



GENEROSITY IN COMMUNITY

2 Corinthians 8-9

If you have a Bible, and I hope you do, let me invite you to open with me to 2 Corinthians 8. I thank God for the privilege of being a part of this body of Christ. I thank God for you. I thank God for Christ in you and His generosity and His love that is expressed all over you, all across this faith family. That was just such a snapshot; you could see as fast as those screens were going, too much information and that wasn't all. However, there are so many evidences of grace all across this faith family and demonstrations of the glory of God, so praise God for His work in this faith family.

Tonight, I want to encourage us, as we give of ourselves, to give more of ourselves. I want to challenge us to give more of ourselves based on 2 Corinthians 8 and 9. Coming up on three years for me as pastor here, and tonight is the first time where we have specifically addressed, in the Word, giving to the church. Now, we've talked about giving in different capacities, being followers of Christ who are giving, but we've not talked about giving in the sense of tithing, which we'll talk about a little bit later on.

However, that next sentence in our church covenant is an important one, and it deals with giving. Scripturally, it's part of what it means to be the church. When it says at the bottom of the church covenant, you see there, it's bolded, "We will give cheerfully and generously to the support of the church, the relief of the poor, and the spread of the gospel through all nations." 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 being the primary texts there, which we are going to look at tonight.

I'm a bit hesitant though, even diving into this, because I know that there are likely people across this room with some very serious hurts, some serious needs that you bring into this gathering tonight. You might be thinking, "Oh, great, we are going to talk about giving, walking through this. We're going to talk about tithing or giving to the church." I hope that, what we've seen, even tonight, this is why we give, because of hurts, real hurts in the body and not just in the body because...and this is what we keep in front of us all the time...there are four and a half, at least, four and a half billion people in the world today, who are without Christ and, if nothing changes, will spend an eternity without Christ.

So, how do we give for the glory of Christ among those masses and then among those impoverished? Over a billion people in the world are living in absolute poverty. 700 million in slums, 500 million on the verge of starvation today, 200 million children exploited for labor, and I want to encourage and challenge us when it comes to giving tonight. I found a research project that had been done at Stanford, and this is what they found. If church members in America gave at least ten percent of their income to the church...so, basically did what is commonly associated with the tithe...if church members in America gave a tithe, a tenth of their income, in two years time, the church could eliminate global starvation and malnutrition, provide education for every child on the earth, and provide universal access to clean water and sanitation in two years.

Now, obviously tonight, we don't have a lot of control over what all the churches in the United States are doing or what members of churches are doing in other places, but we do have an opportunity to say tonight, "God...God, use us and we are going to trust that, when we give ourselves to giving cheerfully and generously according to what Scripture teaches, that you can use us, will use us, to make a significant dent in the lost and poor population in the world. We want our lives, and we want this church to count for the glory of Christ in all nations." So, I want us to see how that affects our giving. What does it look like to be a generous church according to Scripture?

Money and the Christian ...

Now, you've got at the top of your notes there, "Money and the Christian". I just want to remind you, before we even dive in, that the overarching principle that Jesus taught that is echoed throughout Scripture when it comes to money and the Christian. Just a reminder, when it comes to money and the Christian, our hearts follow our money; our hearts follow our money. Matthew 6:21, Jesus says, "*Where your treasure is, there your...*" What will be? "*...your heart will be also.*" Our money signals where our hearts are. The way we spend our money, our checkbooks are sure indicators of our spiritual condition. It's a humbling truth, a humbling verse, Matthew 6:21. You want to see where people's hearts are, look at where they're spending.

This is humbling for us in the immediate culture we live in. Right around this building, you look at where we spend out money: Big houses, nice cars, nice clothes, entertainment, stuff, inundated with stuff, and we are showing our spirituality. We are revealing a heart issue. This is gripping for me, individually and the family.

We've got so far to go, even in the family I lead, and then, when it comes to this faith family, probably the most humbling facet for pastoring for me, if not the most humbling...there are a few things that are humbling...but one of the most humbling facets of pastoring for me is the church budget, because we have so far to go as a faith family. We are still spending so much on ourselves and just can't change that overnight. It is a process of chipping away year after year, and I pray more and more and more, but this is...I think we are going to see in the Word tonight, that if we really want to impact four and a half billion people in the world, 25,000 people today who will die either of starvation or preventable disease...if our lives are going to count for what we just sang about, then that means massive changes in our hearts that are reflected in the way that we spend our money. So, our hearts follow our money.

Generosity and the Church ...

What happens when our hearts are set on what God's heart is set on? That's where we come to 2 Corinthians 8 and 9. We are going to read two passages. We're not going to read the whole two chapters, two passages in just a second here. The setup is, when Paul writes this letter, 2 Corinthians, he's on his third missionary journey. He's going to Corinth. What had happened is, earlier, he had written the book of 1 Corinthians, a letter to the church of Corinth, and at the end of that book, 1 Corinthians 16:1-4, what he had done is he had told them that he wanted to take up a collection for the impoverished church in Jerusalem, the impoverished saints in Jerusalem.

So, he told them, "I'm going to take up an offering", and they expressed an eagerness about that. The only problem is, time went by, and they had not collected; they were not giving. Paul was traveling to other places and was collecting money. We are going to see him reference how he had collected money from the churches in Macedonia, which were very poor churches. We'll look at that in a second. So, what he's doing here in these two chapters is he is reminding them to give.

These two chapters are so insightful because they show us how Scripture exhorts us to give. I think we see a much different picture here in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 than we see in the world. How the world tells us to give, and even how we think of giving in the church, is radically different from what Paul is going to show us here in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9.

How does Scripture teach us to give? What we're going to do is we are going to read two passages, one in 2 Corinthians 8 and one in 2 Corinthians 9 and, basically, the first one, 1 Corinthians 8:1-9 is an example. Paul points to these churches in Macedonia...we're going to see him kind of lift them up as an example. The second passage we are going to look at is 2 Corinthians 9:6-15, and what this over here is, basically, some truths based on this example.

So, we are going to be all over the place going back and forth just turning between these two chapters, but to try to get this picture, let's camp out on these two passages. 2 Corinthians 8:1, Paul writes,

And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints. And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will. So we urged Titus, since he had earlier made a beginning, to bring also to completion this act of grace on your part. But just as you excel in everything - in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us - see that you also excel in this grace of giving.

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

Okay, go over to the next chapter, 2 Corinthians 9; that's the example, Macedonian church. Go to 2 Corinthians 9:6. He says,

Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you so that in all things, at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. As it is written:

"He has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor; his righteousness endures forever."

Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.

This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of God's people but it is overflowing in many expressions in thanks to God. Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, men will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else. And in their prayers for you, their hearts will go out to you because of the surpassing grace God has given you. Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!

We give out of an abundance of grace.

Okay, so how does Scripture teach us to give, and how is that different from how we think of giving in the world, or even in the church? First, we give out of an abundance of grace. Scripture teaches us to give out of an abundance of grace. Come back to 2 Corinthians 8. Paul uses nine different words to describe the gift the Macedonians gave, but by far, the most central term there, and it's all over these two chapters, is "grace".

You look in...you might circle it...look in 2 Corinthians 8:1. "*Now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has giving the Macedonian churches.*" Down in verse seven, last part of verse seven, when he's saying, "...excel in all these things...", he says, "*See that you also excel...*" Let's circle it there. "...in the grace of giving." Giving itself is a grace, the grace of giving.

Then, you get down to verse 9, "*For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ...*" Notice that giving according to Scripture is not motivated by guilt. Giving is motivated by grace. Paul is not trying to pour a guilt trip on them with this example; he is showing them a portrait of grace and true giving, according to the New Testament, is giving that flows from grace.

I hesitate to even throw out some of those statistics, some of those numbers when it comes to losses and poverty. Those are realities; I think we need to see them. I think we need to see our lives in their light, but we are not motivated to give because we feel bad. If that's our motivation, it will last a little while. It will go nowhere as deep as grace giving goes.

Let me show you the difference grace makes in giving. These churches in Macedonia were, when you see them described up in verse two, "severe trial", "extreme poverty". Macedonia includes places like Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, these were impoverished places to begin with. They were ravaged by war, plundered by the Romans. There was high taxation there, abject poverty and that was just normal. You add on the fact that you're a follower of Christ in that area...we see in Acts, when Paul would go to these areas in Macedonia, there was severe persecution.

So, basically, these are...it's not just poverty; it's extreme poverty. These are people who are beggars. They have nothing, maybe even partly due to the fact that they are following Christ, but where they live, living in total poverty, and look at what verse 2 says: "*Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in generosity.*" That is so confusing to me. Put those words together, go back and forth, do you see that? "Severe trial", "overflowing joy", "extreme poverty", "rich generosity"; how does that work?

Okay, let's do the math here. Macedonian churches, severe trial plus extreme poverty equals overflowing joy and rich generosity. That's weird. Severe trial, extreme poverty, you put those together, that's a recipe for joy and generosity. How do you get from those two elements to these two elements? The answer is grace. It's grace. That's how you get from one to the next. That's the picture. What Paul is doing is he is writing a letter to a church that is not impoverished like Macedonia, a church that is more well off, and what he is saying is, "Look at these brothers and sisters and how deeply, how sacrificially they gave." It's a picture, not to make you feel bad, but to make you look at the power of grace and to think about what the power of grace would look like in a church that is more well off.

So, let me try to do, in a sense, what Paul is doing in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 pastorally here. I remember...I remember the first time I was in a house church in Asia, underground house church setting. It was two weeks spending time studying the Word together with these poor farmers with little to nothing, and even their studying twelve hours a day during those two weeks was economically killing them because they were not out in their fields, but they wanted the Word. So, we get to the end of that time, and they start passing around offering. They want to give an offering to me for teaching them the Word.

I told the main leader, I said, "No, like, you're not going to give an offering to me. I don't want, certainly don't need an offering from these folks." He said, "No, we are going to give you an offering. It is the grace of God that causes us to give. We teach our people to give, and they believe it's important according to the gospel to give, so they are going to give you an offering." So, I walk away with, what in dollars was meager, but was a wealth in that context.

Two months after hurricane Katrina, and our house going under water in New Orleans, where Heather and I were living, and I was teaching at the seminary there. Go to Indonesia, two months after the hurricane, and I'm teaching in an Indonesian seminary, and they find out what had happened in New Orleans. I'm sharing different things, and they find out. Now, this is a country that a couple of years prior, you know, had seen a quarter of a million people wiped off the face of the planet, just like that. If you've been to other countries, particularly those who have been hit by natural disasters, you know, there were all kinds of, obviously, all kinds of criticism how the U.S. government handles Katrina. We have no clue what it is like to be left alone when it comes to natural disaster as our brothers and sisters do, particularly in the two-thirds world. When a natural disaster hits, there's no support network for that. It's decades before anything begins to happen in some contexts.

So, here in Indonesia, in a context with rural pastors from impoverished places in Indonesia, they come together, and they hear about the need in New Orleans, and they say, "We are taking up an offering", and they start giving. They start sacrificing, and I come back to New Orleans, to the seminary, with a gift.

Even last week, check this out. Last week, I was in...I was preaching at a student leadership conference, and some of these students heard about what we do with "Secret Church", and how we take biblical teaching and translate it into different languages in the world and then have that recorded in audio in those languages and then go into house churches or different places around the world and give, basically, free iPods, mp3 players, whatever they are, just loaded with biblical teaching to encourage the church there.

So, they heard about that, and they heard I was going to Cuba this next week, and so they started saying, "Well, let's take a collection together to send some iPods to Cuba." So, these teenagers started getting their money together, which is great because you know it's like mom and dad's money, for the most part. So, bingo, like, mom and dad might not have

given it, but these guys are eager. So, they're giving it, and they collected \$2500. These students just start coming together. I mean, I come back with a money bag full of \$1 bills and, like, quarters that totaled \$2500 and some; some didn't have money, cash to give, so they just started coming up to me with iPods, and it was like, "We should have had an altar call and just had everybody come and lay down your iPod on the stairs, like, if you really love Jesus, this is what..." However, that's what they were doing. We never did that, but they were coming up. Man, even when I was leaving, a guy came up and said, "Hey, take this iPod and give it too." What a picture there!

So, I want to say to you tonight, in the same vein of 2 Corinthians 8 and 9: If our brothers and sisters in house churches, by the grace of God in Indonesia...by the grace of God, and students by the grace of God, with very little resources, are digging sacrificially to how they can give to the glory of Christ and His kingdom, then how can we, in the wealthiest county in Alabama, dig sacrificially by the same grace of Christ that is in us, and let that overflow to the glory of God?

That's the picture. Let's give out of the abundance of grace. What if we did that? What if we gave in the same proportion in which they gave? What if we gave in the same proportion in which they gave? That leads into, okay, when we give out of abundance of grace that means we give willingly. This is what grace does. Grace in our hearts causes us to give willingly. Listen to verses 3 and 4, this is great. Paul says, *"For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability."* People with nothing, giving beyond their ability, entirely on their own. Listen to verse 4, *"...they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints."* They begged to give. Like, when do Christians, like, come together and say, "We want the offering now. Like, please can we pass the baskets, like, multiple times in the service. We are pleading with you for the privilege of giving. Let's give, like, four or five times during the service. We want to give." That's the picture here. People in poverty saying, "We want to give."

This is the effect of grace. Notice that all of these things, because it is driven by grace, grace in our hearts, this is not natural giving. This is a supernatural kind of giving that begs. Grace makes beggars out of the people of God. People who are begging to give. God, do this kind of work in our hearts.

We give based on God's blessing. This is the point, because it's driven by grace. When 2 Corinthians 8:1 says, *"Now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches."*, notice this: Macedonian churches are giving, not because anything they have manufactured, but because of what God has given to them. It is God who started this whole picture by pouring out His grace. So, they are giving, based on the grace, the blessing of God, that was given to them.

We give based on God's blessing, and we give...we give (at least) according to our ability. Verse 3 there, we read just a second ago, *"they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability."* You get over to verse 12, the reason I put that "at least" there in parentheses is because verse 12 says...Paul says, *"If the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what he does not have."* So, we give according to our abilities, what verse 12 is saying, and these Macedonian churches gave even beyond that.

This is the lesson of the widow's offering in Mark 12, you remember? Everybody is giving all sorts of money. A widow comes and drops two copper coins in, and Jesus says, "Everyone else gave out of their wealth. She gave out of her poverty. She gave all that she has." This is where we realize that God measures the value, so to speak, of a gift in a very different

way than we do because God looks at that which is given in proportion to that which can be given. What 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 is teaching us is give as much as you can, willingly as much as you can.

Talked to a friend of mine, an incredible brother who lives in North Africa this week, and I was reminded of an email he had sent to me that sums this up. He's living in the middle of unreached people. Many of the people groups he's working with, very few of them have heard the gospel. He said, "How many people have not believed because they have not heard? What will it take for them to hear? Have they not heard because there is no one to tell them? What can we do in obedience to God to change a world in which there are millions and millions of people who cannot call on the name of the Lord, because they haven't believed and haven't believed because there is no one to tell them?"

Most of us would say we know the answer to that question, and many of us would say we are doing things to change the situation. However, the truth is...and this is where it pierced me...the truth is there will continue to be millions and millions of people who do not hear as long as we continue to use spare time and spare money to reach them. Those are two radically different questions. What can we spare and what will it take? When we ask what can we spare, it leads to giving begrudgingly. When we ask what will it take, it leads to giving willingly. We want to give, want to give, beg to give because you see a need and are responding to it. It's what grace does in our hearts. So are we...are you...are we as a faith family giving willingly like this?

Secondly, we give generously because of grace, grace welling up in us causes us to give generously. Rich generosity there, it said, in verse 2. The principle here, the truth is what Paul starts that second section that we read a minute ago, 2 Corinthians 9:6, off with. 2 Corinthians 9:6, *"Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously."* So, the picture is very simple: We reap what we sow. We know this. A farmer, if he harvests small seed, little seed, there will be little harvest; if the farmer plants great seed, then there will be great harvest. So, this is the picture with giving.

Now, there's truths that begin to flow, because what Paul does from verse 6 to 7 to 8 and 9 just builds and builds and builds and builds, and really, just kind of circles around this truth in a variety of different ways. The point is...here is the picture: Generous giving to God...I want to show this to you...generous giving to God results in greater giving from God. Generous giving to God results in greater giving from God.

Now, I want to pause real quick before our minds even think through that process, okay, what we don't mean, what 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 is not teaching is that if you give to God, you'll get rich. That if you give to God, you'll be wealthy in this world, and you'll have all the stuff that you want. Health and wealth, prosperity: Not gospel; not gospel. The Macedonians debunk that whole idea, because they are still impoverished even though they have given generously. Our brothers and sisters in house churches around the world debunk that idea because they are still impoverished, but they give radically. This is not a measure of their faith. "If they had more faith, they wouldn't be in that condition." Blasphemy! Doesn't add up with the Word. Sorry, a little side note there.

However, the picture here is that God gives generously to us as we are giving radically to others. That's the picture. We think...now this is totally different than the way we think, the way our economics works, so to speak. We think, "You keep more, you have more, right? Hoard more, store it in barns. Keep more, and you'll have more." Scripture is teaching, "Give more, and you'll have more", and the picture is the generosity of God constantly

replenishing the people of God as we're giving. That's the picture all the way down to verse 11. Generous giving to God results in greater giving from God. God gives enough for us.

Let me get this out there, and then show this to you, especially in verse 8 and then verse 11. God gives enough for us, and He gives abundance for others. He gives enough for us and abundance for others. Enough for us, verse 8, *"God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things, at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work."* God is generous to His children. He provides for His children. He is able to make all grace abound to you. He is making grace abound to the Macedonian Christians. They have all they need. That's the picture. God is able to do that.

However, often times, God gives more than we need. He gives more than we need. Why? Listen to 2 Corinthians 9:11, *"You will be made rich in every way so that..."* Purpose clause, *"...so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God."* So, why...God is able to give all that you need.

Why does God sometimes give more than we need? Now, American answer to that question, even American Christian answer to that question, "God gives us more so that we can have more. If I've got more, well, I start looking for a bigger house. Let's start looking for a nicer car. If I've got more, then let's get some nicer clothes. If the income goes up, the standard of living must automatically go up." The reality is, the standard of living is probably living above our means in most contexts like Birmingham.

So, we think, "We have more, well, God gives more so that we can have more stuff." Scripture says, "No, God gives more so that you can be generous on every occasion so that you can give more." When God gives more, when God adds to the enough, when He gives abundance, it's not so that our standard of living will increase, but so that our standard of giving will increase; that's the picture that Scripture is giving us here. It's the whole picture in...we talked about this last Fall when we were walking through the rich young man, when we talked about John Wesley, 1731, realizes, comes to the conviction that he needs to define what is enough for him, so that...so that when God entrusts anything more to him, he has got to define enough, so to speak, "This is what I'm going to live on, and I'll be able to give away anything that goes above that."

So, he defines his enough as 28 pounds. That's his enough; that's what he can live on in 1731. That year he makes 30 pounds for his salary, so he gives two pounds away. Next year, doubled his income, so he gave 32 pounds away. Next year, his income is up to 90 pounds; fourth year 120 pounds. It kept going up and up and up and up, all the way to where one year, his income was slightly over 1400 pounds. He gave away all but 28. That's the equivalent of today's wages of making \$160,000 in the year and living on \$20,000. When he died in 1791, 60 years later, the only money mentioned in his will was the miscellaneous coins he found in his pockets and dresser drawers. Most of the 30,000 pounds he had earned in his lifetime, he had given away.

So, what happens...what happens when you and I in the wealthiest county in Alabama, and I know that there are different incomes represented all across this room, but we know that all of us are incredibly wealthy compared to the rest of the world. So, what happens when you and I in this culture go totally against the grain of what this culture says to do and define enough, as best as we can, biblically, practically, to define enough and then to say, "Anything above enough, I'm not going to store away in barns, and I'm not going to spend on greater luxuries; I'm not going to spend it on myself. I want anything above enough that God entrusts is going to be given for the sake of the lost and poor in the church around the world."

What happens when that begins to take over our thinking? Grace in our hearts causing us...now, you know what is so exciting at that point? Now, we are free to, like, ask God for lots of money. My encouragement to you as a pastor at that point is make lots of money. Like, tons of money for the sake of the kingdom of God. Like, work hard and give it away and let the generosity of God that is given to you enable you to now be generous on every occasion. It will result in great thanksgiving to God. That's the picture here. God, help us to define our enough.

Now, this is a process. This doesn't change overnight, just like I mentioned with church, and with our lives. Heather and I just vulnerable continually in this process, especially since last Fall and continuing in a variety of ways to try to define what that is. I want to encourage us, for the sake of the glory of Christ, let's not waste our lives on getting more stuff. What happens when we decide that a \$75,000 income does not necessitate a \$75,000 standard of living or 100 or 125 or anything else, whatever it may be? What's the enough? God gives enough for us, and He gives abundance for others. We give generously.

We give willingly, generously; this is grace. Only grace does this. It makes no sense. This is not "Money Management 101" tonight in American culture. This is not the picture. This is 2 Corinthians 8 and 9. We give willingly, generously and we give cheerfully. This is almost funny. Verse 7, *"Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver."* The word, literally, means "a hilarious giver". One who gives, like as the offering basket is passed, I mean, you just picture, "Ha, yes, love giving." That's the picture.

You see how God looks at giving so differently than us. We've already talked about the ability to give, now the attitude in giving; these things are important to God. God loves a cheerful giver. What's really interesting, you go back to 2 Corinthians 8 real quickly and look at verse 8, I want you to listen to what Paul says here; it's extremely important. Paul says, 2 Corinthians 8:8, *"I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others."*

This is where we hear Paul say that, and we take a step back, and we realize in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9, there's not a command to give. There's not a command to give. There's a pattern of giving, there's a precedent kind of set by the Macedonians. There's not a command here to give. Then, you begin to broaden the search a bit, and you don't see it in the New Testament either. You don't see a requirement to give. Now, you do see Romans 13 and in Matthew, you do see a requirement to give to government authorities, to pay taxes. Romans 13 says we are required to give in that way. However, the picture here is we are not forced by God to give; we are not forced by God to give. It's not even a command here. I mean, you would think if Paul really wanted to raise some money, he'd say, "I'm writing Scripture here; do it", but he doesn't.

Why not? This is where we come to, and this is going to be way too brief of an overview, admittedly, from the start, but it's important here, because the tithe is not addressed here in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9. For that matter, it's mentioned in the context of the Old Testament law, and a couple of different places in the Gospels, but when we look back at the Old Testament tithe, the picture is Leviticus 27, one of a variety of places where it was told to the people of God to give a tithe, a tenth to the Levites who would do the administration of the whole priestly system, sacrificial system, but even more than that is what you find in Deuteronomy. They are also told to give a tithe to support the festivals that go on. Then, another place in Deuteronomy, they are told to give a tithe to support the poor.

So, there is a required giving, a required tithe in the Old Testament law, but what we need to realize is in the Old Testament, this is a theocracy. The Levites were, literally, civil government leaders, so to speak. What you had was a picture where there was required giving for the maintenance of the nation. More like taxes. When you put those two, the different tithes, together, it was really more than ten percent. It totaled up to, some say, close to thirty, some say between twenty and twenty-five, but somewhere between twenty and thirty percent. More like taxes, even taxes that we pay today are similar percentage in many contexts.

So, intertwined, at another place in the Old Testament, you had freewill gifts. You had Exodus...I think Exodus 25...when you take up an offering and take up whatever a man's heart moves him to give. So, the picture is, Old Testament required a tithe for the maintenance of the nation. New Testament requirement: Command to give taxes for the maintenance of the civil government. That's the picture here, but you don't see giving to the church forced, required, so to speak. This is where we need to realize that we don't give to the church like we give to the IRS. We don't give because we are forced to give. We give because of grace in us. God is not forcing us to give; God has freed us to give. That's the point of 2 Corinthians 8 and 9. He has not forced us to give; He has freed us to give.

Now, here's the problem. When we come to the tithe, and we say, "Well, are we supposed to tithe", and what we're looking for is some kind of mathematical formula that we can say, "Okay, what do I need to give to make sure I'm okay?" That misses the whole point of 2 Corinthians 8 and 9, and therefore, the question should not be asked...people even ask, "Well, what do I tithe on? My gross income or my net income?" This is the question that does not come to our minds and our hearts when we are giving generously and willingly and sacrificially and cheerfully. We want to give all that we can. We're not looking for an arbitrary level to say, "Okay, this is the requirement for me, so I'm just going to do that, and then I'll be okay. I'll have that box checked off." Not New Testament teaching at all, at all. Yet, it is prevalent when we think about giving.

My encouragement would be...and this is the way I look at in my life...my encouragement would be, yes, obviously I think there is an Old Testament principle to tithe here, and there are truths that are revealed about God and His relationship with His people. Malachi 3:10, other texts like that, yes, there's an Old Testament principle, so to speak, that we honor in a sense, but I would say only to the extent that if it would be helpful for the tithe to be a starting point...a starting point at best. However, grace giving is so radically different than a tithe. A tithe undercuts...undercuts the picture that 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 is painting here. Paul says, "I am not commanding you to give. Old Testament tithe is not your standard of giving anymore."

What's your standard of giving, New Testament church? Look at verse 9, *"For you know that 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."* We give out of the abundance of grace willingly, generously, cheerfully, not because we are forced to give, but because we are free to give, and we want to give all that we can.

We give as a demonstration of the gospel.

That's the New Testament picture, and it leads us to give until we give as a demonstration of the gospel. Our standard of giving is not the Old Testament tithe; our standard of giving is the Son of God on the cross, and we look at giving in light of the cross and in light of the gospel and giving is a demonstration of the gospel.

Paul goes from talking about these Macedonian Christians to elevating it to a whole other level, and he says, "Look at Christ. You want to see how to give? Here is how we give: We sacrifice our rights for others." Doubtless...doubtless Christians in Corinth were making excuses for why they could not give. Why they were not able to give. Now...and I know, I know that around this room there are all kinds of financial situations represented, so I want to tread lightly here, so to speak, because I know there are so many different scenarios in this room, but the whole point of 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 is, "Look at the people who have nothing, absolutely nothing. They're begging on the streets, and they gave deeply."

So, grace transforms, the gospel transforms our hearts so that we're not looking for excuses as much as we're looking for opportunities. "How can I sacrifice more?" There are times when we think, "Give according to our ability. Well, I'm just not able to give that much. I'm just not able to. When it comes down to the bottom line at the end of the month, I'm not able to give that much." This is where I'm humbled, convicted, and convinced...I'm convinced the majority of us, including myself, in this context, we are not giving according to our ability, including myself. A very small percentage of us are really giving beyond our ability.

Now, it's not to say that it's not tough at the end of the month, but the reality is, we have so filled our lives with so many things we do not need that leave us with a little bit at the end. That's where we've got to unpack the rest of this picture and do the hard work of saying, "What we do we need? What is our enough?" We sacrifice our rights for others. We serve a Savior who left His throne in glory and took on a robe of human flesh and lived as a homeless man, Luke 9:57-58. He is our example in giving.

We sacrifice our rights for others, and we spend our resources on others. Consider the richness of Christ here and what He did. When we spend our resources on others, we demonstrate the gospel. This is the whole point when you get over to verse 13. He says, "You have proved yourselves. Men will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ." I love that phrase in 2 Corinthians 9:13, "*your obedience accompanies your confession of the gospel.*" They didn't just believe the gospel or talk about the gospel in Macedonia, but they showed what the gospel looks like in abject poverty giving in rich generosity. That's gospel.

It's the picture. We demonstrate the gospel when we give radically, but what do we say, what do we demonstrate when we acquire and get more and more stuff, just like everybody else in the world? Are we showing the gospel? No, no, we're showing the world that we like all the same stuff they do. They look at us, and they say, "You have the same stuff I do; you just tack on Jesus on Sundays." The reality is we are pursuing the same stuff. We are running after the same stuff. God, help us. God, take this church and help us to show the picture of the gospel. God, take my life, my family. God, help us to show a picture of the gospel, radical giving, demonstration of the gospel, such that people would look at our faith family and say, "They do not just talk about the gospel. You see the way they give? They give till it hurts; there is something different there." It's a picture of Christ and the gospel.

We give to promote thanksgiving to God.

We give as a demonstration of the gospel out of an abundance of grace to promote thanksgiving to God. This is the whole point. 2 Corinthians 9:11, through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God: "*The service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of God's people, but it's also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God.*" Here's the picture: God gives grace, His people give generously and God gets glory. Did you catch that? God gives grace to give, His people give out of the abundance of grace, and He gets glory. The One who gives the grace always gets the glory.

That's the whole point of the church in Macedonia. It's not to lift them up; it's to lift up the grace of God in them to the glory of God because their giving overflows in many expressions of thanks to God. It's why we can celebrate; why we must, we should celebrate like we did earlier. Look at what God is doing by His grace all across this faith family, and it overflows in thanksgiving to God. That's the picture when we...two facets here...promote thanksgiving to God because giving unites the people of God; it unites the people of God. I'm going to fly through this part right here, but at the end of verse 14 it says, "In their prayers for you, their hearts will go out to you." Their hearts will go out to you.

Check this out: When the people in Jerusalem get this offering from impoverished churches in Macedonia, what do you think that is going to do in the relationship between the saints in Jerusalem and the saints in Macedonia? Warm hearts and unity among the people of God. In the same way that when I go to Cuba this week and say to house church pastors there, "Here is a gift from brothers and sisters in Georgia and Alabama, and here's a gift: You're not alone. There are brothers and sisters who are praying for you and want this to be an expression of the grace of God to you from them." That's unity among the people of God; giving creates community.

If we...it's why it's a part of our church covenant because, if we do not give, if we are hoarders that are holding on to our stuff and not generously giving, then that radically affects community. Then, we are a bunch of people in here that want to keep to ourselves and keep everything to ourselves, instead of coming with open hands into community; that radically changes community.

We give regularly to the church. This is not specifically addressed in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9, but I wanted to hit on it real briefly here. You might write down some of the passages because...because this is important as we talk about giving in the church. We give regularly to the church. 1 Corinthians 16:1 and 2 is the picture where we see when the New Testament church is gathered together on the Lord's Day. They made it a practice to regularly, systematically give as they gathered together. It's the precedent for which, by which, we do what we do when we gather together on the Lord's Day, and we give. We give systematically, intentionally, we give regularly to the church, and you saw in the church covenant, we give cheerfully and generously to the support of the church. 1 Timothy 5:17-19, coupled with Ephesians 4 a biblical picture of giving to support of the church, support of equipping ministry in the church, to the relief of the poor, obviously, here in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9, Romans 15, Galatians 2:10. Paul's says to Peter, "Remember the poor. Remember to give to the poor," Galatians 2:10.

Then, the spread of the gospel through all nations. 1 Corinthians 9:6-14, we give. It's biblical: We need to give so that people will proclaim the gospel to the ends of the earth. So, when we commission a couple from our faith family in a few weeks that's going to another country to make the gospel known, it's biblical to give to help that become a reality; that's what's depicted there.

We give regularly to the church for those purposes, and then, the church deals responsibly with our gift. This is the second half of 2 Corinthians 8. 2 Corinthians 8:16-24 Paul goes out of his way to make sure it's clear that when the church gives this gift, it will be handled responsibly and wisely. When you get to verse 21, it says, "*We will take pains to do what is right, not only in the eyes of the Lord but also in the eyes of men.*" I wanted to take a moment to point out...some of you may know, may not know, even how it works in this faith family, but we have...we have elders, which we'll talk about next week, and then we have a stewardship team, a finance team. An elder provides a spiritual oversight for that team, but the stewardship team is men and women in this family, a group of men and

women, who make sure we are wisely, responsibly handling the money that is given to this church, to make sure that it's not being used inappropriately in any way.

They work with staff. Donny Arrant and others who work administration and other folks working together on this, and just if I could brag on them for a moment. Every year, auditors come in, look at the picture, every year come back, "Extremely well done; above reproach." Just seemingly faultless, I mean, all the way down to the "T", it's just that they do an incredible job. So, I praise God for their diligence to making sure we deal responsibly with gifts.

So, giving unites the people of God, and then giving exalts the goodness of God. Giving unites the people of God and giving exalts the goodness of God. I love the way Paul ends 2 Corinthians 9:15, and he says, *"Thanks be..."* After all this, this is what he says, *"Thanks be to God for his gift, his indescribable gift."* Giving overflows in thanksgiving to God for the way He gives.

So, dream with me for a minute. Just indulge a bit of dreaming for a minute. The most recent statistic study that I came across, that I could find, said between one-third and one-half of church members give to their churches...give anything. Not talking ten percent tithe, anything, just give anything...between one-third and one-half. So, maybe, forty percent, somewhere in the middle there, actually give anything...of church members, and this to me just reinforces that we need to re-understand, look at Scripture, and what it means to be a member of the body of Christ because that is...it's biblically ludicrous, the idea that you can be committed to a local body of believers, and yet, give nothing to a local body of believers. That flies right in the face of 2 Corinthians 8 and 9.

It's not that we are required to give "X" amount. "You don't give this amount, you're not a member." That's not the picture. That's not what 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 is saying, but if you have the grace of Christ in you, the grace of Christ, the gospel of Christ just overflowing from your heart, then we give period. If that has not been a practice in your life, my encouragement would be to you not, "Here's the number. Make sure you start giving that next week", but my encouragement would be to you to go to God and ask Him to change your heart, because grace is the foundation for our giving. Only God can do that kind of work, so ask for grace to give generously and willingly, cheerfully, all these things we talked about.

However, what if we did? What if 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 were actually a reality, not just among the Macedonian church, but among The Church at Brook Hills and what if, what if the tithe, instead of being this, "Okay, let me make sure I check this off so I'm okay." Maybe, what if it was a starting point for men and women, brothers and sisters across this faith family. What if every member of this church has that as a starting point? You do the math...dream with me...what would happen? Watch this with me; dream with me, if we did that in a year. In one year, if we said, "Okay, this year we are going to use that as a starting point, and we are going to be grace givers, and that's our starting point", watch this with me.

If you are a member of this faith family, if you are visiting with us tonight an attender, we certainly welcome you and hope that you have been blessed with the study in the Word. Particularly, those of you who are members of this faith family. I want to encourage you and challenge you tonight to let this time tonight in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 be a spiritual marker for you in your journey. Let this time tonight in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9...for some of you, this may be old news, knew all of this grace giving reality, and it's flowing, and you are begging to give.

If that's the case, praise the Lord, continue. I hope you're encouraged, but if this picture of grace giving has not been a reality in your Christian life, to say tonight, "God, I need you to do a work in my heart, in my family's heart." Again, it's not necessarily even an overnight thing. There's all kinds of stuff that we fill our lives with that takes time, but to say tonight, "I want to be a grace giver." Not, "Okay, here's a number, now do it." However, I want to give generously. I want to give all that I can, and I don't want to spend my life and my resources on stuff that will burn up in the end. I want to spend it on that that will matter in the end. I want my life and my finances to count for the glory of Christ and the nations. God, we pray that it would be so.

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