

**“The Grace of Giving”**  
**2 Corinthians 8:7-15**  
**Holiday Island Presbyterian Church**  
**July 1, 2018**

<sup>7</sup>But since you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in the love we have kindled in you—see that you also excel in this grace of giving.

<sup>8</sup>I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others. <sup>9</sup>For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.

<sup>10</sup>And here is my judgment about what is best for you in this matter. Last year you were the first not only to give but also to have the desire to do so. <sup>11</sup>Now finish the work, so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it, according to your means.<sup>12</sup>For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what one does not have.

<sup>13</sup>Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality. <sup>14</sup>At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. The goal is equality, <sup>15</sup>as it is written: “The one who gathered much did not have too much, and the one who gathered little did not have too little.”<sup>[b]</sup>

**INTRODUCTION:**

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**Let me ask you a question this morning to get you thinking:**

**What do the following all have in common?**

**a kitchen timer, a post-it note,**

**and a string wrapped around a finger.**

**Well, obviously the answer is they are all “reminders.”  
They help us remember  
to do the important things we want to do.**

**And if we set a reminder on your phone,  
we are notified when it is time to do those things.  
At our age, reminders can be very helpful;  
and prevent some unneeded embarrassment.**

**Doctors’ offices call us to remind us of appointments;  
sometimes I get a postcard as a reminder.**

**The sermon today will be a “reminder.”  
Just as a person cannot live a full and healthy life  
without some sort of balanced diet,  
a church without a balanced diet of spiritual matters  
will not be healthy and may wither.**

**So, on the spiritual menu today is: the grace of giving.**

**The short summary of Paul’s message to the Corinthian church is:**

**You are good and faithful people. Now show your spiritual maturity by continuing to show your spiritual maturity through your gracious giving. I (Paul) am not commanding it; I want you to do so out of your understanding of the grace Christ showed towards us.**

**Let your gift be in accordance with what you have; not according to what you do not have... “At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. The goal is equality. As it is written: “The one who gathered much did not have too much, and the one who gathered little did not have too little.”**

**That sounds a lot like the distribution of wealth, doesn't it?  
Some sort of spiritual Robin Hood approach to giving.**

**Well, put aside your political beliefs for a moment  
and see what it is Paul is trying to say.**

### **GIVING AS A SPIRITUAL RESPONSE:**

**For one thing, Paul says:**

**“the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according  
to what one does not have.”**

**Paul expects the giving**

**to be out of the abundance of what one has.**

**The size of the gift is relatively immaterial.**

**It is the *willingness* to give that counts.**

**When Paul speaks of “equality”**

**he is not talking about the redistribution of wealth.**

**Paul is saying that the chronic poverty in Jerusalem  
could one day be reversed.**

**Then the Christians in Jerusalem**

**would then be in a position to help the Corinthians.**

**Paul is saying to the Corinthians,**

**since you are not facing persecution**

**nor are you deep into desperate financial straits,**

**you should willingly contribute to those who are.**

**As you have been abundantly blessed, you should give abundantly.**

**CORINTHIAN RESPONSE:**

**A normal – and probable – response to Paul’s request would be:**

**Why is Paul putting a financial burden upon US  
so that others can be free of that burden?  
How is that fair?**

**By the language Paul used, he is making it clear  
that generosity is considered on the same spiritual level  
as speech, knowledge, faith and love  
as an expression of the divine grace given from God.**

**Paul is quick to point out  
that the Corinthians are already excelling in the other areas,  
now it is time of them to exhibit the grace of giving.**

**This is a good place to pause and define grace.**

**The simplest definition of biblical grace is this:**

**It is the *unmerited* favor God show to humanity.  
It is something that is freely given  
out of the love God has for us.**

**We do *absolutely nothing* to deserve it.**

**It is God’s gift to us.**

**Paul is saying that the Corinthians should be giving  
with that same kind of grace:**

**the offering to the Jerusalem Christians is not earned;  
it is a loving response.**

**Even though the Gospel was to be freely offered,  
it is never free to offer it.**

**Missionaries, ministers and ministries needed to be funded.  
And they are to be funded by members of the church itself  
and not the state.**

**Paul would even frown upon ministry being funded by yard sales  
and begging from the world.**

**According to Paul,  
God wants holy money sanctified by holy men and women  
who were called by God into His church.**

**Now, before you start thinking that I am saying  
that we shouldn't have spaghetti dinners and other fundraisers  
trust me – that is NOT what I am saying.**

**However, those kinds of fundraisers should *supplement* our giving  
and not *substitute* for our giving.**

**Once a year,  
the Greek Orthodox church in Cedar Rapids, IA  
hosts a Greek food festival.**

**They cook and bake and then sell their wares to the public  
to help pay for their own ministry –  
- the pastor's salary, the building maintenance, etc.**

The rest of the year,  
there is little or no interaction with the city.  
They just ask the city to fund their ministry  
then use the proceeds for themselves.

Paul is enlisting the Corinthians  
to help fund the ministries of the Jerusalem Church  
which was in dire need of help  
because of the persecutions they were facing.

**CONCLUSION:**

I don't think Paul is calling the prosperous Corinthians to tithe.  
Otherwise, Paul would have been specific about that.  
And there is no compulsion to give.

Paul makes it clear it is a *request* not at commandment.

Instead, Paul is *asking* to people to give graciously  
and thereby demonstrate their faith with their checkbooks.

I also don't think Paul was giving us advice  
on how to respond to someone  
who calls the church on a cell phone,  
drives to the church in a newer model car,  
is dressed decently and asks for money,  
usually so they can continue their journey  
from one place to another.

Paul is not asking for the Corinthians to help *individuals*,  
Paul is seeking aid for the Jerusalem Church.  
Those who are seeking to follow Jesus at a high cost.

**In other words,**

**Paul is not trying to raise money to aid individuals,  
Paul is raising money for a mission project.**

**If there is one thing that sets this church apart**

**from other churches in this area - and others I have served –  
- it is the generosity of the people to fund mission work.**

**We are quick to help the people of the Ozarks who are in need.**

**In that endeavor, you have been very faithful!**

**But . . . how much are we doing to help churches**

**which are facing persecution around the world?**

**Are we building churches -**

**- either in the US or foreign countries?**

**Are we sending members on mission trips?**

**I think you'll agree,**

**we could do better.**

**Because the Christians in Jerusalem**

**have accepted Jesus as the Messiah,**

**they are being persecuted for their betrayal of Judaism.**

**They are being cut off from gainful employment,**

**they are severely discriminated against**

**and are living in dire poverty.**

**Paul is addressing Christians to come to the aid**

**of other Christians who are doing their best**

**to live faithful lives devoted to Christ.**

**Top make his point,**

**Paul turns to Christ as an example of gracious giving.**

**There is no greater example of gracious giving than Christ.**

**He gave up His place in heaven**

**to come and be among us – to teach us, to lead us –**

**- to eventually offer Himself as a sacrifice for us.**

**Christ is the finest example of boundless generosity**

**And His sacrificial giving stands as the example of God's love.**

**Just think how much greater**

**the witness of the church today would be**

**if only we would open ourselves to this truth.**

**It is so much easier – and tempting - to spend the Church's money**

**to add on to the church building**

**than to build a building for a poor church**

**which is meeting in a tent.**

**When we don't remind ourselves of our connection**

**to Christians around the world**

**and the circumstances under which they exist,**

**we have lost the sense of connection;**

**and abandoned our call to be one body.**

**We are not Christians in isolation –**

**- we are members of the body of Christ.**

**The blood that saved us from eternal damnation**

**also saved the Christian in Bosnia,**

**the Christian in El Salvador,**

**the Christian in China.**

**Today, we will break the bread and bless the cup  
and remember – *remember* – the limitless love God has for us  
and showed us through the sacrificial death of Jesus.**

**We will celebrate the Lord's Supper without fear of reprisals,  
arrests and torture for what we believe and practice.**

**We will do so in a nice church building,  
that is air conditioned and comfortable.  
With nice chairs to sit on and great music to inspire us.**

**But . . . we will not be the *only* Christians  
to celebrate the Lord's Supper this day.**

**There will be those in other countries  
who will break the most meager loaf of bread,  
and lift a chipped cup  
to celebrate the Lord's Supper.**

**All the while hoping – praying –  
- for safety until the service is over.**

**There will be those who are grateful  
to have a pastor who can meet with them  
once every month or so because they cannot afford  
to pay even a part-time pastor.**

**There will be those south of the Equator where it is winter now  
who will be gathered and shivering in the cold  
because they do not have an adequate building  
in which to hold their services.**

**It is important for us to take time to remember  
how truly blessed we are  
to live in a free country  
and to be as prosperous as we are.**

**That reminder is a safeguard for us.**

**It's like guardrails on the highway  
or the little rumble strips in the road –  
when we go over them they remind us,  
get back into the center of the road!**

**If Paul were to go one step further –**

**- which he didn't, but I will –  
he would have said something like:**

**There you have it.**

**Now what are you going to do about it?**

**PRAYER:**

**God of all blessings, we thank you that we can gather here in this wonderful Church and *freely* worship You as You deserve. Give us the courage and means to help all other Christians enjoy the same comfort and freedom. In the Grace-filled Name of Jesus. Amen.**