love is not there, the giving is not there. And it's that giving that shows Christ is living in us. Giving is an example of God's love given to us.

Giving is our effectual response to His provision in our life

But the third thing and the final thing I want you to see is a principle of spontaneous giving, we've got to get it down. We've got to stop being afraid of talking about the offering. We've got to stop being afraid of talking to people about honoring their commitments because this is exactly what Paul is doing right here. Why should we be ashamed of it in the 21st century? Thirdly, giving is our effectual response to His provision in our life.

I tell you what, how many days of my life I'm ungrateful. My wife and I have spent most of this past week just thanking God for what He's given us. Do you realize how much we take for granted? We don't even realize God has given it to us until we lose it and then we start missing it and we forget that God gifts these things to us and our giving ought to reflect a grateful heart. He says in verse 10, "And 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." You started this thing. It was in you. But then he says in verse 11, "But now finish doing it also; 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 man has, not according to what he does not have."

And verse 10, when Paul says, "I give my opinion" many people read that and think that it's not inspired because it's Paul's opinion. I'm sorry. I laugh; it just tickles me. It's under the inspiration of the Spirit of God. What he is simply saying is this is not a command, the Spirit is not leading me to command you, I'm just going to give you my opinion on this matter. That's all it is, a sanctified opinion. It's under the leadership of God's Spirit. This is divine wisdom that God gave to Paul not to command them in verse 8. Instead he gives a sanctified opinion. Why? Because he wants their giving to be spontaneous and now he feels like he's finally got an audience that can hear that. He doesn't have to command them anymore. They've repented; they're seeking to live right. They're longing after Paul as we studied earlier.

Giving is the effectual and grateful response to God's provisions in our lives and he sees these people at a point they can begin to understand that. It should not have to be commanded but it needs to be spontaneous out of that grateful heart. "And I give my opinion in this matter, for this is to your advantage." The "this" there is not his opinion. The "this" is their giving, their following through with their giving. "It's to your advantage," he says, "it's to your benefit, this spontaneous giving is to your advantage." A better translation is "it's fitting to you." It makes no sense, he's telling them, to desire to do something and then not to follow through with it. It's fitting, it's to your benefit, it's to your advantage.

Paul encourages them to spontaneously finish what they started. He says in verse 10, "And 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," and he goes beyond that, "but also to desire to do it." "I was there, I saw your enthusiasm, I understand how you 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."

Have you ever noticed how quickly people will make a promise to give if the atmosphere is right? We'll have a banquet and we'll get somebody to come and tell 72 stories about how God blessed them and made them rich because they gave. And then we'll pass out commitment cards and people will suppose to have prayed, but you know how that goes, and they quickly think, "God, help me quick." And they have a desire to give and they'll put an amount down. And that's why I don't like pledge cards at all. If we ever do anything like that, it'll never have anybody's name on it because that's between a person and God. But they'll put down on that paper that they want to give \$500, I want to give. And we had to build a building in Chattanooga. We had a big banquet and people came and we told them not to put their name down. We knew exactly what the building would cost; we'd gotten the figures that afternoon for the first time. They wrote down and wrote down and lo and behold, it was to the very penny of what was handed to me about two hours before that banquet that I didn't even know about.

Man, we rejoiced, the desire is here, we're going to do what God is putting on our heart to do. Have you ever noticed how quickly that goes away? About five or six months later we were in the midst of it and all of a sudden the money wasn't coming in. All that desire was back here, but they weren't following through with what they said they were going to do. Great starters, pretty poor finishers.

Let me ask you a question: what commitments have you made and not fulfilled? In verse 11 Paul does not impose on the Corinthians the level of giving that the Macedonians had given. You see, there are two levels of giving here. You'll never understand the Macedonian church until you start living under the Lordship of Christ. This is a giving that is beyond explanation. It's amazing how this giving takes place when a person begins to walk with God. The Corinthians were nowhere close to that. They were at ground zero. They were just repented; they were just turning around so he doesn't impose on them. "You give beyond your ability." That's not what he does at all.

But he says to the Corinthians, "But now finish doing it also; 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 man has, not according to what he does not have." So he doesn't impose on them this "grace giving," this supernatural giving that was evidenced by the

Macedonians.

Another way of translating the phrase, "for if the readiness is present," is "if you really do want to give, if that is your desire, then start by giving out of what you have." That's a great way to do it. If you look at 1 Corinthians 16, you look at this one every week, just set it aside. Start there, that's okay. Paul says that's absolutely fine. That's still God working in your heart. That's His enabling work within your life. Start with what you have. Just give what you have to give.

Somebody said that was easy. No, it's not easy. And I told you this in the first message I preached here that if people in America today that call themselves believers would give just out of what they have, just out of what they could, the church would never suffer anything they needed for missions ministries or anything else that is going on. It's an act of grace just to give what you have. But as one continues to walk with Christ, I'm just want to encourage you here and I have to be very careful because I don't want to set a precedent and let you build off of that. Let's just go with what God says, start with what you have. But as you walk and live under His Lordship, under His ownership, giving is going to abound in your life beyond anything you ever dreamed about. And it's going to put such a joy in your life that nobody can explain it.

I couldn't begin to explain it to you. There are definitely two levels of giving that we see in 2 Corinthians 8. One with the Macedonians who gave themselves to the Lord and lived under His Lordship. The other to the Corinthians who were just beginning to get it and they were turning and at least they would give out of what they had.

In order for spontaneous giving to take place in our life, we're going to have to learn these three truths. Giving is equal to all that grace offers. Don't ever put anything else beyond giving because that's the heart of it all. Giving is an example of God's love in us; it flows right out of it. If the love is there, the giving is there. And giving is our response, our effectual response to His provision in our life. Whatever we have, we recognize He gave to us and He owns it and we want to reflect a grateful heart back to Him by giving to Him.

But I want to still say there is still another level of giving. It's not about giving; it's about giving yourself to the Lord. But I'll tell you, it's joy. If you would just bear with me and permit me to do this, I just want to share a couple of instances with you. My wife and I were set free in this area years ago. Nobody will ever see what we give because we give over and above and we love doing it and don't even care about it. If the IRS sees it, that's great, and if they don't see it, that's fine. We're not doing it for the IRS; we're not doing it for a tax write-off. But God set us free. I've never in my life experienced what I've experienced. You're going to understand this when you get into grace giving. This is just giving. Yes, it's out of grace, but I'm talking about that abundant grace giving of the Macedonians.

When you get into it, this is not your motivation. If it ever becomes your motivation immediately it becomes a program and it cuts out in your life. But you're going to find out that when you start learning to give and trusting God, let Him direct you, you can never out give God. How many have already discovered that in your life. You cannot out give God.

When I first began to see this, I got so excited about it I can hardly talk. It's not mine, so Lord, it's up to You. It's not up to me. I'm not going to worry over something that is Your responsibility. God never gives grace to what's not my responsibility, so my Mama sent me in those months that we were learning this, sent me a \$50 bill and I hadn't seen too many \$50 bills. This was back in the late 70's. I had to look at that thing for awhile if I really believed it was real. And it was almost the moment I got it God said, "That's not yours. Put it in your pocket." Has to be the devil; I already had plans for the money. I mean, weeks went by and I still had that \$50 and it was burning a hole in my pocket. And God said, "Don't you dare. I got that for somebody else. Your Mama did what I told her to do to give it to you so you can do what I tell you to do." It hadn't stopped its journey yet.

And one morning I was down at the church, a good friend of mine who has gone on to be with the Lord. And he said, "Can your church support me on a mission's budget?" I said, "We just voted on the budget; it's already too late." He said, "Can you help me?" I didn't have enough money to buy gas but I said, "I'll tell you what, though, can I give a one time gift?" And he said absolutely. And I opened my billfold and pulled out a \$50 bill. He was as excited as I was. And I said, "My Mama sent me that several months ago and God told me not to do anything with it until He was ready, and it's yours." Well, he just thanked me and walked out of the office and there is something about that. It's not yours, why worry about it. Just do what God tells you to do with it.

Well, that afternoon I got a phone call and they said they wanted to take me out to eat and go over and have a good time. We went to the nicest place to eat, they paid for our meal, and they said they wanted to buy my wife something. So the wives that were with us, they took Diana into the mall and bought her a purse. And she came back and looked at me and whispered in my ear, "That purse cost \$25." And I thought to myself, "I wonder where the other \$25 is?"

If you ever give to get, He'll take it away from you. You give to get so you can give again. It's a cycle you get into and only the people who live under the Lordship of Christ have a clue what I'm talking about right now. We got back and I went over to my car and opened that front door. And when I got in, the visor was down and I never do that and it hit me in the head and it hurt. I backed up and then I looked and pinned to the visor were two ten dollar bills and a \$5 bill and a note that said, "We were riding by the church

and for whatever reason God prompted us to stop and wanted me to give you this money.” They didn’t sign it or anything. It’s amazing how this works.

Just a few weeks later the BSU director drove over an hour to get to our church with a bunch of students just to come to church that morning. I saw them sitting out there in about three rows. And I introduced them and while they were shaking hands God said, “Take them out to eat today.” This is 15 college kids; you have to understand this. I don’t have maybe \$6 in my pocket. If you don’t know, you can’t recognize His voice. So I went up to the director and said, “I’m going to take you all out to eat.” She said, “You don’t have the money to do that.” “Well, God told me to do it so I guess He’s got it figured out.”

There was only one place we could go to eat and that was a truck stop. I took them out, but I was really sweating a little. I knew God had told me to do it, but how? As I was standing shaking hands with the people walking out, one of them walked up and shook my hand and it had bills in it. That’s the greatest handshake in the world. I shook his hand, slipped that money in my pocket and didn’t look until I got in the car. We got over there and it was \$75. That meal with the tip and everything was \$72.75. God threw in \$2.25.

It got us on a journey, it’s been almost 30 years ago, and it’s the greatest journey we have ever been on in our life. But does it start there? Absolutely not. Don’t you even think about it if you’re not giving. You go back to what Paul said to the Corinthians. Give out of what you have and trust Him. There are people today who say the tithe is Old Testament; it’s Law. Are you kidding me? Abraham gave tithes to Melchizedek 400 years before the law even existed. It’s the reflex of a grateful heart. Giving, supernatural giving, starts way above that. But you don’t start up here, you start down here and you give because that’s a reflection of a grateful heart toward what God has done in your life. That’s His grace operating in your life.

Can I ask you one question: how’s your giving this morning? How’s your attitude towards it? Remember, this is not my agenda; I’m just preaching through 2 Corinthians. This is chapter 8, I didn’t write it, so evidently God’s got something to say to us.

2 Corinthians 8:13-24

The Soundness of Grace Giving

Would you turn with me to 2 Corinthians 8. We’ll finish the chapter today as we continue to push through, slowing walk through the book of 2 Corinthians. We’re talking about the grace of giving. I didn’t write this: Paul brought it up and the timing seems to be so appropriate this time of year. This message is part 3 of that and we’re going to talk today about the “Soundness of Grace Giving.” Is it really solid, is it really sound? We’re going to finish the chapter, verses 13 all the way down through 24.

Let me get you into it by just a little bit of review. I always do this because I want to make sure we’re in the flow, the current that we’ve already seen. The apostle Paul has a brand new renewed confidence in the Corinthian church. It’s amazing when you’re working with somebody and you see them move to a different level in their Christian walk. First John talks about the different levels of maturity. There are the little babies that can’t walk or talk and they need a lot of help. And then you’ve got your children that need to be discipled and then you have your young men that have overcome and then you have your mature ones. And it’s beautiful to watch people move from one to another as they grow in the grace of the Lord Jesus. And this is what has happened to the church of Corinth. It’s really affected Paul because they’ve repented and responded in faith to the letter that he had written to them.

And Paul wants them now to be proven in this area of giving. He understands that this is a part of it. That when Jesus lives in us, giving is going to be a part of that. To encourage them in their giving he cites the impoverished Macedonian church. Now he was using the Macedonians, not as a standard, you’ll see that, because he said I don’t want you to give to their standard, you wouldn’t understand it to start with. But I’ve got another standard to start you with. But he uses them to test the wealthy Corinthian believers.

You see, the Macedonians gave far beyond what he’s even going to ask of the Corinthians and the Macedonians had far less than what the Corinthians ever thought about having. He wants to test the genuineness of their love. I don’t know if we even stayed long enough on it the last time, but verse 8 of chapter 8, I want to make sure we get this verse. He says, “I am not speaking this as a command,” remember he wants their giving to be spontaneous, “but as proving through the earnestness of others.” The word “proving” there is dokimazo. It means to “put something to the test,” but it is a test that always proves something to be genuine. There’s another Greek word that when you put something to the test to disprove it, but this word, when it’s used, is always to prove something, to make it, to prove it genuine.

And Paul says, “but as proving through the earnestness of others.” Now that little phrase, “the earnestness of others” talks about the diligence, the attitude, the urgency and the diligence of the Macedonian church when they heard of the poor Christians, the saints in Jerusalem, and they heard of their need which is all about this context, the offering they’re going to be taking, they responded. And he said, “I wanted to use the earnestness of others.” He says, “but as proving through the earnestness of others the sincerity of your

love also.”

The word sincerity there is the word that also means “the legitimacy” of something. He wanted people to see that Jesus is really being Jesus in their life and he wanted them to see the legitimacy of the love that that comes out of them: “but proving through the earnestness of others the sincerity of your love also.” You know that there are four words for love in the Greek language. Only three are used in Scripture. It’s funny, we take the one that God never chooses to use and we use it all the time as if that’s what love is. It’s the word eros. We get the word “erotic” from, sensual love, that’s what the world is, that’s all you see today. It’s never used in God’s Word.

The two most common words used for the love, there’s a third one that’s a derivative of it, but there are two main words and the main word that is used is agape. That’s the word he uses here. That is the word that is the fruit of God’s Spirit. That’s something a man cannot produce in his own power; that’s something God has to produce in that believer. It flows out of the believer’s life when he’s living under the Lordship of Christ. It means the divine commitment to do whatever is beneficial to meet the needs of others no matter what it costs me. So giving of our money to the needs of others always reflects the love of Christ manifested in us as believers.

And so you can flip the coin over. If a believer doesn’t give then it’s apparent he doesn’t love. If he doesn’t love, then it’s apparent he’s not walking under the Lordship of Christ because there’s no fruit evident which will be that love. A believer who doesn’t give also shows he knows nothing about the enabling grace of God. He has received the grace of God in vain. Remember the warning that came in 6:1? Paul says, “I’m urging you, you’re missing the point, don’t you receive the grace of God in vain.” Jesus is the grace of God and when we let Jesus live His life in and through us He will produce the fruit of His love out of which will come the giving of our time, whatever, and our money. It’s just a consequence of Jesus being Jesus in us.

In verses 8-12 Paul shows some of these consequences. Three principles of spontaneous giving. Now he understands that the Corinthians have a problem of thinking that this gift is greater than this gift. And that was a big deal then and it is in the 21st century today. He understood that. And so he begins by revealing that giving is as equal to all that grace offers. It’s equal to everything else that grace does in a person’s life. It’s part of the grace package. You can’t remove giving from Jesus being Jesus in an individual’s life.

In verse 7 he says, “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.” The literal there is “this work of grace.” Make sure that this is being seen in your life.

Paul also illustrates how giving is an example of God’s love working in us. It’s what we’ve just been talking about in verse 9. He says “For 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.” You see, that totally unselfish attitude of God toward man, when He stooped down and was willing to rid Himself of His divine glory, when He came to pay a debt He did not owe for people that owed a debt they could not pay. Now that same attitude of love, that unselfish attitude, is resident within the life of a believer in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

You see what He had and who He was made no difference. It didn’t stop Him from doing what He did for people who did not deserve it in any way. So when we are letting Jesus be Jesus in us, then it’s going to be that unselfish attitude that is going to be reflected in the way that we do everything that we do, but particularly in our giving. Now Paul also taught us that giving is our effectual response to God’s provision in our life. He’s going to tell them, “Listen, at least be grateful for what you have and understand that God gave it to you. And let that be the standard, let that be the place that you start.”

He says in verse 10, “I give my opinion in this matter, for this is to your advantage,” it’s a sanctified opinion by the way, “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.” “Listen, this was in your heart a year ago; you signed a card.” I don’t know what they did but somehow Paul knew that it was their desire. He says in verse 11, “But now finish doing it also; 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 man has, not according to what he does not have.” And that’s going to get us into our message even today.

Paul doesn’t command the Corinthian believers again, because he wants to see Jesus in them. He’s seen it in their repentance, he’s seen it in their heart change toward him, and he says, “Come on, grow up, let me see the giving. Let that also be a reflection of the Jesus that lives within you.” Well, he wants them to fulfill what they had desired to do at one point. He says, “Go on and finish it out and let it be a testimony to Christ in you.”

Well, today we’re going to continue to look at this marvelous subject of grace giving and folks, we haven’t even gotten started. I’m kind of wanting to hurry because chapter 9, it’ll light your fire. He just keeps right on going for 2 chapters. And we want to look though at the soundness of grace giving. Does grace giving make any sense? Does grace giving hold up in this world of suspicion and doubt of the 21st century? Does it make any sense at all? Is it solid teaching? Well, let’s just look at it.

The provision in grace giving is sound

There are three things that I want you to see about the soundness of grace giving. First of all, the provision in grace giving is sound. You see, we need to see that grace giving is the way to ensure our own needs will be met. I want to make sure you see what I'm saying here. If you want to ensure that all of your needs, not your wants, but that your needs are going to be met in the future, not even right now perhaps knowing what they are, grace giving assures that. It's a promise of God and I'll show it to you in His Word.

Look at verse 13, "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 want, that their abundance also may become a supply for your want, that there may be equality." Now if you read those two verses very quickly you'll say, "Now what did he say?" Let's back up and find out. First of all it appears, and I don't know if he's doing this or not, but it appears he's trying to soften what the Macedonians have done.

You see, when somebody really gets caught up in the Lordship of Christ and God speaking to their life, they may do some things that other people look at and can't figure out. And they had given beyond their ability and it almost looks like he's trying to soften that a little bit to make sure they understand. He says, "For this is not for the ease of others and for your affliction." You see the skeptics could have looked at the Macedonian church and they could have said, "Hey, that makes no sense at all. Now the Macedonians are poorer than ever and the believers over in Jerusalem are on easy street. That doesn't make any sense to me at all."

If that's what Paul is trying to clear up, he does it very quickly. Now Paul has just told them earlier in verse 12 "For if the readiness is present, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have." So he's cleared that up anyway, but he continues. Then he says, "For this is not for the ease of others." Understand that what you're doing is not for the ease of others. Now that word is *anesis*. It's the word which means to be freed from something. If you'll study it through the New Testament it's quite interesting that they translated it "ease" here. Their giving was not so that the poor in Jerusalem would be freed from their responsibility to give when they were able.

In other words, it's not just one group of people becoming poor, giving to another one who already is poor. That's not it; it's reciprocal. What had happened when that kind of thing happened, they would give to the needs of others. What he's trying to say is when you give to their need, there's going to be a time when they'll be back on their feet. And when they get back on their feet, then they may turn right around and they're responsible to give to others, maybe even to the Corinthians. Paul says it's not for them to be freed of their responsibility and then he adds to that, "and it's not for your affliction." Make sure you understand the whole picture.

In other words, God doesn't want the Corinthians to give everything they have and then not be able to pay their bills while the poor people in Jerusalem are on easy street and they just continue to drink the well dry. That's not what he's talking about. And then he balances it by saying, "but by way of equality." "For this is not for the ease of others and for your affliction, but by way of equality." The word for "equality" there is *isotes*, which means that which is equitable, that which is fair to all concerned. Now Paul had spent quite a bit of time teaching the Corinthian church of how the body functioned. He did that in the first epistle that we have in 1 Corinthians 12:13-14. It all fits together, showing them how we all interact with one another. How we need each other.

And what he's doing here is trying to bring that back to their attention. There will be times when we won't have it and we're the ones in need, and at that time God will lead others in the body to help meet our need. But here's the point: what goes around comes around. He says, "Come on, Corinthians, get with it. You're not just supposed to help the Macedonians and continue to help and continue to help as if their never to do anything. No, you help them to get on their feet and then they in turn will help others get back on their feet. That's the way the body works together."

He says in verse 14, "at this present time your abundance being a supply for their need." That was the situation they were in. But then he says, "so that their abundance also may become a supply for your need," and there may be equality. You see, at that time the Corinthian church was a very wealthy church and they had it. The poor Christians in Jerusalem didn't have it and as I was studying on it this week I discovered it was almost a decade before they ever had it. But what he's saying is there may come a time that the whole thing is reversed; you may be the one in need and then they who have now been helped to get back on their feet will turn right around and help you.

"At this present time your abundance being a supply for their need, that their abundance also may become a supply for your need, that there may be equality." But the principle is this: if you're willing to let Jesus be Jesus in your life, if you're willing to give of yourself to His Lordship and you're willing to give to others as He directs, you can write it down. He assures you in His Word that He will meet your needs when they come up.

Giving is never one-sided when you're dealing with believers. It will come back around. There will be seasons in our lives when we'll have abundance. Paul talked about that in Philippians. He said, "I've learned how to abound and I've learned how to be a base." We're going to go through all of those different times in our life, but we need to learn that as we are faithful to say yes to Him and give, we can be assured that our needs will be met.

This is almost identical to what Jesus tried to tell us in Luke 6:38: "Give, and it will be given to you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over," says Jesus. What kind of measure are you talking about? "For whatever measure you deal out to others," the way you are willing to trust God and do what He tells you when you do have it to give, it will be measured to you in return. Now I don't know how much clearer God's Word could be.

Paul gives a beautiful example of this to the Philippian church; remember the church of Philippi in Macedonia? They'd been giving and giving for a long time and he says in Philippians 4, the reason he even writes this epistle is to thank them for their generosity in the gift they sent with Epaphroditus. And he says in verse 14, "Nevertheless, you have done well to share with me in my affliction. And you yourselves also know, Philippians, that at the first preaching of the gospel, after I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving but you alone; for even in Thessalonica you sent a gift more than once for my needs. Not that I seek the gift itself, but I seek for the profit which increases to your account." "I see for the profit which increases to your account."

The reason I want to see people get into giving is not because of the budget or anything else. I want to see people understand the grace of God. Folks, it's the most marvelous cycle you can get into; it's God's economy and when you start learning to trust Him—in fact, giving is one of the greatest ways in which you can reflect your trust in God and as you do that he says it puts it to your account.

He says in verse 18 of that passage, "But I have received everything in full, and have an abundance; I am amply supplied, having received from Epaphroditus what you have sent, a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God." And then here's what he says, "You have been willing to give to me and I didn't even ask for it." And verse 19, "And my God," and this is the Word of God, folks, "will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus." It's the most awesome thing in the world when a believer learns that when he hears from God and God says, "Hey, you have some of My money over here and I want you to take it and give it to that person over here." But what about a rainy day? God says, "Did you listen to what I said?" And so you give it and God says "You just watch. When your need comes up I'll have somebody doing the same thing back to you."

Do you know why some people can't believe that? It's because they put their trust in their credit card or they put their trust in the Social Security or they put their trust in the government or something. They're not putting their trust in God. God says like in Malachi, "Hey, guys, test Me. Come on, test Me. Go on and give and see if you can out give Me. You cannot do it."

I remember years ago when we first began to learn this, and I'm hardheaded, so I understand that it's going to take awhile for some people to get into this, it took me forever. If God ever had a thick head, you're looking at it. And we had a bill of \$188.55 I have never forgotten. It was staring at us and we had to pay it the following week and I said to my wife, "Are we supposed to start giving?" Because God had put on our heart to give. And listen, when I give my stories, don't you base your faith on my stories. You base your faith on God's Word. I'm just telling you how God worked in our life. And as we prayed, God said, "You give it, trust Me. I'm just trying to get you to trust Me. Walk with Me." And so we wrote out our tithe check and we didn't have the money to pay that bill.

That weekend, on a Friday and a Saturday, I had a couples retreat to do for a small church and I had a wedding. Now, what do you get for a wedding? You don't do it for money. I never have. I've never asked people anything for a wedding. There have been times people have chosen to give and sometimes they haven't. That's between them and God. But on the couples retreat I was thinking, "You know they might give me something. At least pay for my gas." And they took up an offering. I went, I spoke two times on Friday and two times on Saturday and I went over and did the wedding in that little country church. I came back, did two sessions that night and then had to get home for Sunday the next day.

And as I got ready to leave they had an offering they'd taken up. Pennies, nickels, dimes, dollars, all wadded up and in a little sack. And I took it and told them they shouldn't have done that. I've got to have \$188.55, and I just tried to be as humble as I could. You've heard about that book, Humility and How I Achieved It. And I got in my car and I didn't drive very far. I just drove far enough that they couldn't see me anymore. It was at night and when I couldn't see their lights I figured they couldn't see mine so I pulled off the side of the road, turned on the inside lights, put every bit of that money down in the floorboard on the passenger side and got down and counted every single penny and dime, but them in dollar stacks, and put the dollars down and it came out to \$188.00. At first all I had was "God, you owe me 55 cents." It's amazing.

I told that last night and a guy walked up and gave me two quarters and a nickel. Said, "Now you're even." Man, I'm telling you what, you talk about exciting you. To understand that God is not just some concept that we come and talk to as if He doesn't even exist. God lives in us and His Word is alive; His Word is true, and He just wants us to believe Him. Giving, folks, a lot of people use excuses for not giving. "I don't believe those people at the church are real" and all this kind of stuff. Go to the root of it. You've got a stingy, greedy, unbelieving heart because when a person trusts God, then he does what God says to do and the result is giving. Giving is going to flow out of that; that's the love of God being manifested in his heart.

He gives a precaution in grace giving

Secondly, he gives a precaution in grace giving. Now, we must understand something. In the times of abundance, in the times that we have, having is not for hoarding. It's an interesting thing what people do when they have more. The old American thought, get all you can, can all you get, sit on the can, poison the rest, is not what Paul is teaching here. But that seems to be the mindset, even of churches.

It says in verse 15, "as it is written, 'He who gathered much did not have too much, and he who gathered little had no lack.'" In other words, some people's needs are smaller; some people's needs are greater. Now what's he talking about? Well, you have to go back to where he quotes from. He quotes out of the Old Testament. You have to go back to Exodus 16:18 and discover what he's talking about.

He's illustrating how God could be trusted to meet everyone's needs no matter how big or how small they are. In the Exodus passage the children of Israel were in the wilderness and they could not find enough food for themselves and so they cried out to God and God provided food from heaven which was called manna. Somebody told me the Hebrew word for manna—I didn't look it up so I'm telling you what they told me—means "what is it?" I love it. It's kind of like I feel when I go into a certain restaurant.

God provided manna. Manna was very thin; it was white flakes and they would fall on the ground every morning. Now God told the Israelites to gather as much as they needed only for that day. Now some gathered more than others did because their needs were greater and some gathered little, but one didn't have too much and one didn't have too little. It was exactly what they needed. But there were those who were probably on the committee that just felt like God might go to sleep the next day and forget what He said so He left some on the ground at night. He said, "Don't you leave any there." In other words, "You take what I give you, but don't leave any. Don't store it up."

But they decided they couldn't trust God for that. "I've got to make sure I've got enough for that rainy day that might come." Paul cites this lesson that since they didn't trust God and they left it there, they stored it up, they tried to keep it for the next day, they were rewarded the next day with a smelly, maggot-ridden mess. That's what they were rewarded with. But God said, "Don't you dare, you trust Me every day. Don't you get it and store it up and think that's going to carry you through anything. You live trusting Me. You don't have that other attitude."

You see, when Moses says in Exodus 16:19, "And Moses said to them, 'Let no man leave any of it until morning.' But they did not listen to Moses, and some left part of it until morning and it bred worms and became foul; and Moses was angry with them." See, God wants us to trust Him every day for whatever it is we need, whether it be small or large, but not to store it up and hoard it when we have it. Because when He gives you an abundance just like He had the Corinthians, that abundance simply means there is somebody in need and I need to take that abundance and make sure I'm hearing from God so that I can meet that need.

That's the way the body begins to operate, dependent upon one another. God will see to it that you'll never be in need if you're willing to give and do what He says. So our motive for giving is to trust God and do what He says, knowing that He's God, knowing He's Lord and also knowing He'll take care of us whatever need we have. And the measure for giving is God's material blessings that He's provided us with. And when we're in abundance we don't store it up for that rainy day.

Paul doesn't lay down any mathematical formula, because grace giving is not systematic. It's not an investment program. It's not always equal for everybody. Grace giving is never satisfied with just the minimum and I believe the minimum is the tithe. And I've had people get all over me, "You preach grace. How can you talk about the tithe? That's the Law." And I beg your pardon; Abraham gave tithes to Melchizedek four hundred years before the Law ever came into existence. It has nothing to do with the Law. It's a reflex of a person's heart. That's where giving starts. That's the minimum. But grace giving is never just satisfied with the minimum as the Macedonian church would tell us.

But Paul said it was a good place to start. Start with what you have. God's given you an abundance; use out of that abundance to take care of His people. Paul is emphasizing that we can trust God to be the One who balances the books of our giving. Let me ask you a question. How many of you have discovered that, first of all, it's God's money, not yours, so when you store it up, if God wants it He'll get it one way or the other? Have you discovered that? There's a lot of wisdom in this service and we're willing to admit it. It's God's money and if He needs it, He'll get it.

You say "I'm saving it for a rainy day." It's going to rain quicker than you thought. Just wait. And what he's trying to do is free these Corinthians from trying to hoard what is not even theirs to hoard; it's God's money and do with it what God says. You see, when people's hearts get right with God, they will give. You don't have to preach on it. But thank God we can so that people can better understand it and God puts it in His Word.

The protection in grace giving

The third thing he says is: the provision of grace giving: you can count on it. You give as He tells you to give and you'll always have your needs met. The precaution in grace giving: don't you ever, as a church or as an individual, hoard what God has given to you.

You have to always be willing to turn it loose, keep it in circulation. Then thirdly, the protection in grace giving.

Now when a gift is given and it's given to an individual by an individual, that's not what he's talking about here. But in the case of the Corinthians and the other churches that participated in this offering for the poor saints over in Jerusalem, there was quite a bit of money that came in and somebody was going to have to make sure that it was taken and dispersed properly; the accountability factor. Now Paul, in the remainder of chapter 8, begins to define the character of those who are to be trusted once the money has been given with making sure it's done God's way.

Now these folks mentioned in these verses were the ones in charge, like I said, that went along with Paul. God called people to go along with him, to assist him in making sure this offering did what it was intended to do. Now, you will note as we go through this the very deep spiritual character of these individuals. They might represent today in our churches a finance committee of a church. It might represent the finance committee of a mission's organization. Anybody who has been given the responsibility to come alongside God's called people to assist them in the burden God has placed upon their heart.

The people Paul mentions in these verses worked alongside Paul as almost a servant in a sense of helping to get the job done. Let's look at the characteristics. We take this from different individuals and I'm going to make a list of them. First of all, we note that they were believers who had a God-given burden to serve with, not over, God's leaders. Look at 8:16. "But thanks be to God, who puts the same earnestness on your behalf in the heart of Titus;" God quickened his heart, "For he not only accepted our appeal, but being himself very earnest, he has gone to you of his own accord."

Now, Titus was a man who had been deeply burdened by God to serve alongside Paul in a lot of things, but particularly this thing. Paul had given the appeal. The appeal came from God's man who was quickened with God's heart to give the appeal to God's people, and he wanted to come alongside him. The word "put," when it says, "God who puts the same earnestness on your behalf into the heart of Titus" is the word *didomi*. Now it means to "bestow, to give to somebody who would not have it otherwise." In other words, they wouldn't have this burden if God hadn't given it to them. To handle God's money you must have people who in their walk with Christ and in their surrender to Him absolutely, have heard the burden that He's placed upon their heart and is called alongside the leaders that are appointed to serve.

Paul says that Titus "not only accepted our appeal, but being himself very earnest, he has gone to you of his own accord." And that word means, it's the word *authairetos*, and it means "to do something spontaneously with no coercion whatsoever." Paul didn't say, "I was on the nominating committee and I put this old boy." He said God put him there. God broke his heart. God said, "You go alongside Paul and you assist him in this that I've put on his heart. Nobody twisted his arm."

The second characteristic we have comes from a man that we don't even know who he is. They had a burden for the total message of the gospel message. You see, this is so important. Verse 18, "And we have sent along with him the brother whose fame in the things of the gospel has spread through all the churches." So they knew who he was; all the churches knew who he was. When it says, "whose fame in the things of the gospel," you have to understand something, and I want to make sure we correct a thinking. Many people think to have a thing for the word gospel, it means "to reach the lost." No, no, that's just part of it. The gospel is the whole message, the "good news" of Jesus Christ, although a burden for lost souls is very definitely implied here.

It certainly denotes a sensitivity to the heart of God, but the things of the gospel include the message of Christ living in and through us. That's what Paul said to the Romans. "I can't wait to get to you, the believers there, to preach to you the gospel." So it's not just for the lost; it's also for the saved. So this individual wants to see the message of "Jesus, be Jesus in me and through me;" he wants to see that message get out as much as he does the salvation message of Christ coming to live in a person's heart. This is an individual who is totally on board with the message of the church. There's a sensitivity to Christ in every area, in every level of his life.

Thirdly, they had a desire to see God, not man, glorified in the giving of His people. Now that involves trusting Him when it's not there. Verse 19, "and not only this, but he has also been appointed by the churches to travel with us in this gracious work, which is being administered by us for the glory of the Lord Himself." The one purpose: God is only glorified when we give it all to Him and we allow Him then to be who He wants to be in us, "and to show our readiness."

This individual shared Paul's heart, didn't he? He wanted only Christ to be glorified in whatever giving it is, but in this specific gift, to the poor saints in Jerusalem. His purpose was just to honor Christ and because of this he had the confidence of the whole church. This old boy has no personal agenda whatsoever. He just wants to see Christ glorified and honored and therefore they said he needs to go with Paul. They have the same heart; they can walk together. You never want somebody handling money that's been given who isn't in sync with the purpose of seeing only Christ glorified and honored in the matters of money.

Fourthly, they had a reputation for honesty. Now everybody saw this about them. Verse 20 says, "taking 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. And we have sent with them our brother, whom we have often tested and found diligent in many things, but now even more diligent, because of his great confidence in you.” Now, these people around Paul were tested and proven people. Believers who would do nothing to discredit the ministry.

And then, fifthly, they had a cooperative spirit with Paul. You see, Paul didn't work for them and they didn't work for Paul, but they worked together with a common purpose: to carry out the burden that God had put on Paul's part. What churches do so often—and we're seeing this all over the country and it's well meaning; I can understand why they do it—they get successful business people who have done well in the world system of making money to take care of God's money in the church. And sometimes that's a wonderful thing if that's a believer who walks with God.

But the problem sometimes comes when you get somebody who does not have the kindred heart of the ones who are leading who have the burden. He does not have a kindred vision. He doesn't share the vision of the leadership that God's appointed. He has no kindred walk with the God-called pastors that God has sent. This is many, many times. I was just in a pastor's conference this past week. I heard from pastors, and one of the biggest things they were running into was the power struggle over money in their churches. They were made to feel like they were peons that worked for the committee instead of a team effort, understanding God's vision and able to walk in it.

And if you'll just look at these verses it tells us everything that we need to know. Thank God for the people we have here, I tell you. But, you see, what happens so often in churches: they make the mistake of not trusting God. They make the mistake of putting people who don't walk with God in positions that cause the whole thing to begin to crumble.

They're partners with God: partners with Paul, and partners with God. He says, “As for Titus, he is my partner and fellow-worker among you; as for our brethren, they are messengers of the churches, a glory to Christ.” And then he tells them all, “Therefore openly before the churches show them the proof of your love and of our reason for boasting about you;” by your giving, in other words. You can trust these people; now you show them my reason for boasting in you.

So is the message of grace giving found in Scripture in the 21st century? Absolutely; first of all, the provision in grace giving. You can't out give Him and if you give as God directs, you can count on the fact that your needs will be met. God will take care of your needs. The precaution in grace giving is don't ever hoard in the good times what God has given you. Keep it in circulation; don't make the mistake that the children of Israel did in the wilderness. And the third thing is the protection in grace giving. God has beautiful people that He puts alongside as a team to work with the people that He's put the burden upon so they can share the vision, share the burden, and God will be glorified in what takes place with what's been given.

I don't have an agenda in this. I didn't write this: I'm just trying to tell you what it says. But you know what my heart is? That more and more and more people get involved in it. When everybody all of a sudden feels it for themselves, sees the burden, sees the vision and they begin to work together, that's what it's all about. And then we can come together and rejoice until Jesus comes back at what He does in missions and what He does in every area that God has put on our heart and burdened us for. That's what it's all about.