

(As we continue our journey through the word of God let's make our way to)

2 Corinthians 8:1-24

“What Gives?”

Someone asked me one time that if I had to describe the love of God in 1 word what would it be? It took me about 5 seconds to utter the word, “Giving.” No doubt there are other words that could be used to describe God's love, but the love of God is a giving kind of love. It's not one that seeks to get after it's given, sort of an “I'll scratch your back if you scratch mine” kind of a love. **It gives seeking to get nothing in return; it gives not based upon the worthiness of the recipient because none of us are worthy to receive God's love. It's not self-seeking, it's others oriented, it just gives, it longs to bless.** Jesus said in that popular and often quoted passage in John, “*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.*” John 3:16 It was the love of God that *gave* Jesus Christ that He might lay down His life for the sins of the world. In the book of Romans we read, “...*God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*” Rom 5:8 **Which is kind of another way of saying the same thing, we were with out strength, ungodly, but because God *loved* us He *gave* His Son for us. We read in the book of Eph, “*Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.*” Eph 5:1-2 and Again, “*Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her,*” Eph 5:25 so over and over again throughout the scriptures God's love is placed on display in a tangible way through His giving. The principle seems obvious enough, God's love gives.**

and What Paul is going to put on the table before us today is that God's love at work in our lives will cause us to give as well. and There are various ways in which the love of God at work in our lives will cause us to give. There's the giving of *sacrifice*, sometimes we sacrifice to be pleasing to the Lord, perhaps there's something we want, or would otherwise do, but because we want to please the Lord we sacrifice that. and That's a light example of course, but sometimes we give through sacrifice, from little things all the way (for some) to their very lives. There is the giving of *sacrifice*, there's also the giving of *service*, we give to the Lord, and to others by the fact that we *serve* the Lord through serving others in His name, we get involved in the body. **Sign up to serve, or go out on the mission field, the spectrum of service is broad, but it's one way God's giving love is seen in us. So there's the giving of sacrifice, the giving of service, both of which are legit and honorable before the Lord, however the giving the Paul is talking about in Ch's 8-9 in the book of 2nd Cor is the giving of our *resources*, or let me make it real painfully plain, our money.**

and I have to confess that as a Pastor it's a bit awkward for me to stand here and take you through passages of scripture that deal with money. Perhaps you've never been here before and you're thinking, “Oh great, I finally tried this church and the 1st thing they talk about is money.” **Because of a minority in the body of Christ that's perverted the scriptures with regard to prosperity, or held “begathons” in the name of Jesus saying that, “God needs your money and apart from your donation God's work will go under.” It makes it real uncomfortable for all of us.**

However there's another part of me that's glad we're where we're at because I'd rather you know what *God's Word* has to say about your money as opposed to some tele-evangelist has to say about it. and Let me just say right from the beginning that God doesn't *need* your money, the beasts of the forest, the beasts of the fields, the cattle of 1,000 hillsides belong to Him, He uses gold for asphalt. We don't give because *He* has a need, but because *we* have a need. By nature we're selfish, stingy, tight-fisted and all about ourselves.

However God has called us to die to ourselves, to be other's oriented, He's looking to transform you day by day as by His Spirit into the image of His Son. and One way that's demonstrated is quite frankly in our giving. Remember, God's love gives, and as the love of God is growing in you, one of the very tangible ways it will display itself is in not just the intent to give, but in the action of giving.

As we come into Ch 8 here Paul is picking up on a subject that began a yr earlier with the Corinthians that still hadn't come to completion. He speaks of it in 1st Cor 16 as well. As you know at this time the believers in Jerusalem were absolutely devastated financially, they were going through incredibly tough times, famine, persecution, reduced to the most menial of jobs if they could find work at all. and Paul throughout his 3rd missionary journey (and before) had it on his heart to give the Gentile churches the opportunity to minister to the church in Jerusalem through sending a financial gift to them to bring relief to them in their time of need. and It would serve a # of purposes the least of which had to do with the money. It wasn't about the loot; it was about the fruit, giving is one evidence of fruit in our lives. **It would also bless the body in Jerusalem and it was Paul's heart that through this it would help bring down the wall that was there between Jews and Gentiles and that Jewish community would begin to embrace their Gentile brother's and sisters in a greater way. So the topic changes here from Christian living, to Christ giving.**

Vs1-2

The word "liberal" carries with it certain political connotations in our culture but here Paul is simply speaking of their overwhelming generosity. and We don't know exactly what the great trial of affliction was that he's speaking of, but the point is clear and that is that they were going through tough times themselves and they were living in deep poverty. Yet they gave generously to the work of God in ministering to the saints in Jerusalem. **Now when Paul speaks of the churches of Macedonia he's speaking of the church in Philippi, Berea, and Thessalonica. and What we discover throughout this Ch is that *giving* and *grace* go hand in hand. As a matter of fact he'll use those words interchangeably throughout this chapter, grace is a key word in Ch's 8 and 9, the word "money" isn't even mentioned.** It's called a "gift" which is the same word that's translated here in Vs 1 as "grace." It's what we might refer to as "grace-giving." We've learned over the past weeks and months that grace is way more than simply the substance that God uses to make up for the sin in my life. I sin, God's grace covers me. That view of God's grace really doesn't understand God's grace. **God's grace is an instructor, a teacher of righteousness, it teaches me to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, that I should live soberly, righteously and godly in this present age. God's grace is a teacher, it's also a giver; as I mentioned a minute ago by nature I'm a penny pinching miser, we all are, and if not you're a splurger but not on others, you like to splurge on yourself.**

Oh, some people who have more money than they know what to do with will give to a charity or something in order to feel as though they've done their civil duty, but even that is rooted in my wanting to feel good about myself and what I've done so that though it benefits others it's often a very self-serving act. **When I have a desire to give to the work or ways of God, not for my benefit but for the sake of others and the glory of God, that's a result of the love and grace of God at work in my life, it's not natural.**

Paul says, "We make known to you the *grace of God* bestowed on the churches of Macedonia:" their giving was a "grace" of God bestowed upon them, a testimony of God moving in their lives. Today the home church supports the missionary work; this was the missionary work supporting the home church. and Notice they gave even during tough times.

When times are tough for us we want to wait until things smooth out, then maybe we can give. Yet we notice that the churches in Macedonia were giving while going through a great trial of affliction. and Not out of their abundant resources, but out of their deep poverty.

Vs3-4

This blows me away. Where it speaks of them "imploring with much urgency that they would receive the gift," (or the grace) it means that they were begging, pleading for the privilege to share in the work of God through what they had to give. You get the impression that perhaps Paul was trying to hold them back, "You guys have it rough enough, just be blessed and don't worry about it." and They were like, "Paul, we're pleading with you, please let us be apart of this." I'm not sure if there has ever been another time like this in the history of the church whereby the congregation was pleading with the minister to take up an offering. ;o) "Please let us give," isn't the general cry of the heart of man!

and Notice Paul says that they gave according to their ability, and then he says it was beyond their ability, and then a critical statement, "They were freely willing." So it wasn't constraint, it wasn't guilt motivated; they gave of their own free will. and This is the way we're to give, of our own free will, not by guilt, constraint, compulsion, or some other manipulative technique. When Paul says that they gave according to their ability what that means is that as far as a literal dollar amount it probably wasn't much. They didn't have much to begin with, they didn't put an offering on their credit card, or put something in hawk so that they could give, they gave according to their ability. **But when he speaks of giving *beyond* their ability, this is when it's reaching down into the heart of not *what* they gave, but *how* they gave, the position of their heart in giving. Jesus illustrated this same idea one day to His disciples. Turn to Mark Ch 12:41-44**

So in a sense she gave according to her ability, 2 mites (less than 2 cents). Yet at the same time that was everything she had so in reality she gave beyond her ability, more (in proportion) than anyone else. and God noted that, you see the key in understanding this passage is found back in Vs 41. Jesus was observing not "what" the people gave, but "how" the people gave. That is, He was discerning the motive of their heart in giving. and He's still doing that, He's looking not so much to the amount, but the motive in our giving. **People like to get caught up on a percentage, "How much do I have to give to make God happy" the answer is everything.**

He wants all of you, not just 10% of you. and Once you resolve that you belong to the Lord in whole, He has *all* of you, then you won't be as snared by percentages. It's all God's, you see if you make a million dollars this year and give 100,000, that's great, but it didn't really cost you anything, it was no big deal. But if you make 10,000 this yr and give a thousand, that was a huge deal in your heart before the Lord. You see giving is to be proportionate (and I'm getting ahead of myself) but we're to give according to what we have. For some 10% may almost be sin, because for them to give 25-30% wouldn't be a big deal. For others 5% may be huge, God is looking to the heart. Now the NT does mention the tithe favorably if done with a right heart, but it doesn't teach the tithe dogmatically/legalistically, I think it's a good place to start (if you can). **But grace elevates us beyond the law, we're not limited to the tithe, we're to give in proportion to our prosperity. To whom much is given, much is required, the rich *should* be giving more, the poor have no shame in a small gift, because God is searching *how* we give, our motive in giving.**

Vs5

This is one of those Vs that should be underlined in your bible because we note the proper priority. The reason that they were able to give to the work of God so generously was because they'd given themselves 1st to the Lord whole-heartedly.

If I truly give *myself* to God, I'm not going to have any problem giving of my *substance* to God. If we give ourselves to God we'll have no problem giving *of* ourselves for others. Because you can't love God and ignore the needs of others; John said, "...*whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?*" 1 John 3:17 So we give ourselves to God 1st, then the giving in any other capacity will follow as the natural overflow of His work in us both to will and to do for His good pleasure.

Vs6-7

"You guys are excelling in all these other areas of grace, don't fall short in this one, it's time to follow through and finish what was committed to a yr ago." Notice serving is no substitute for giving. "Well I serve in the children's ministry and that sorta makes up for the fact I don't give." Paul noted all the gifts that they were abounding in and blessing the body by, but that didn't justify falling short in this area. and We see Paul speak of this gift as "grace" 2 more times in Vs 6-7. and Even in that, the using of the word "grace" to describe financial giving speaks to us of a few things. We've mentioned already that the ability to give (meaning He's *given* to us so that we have something and are able to give) and the heart to give is the result of God's grace. **Giving is the result of God's grace in you, when you see a believer who's truly generous, don't think they're simply trying to suck up to the ministry in order to make yourself feel better about being miserly, a great work of God's grace has been done in that person's life. and The giving as the result of God's grace should have the fingerprints of God's grace, meaning when we give out of the overflow of grace we give freely.** We give expecting nothing in return, we give generously, and our motive isn't based upon the worthiness of the recipient (though we want to make sure we give to above board operations) but God doesn't give to us because we're so great, but it's simply the overflow of His goodness into our lives. He just has a heart to bless. He's not looking to be paid back, He doesn't look at it like "Now you owe Me." It's a free "no strings attached" gift. It's grace.

Vs8

You see here it is. Your gift isn't *commanded*, you're not under law. Giving by force is called taxation, God isn't taxing you. But check it out, though it's not a *tax*, it is a *test*, did you see that there? This is heavy but I want you to see that these aren't my words, the scripture is saying here that one way that the sincerity of your love is demonstrated tangibly is in the way you give personally/proportionately to the Lord. We'd like to think that we can love apart from giving, the Word of God takes issue with that. We just read in 1st John that if we shut up our heart from a brother in need, how can the love of God abide in us? Jesus said, "... *where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*" Matt 6:21 In other words you can see where a man's heart is, where his priority lies based upon the way he spends his money. All the time buying the best golf clubs, new cars, fill in the blank, if you love something you have no problem kicking down the cash for it. So what I give to the Lord, and the way that I follow through on my commitment to give to the Lord is in a certain sense a valid test of the genuine nature of my love for the Lord. That's heavy isn't it? John said, "*My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.*" 1 John 3:18

Something else we see here is that Paul had no problem making an open comparison in how the Corinthians gave compared to the Macedonians. Now don't misunderstand it wasn't a fundraising pressure tactic, but he was able to point to them as a model to show what sincere love and a genuine passion for the things of God looked like practically. Now he didn't point to people specifically, but to a congregation generally and say, "They give out of sincere love." Jesus was doing the same basic thing with regard to the widow and her 2 mites. So again it's not the amount, it's the proportion, are we giving out of the abundance, or out of the substance of who we are? He has another example in Vs 9 of "grace-giving".

Vs9

and Of course here we have the gospel in a nutshell, (the word "grace" in this Vs referring to the way that Jesus "gave" of Himself). He was rich, but for our sakes became poor that we through His poverty might become rich. The love of Jesus was demonstrated in a practical way in that He *gave*. When was He rich? This is a reference to the pre-incarnate Christ, Paul is pointing out subtly, yet very definitely the deity of Christ. Before He added humanity to His deity, wealth wouldn't even be an adequate description of His resources, gates of pearl, streets of gold, precious gems forming the foundations of His city, He was rich in every sense of the word. Yet for our sakes He entered into humanity, born in a borrowed barn, preached from a borrowed boat, rode into Jerusalem on a borrowed donkey, ate the last supper in a borrowed room upon a borrowed table, and was buried in a borrowed tomb. He laid His wealth aside, even to the point of becoming sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. and I don't want to over exaggerate the poverty of Jesus, (He didn't starve) but He was very clear though foxes had holes and the birds of the air had their nests, He had nowhere to lay His head. Jesus gave of Himself *completely* that we might know Him and live with Him throughout *eternity*. In Christ we see the "giving" heart of God, there was nothing He wasn't willing to give in order that He might redeem you, forgive you, and give to you everlasting life. and There's no doubt more to be gleaned in there, Jesus becoming poor for us that through Him we might become rich.

That is, He took our penalty, that we might enjoy His privileges, He inherited our just penalty, that we through Him might inherit the riches of everlasting life, the privilege of sonship, becoming as it were the sons and daughters of God. (We need to move on)

Vs10-11

Put simply there comes a time when we have to put feet to our faith. If God is leading us we eventually need to quit praying about it and get busy doing it. God rebuked Moses for praying when they were there before the Red Sea and the Egyptians were closing in on them. In essence He said, "Now isn't the time to pray Moses, it's time to act." and Paul is telling them here that it's time to follow through on their intentions from a year ago. Because *intentions apart from actions amount to nothing*, it's said of some that when it comes to giving and getting behind the work of God that they'll stop at nothing. Unfortunately that's true of too many; they stop at *nothing*, they give *nothing*, they may have great intentions, but it's never followed up by actions. If you start something, finish it, if you say you'll do it, do it, if you plan on giving it, give it.

Vs12

You see if there's not a readiness, a willingness, then don't give at all (we'll get into that more next week). "If there is 1st a willing mind" it's accepted. If you give begrudgingly you may as well keep it because according to the record of heaven God doesn't accept it, or note it. and Notice it's accepted according to what one has, not according to what you don't have. Or to understand that another way God doesn't desire you to go broke giving to Him. and This takes us back to the idea of the tithe, what does God want me to give? He wants you to give according to what you have, proportionate to how you've been blessed. Perhaps you're saying, "I have so many bills I can't give." I would say you have so many bills how can you *not* give, but if I selfishly go out and charge up credit cards, car payments, a house beyond my means, and do all this spending on myself and then have nothing leftover; I can't say I have nothing for God. I have to say I've been a poor steward and have squandered God's blessing upon myself, and I should repent and manage my funds in such a way that I can be a blessing to the body of Christ.

But Paul isn't saying that anyone should go broke at the expense of giving to someone else, notice.

Vs13-15

So he's not saying that we're to coddle laziness or an unwillingness to work, but that we're to be willing to meet legitimate needs. Someone can't pay their water bill, but they smoke 3 cartons of cigarettes a month doesn't need my help, they need to reconsider their priorities. But the point here is that if I have excess and the Lord reveals to me a legitimate need, I need to be willing to meet that need. The bible says, "*Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.*" 1 Tim 6:17-19 It's not sin to be rich, and it's not more spiritual to be poor, it's not sin to be poor, and more spiritual to be rich. The point here is gather what you need, share what you can, and don't try to hoard God's blessings.

When the Israelites sought to hoard the manna what happened? It putrefied, if God is blessing your life, then let God be glorified through your life by the way you bless others. and Again, having a savings account, providing for your family, leaving an inheritance for your children, all of that's wise and none of it's a problem. But our priorities have to be clear, we give ourselves 1st to the Lord, (which prioritizes our family and all of that) and then to others by the will of God.

Vs16-21

Kind of ironic that the brother who was famous (or known) throughout all the churches isn't reported by name, they all knew him, we don't have a clue who it was. But we do know he had a heart for the lost, his praise was in the gospel. I think that when it comes to looking for people to help a ministry manage its finances (putting a board together and all of that) sharp business minds are great, but men whose praise is in the gospel are greater. I like the combination, but you've got to have that guy who helps keep the focus on the main thing. Getting the gospel out there, doing ministry, we're a "non-profit" organization, it's not about how much we can save (though there's a degree of wisdom in that) but it's about how many souls can we save, and how can these funds be invested accordingly? Taking care of the body, and reaching out to the lost.

Paul was careful to safeguard his integrity when it came to money matters. He didn't touch it personally, he had 3-4 other guys handle that stuff. So that he couldn't be accused of receiving the money and then scoring a sweet new chariot in the next town, that which was given for ministry, went to the ministry. He didn't just say, "Hey I'm accountable to God, it's none of your business." He provided honorable things in the sight of God *and* men, kept good records, had a trail of receipts, could be easily accounted for, above board. and When you give, you want to make sure that the ministry you give to is above board, accountable, providing honorable things in the sight of God and men. If you give here, our record books are open, we've got nothing to hide in our files, it's your business anytime you want to know. If you don't give here, it's none of your business and we have no conviction to satisfy anyone's self absorbed curiosity. But Paul took the necessary steps to avoid being rightfully accused of financial impropriety, very important for any ministry.

Vs22-24

That word "proof" speaks of a "manifestation made by an act." It takes us back to the test of the sincerity of our love, the proof is in the pudding. Put your money where your mouth is, that's what Paul is saying. Don't just speak of your love, show your love, it's more than intentions, its actions. What gives? The overflow of God's love and grace working *into* and *out through* your life.

Prayer Points:

God You've given us a lot to contemplate, and meditate on today. We're so easily able to come up with reasons why we can't give, but You've shown us that true love (Your love) overrules them all, that Your grace is a giving grace. Father we desire to have the fullness of Your love and grace moving and stirring in our lives, help us not to resist Your work in us, but that we would die to self, that we might live for You. Help us to be obedient to Your promptings on our heart. Whether it's sacrifice, service, or sharing our resources, whichever area or perhaps all 3 that You would challenge us on, help us to heed Your voice and submit to Your direction.

We've talked a lot about giving today, but I want you to know 1st and foremost that before you worry about giving anything to God, His concern is that you receive what He wants to give to you. For God so loves you that He's given His only begotten Son *for* you, so that should you believe on Him you'll not perish but have everlasting life. and It doesn't matter where you've been or what you've done, how young you are, how old you are God loves you, longs to forgive you. It's not the well who need a physician it's the sick, it's not the righteous that need a Savior, it's the sinner, and we've all sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Jesus didn't come to call the righteous, but the sinner to repentance. So today if you hear His voice, don't harden your heart, open your heart to Jesus Christ let Him in, receive the forgiveness of sin, and everlasting life.