

Growing in Grace

Lesson # 13

“The Charming Joy of Grace Giving”

[Taken from *The Grace Awakening* by Charles Swindoll. (Dallas: Word, 1990). Ch. 12, pp.261-275]

Have you ever wondered what it is about Christmas that has such a magnetism; that in spite of the commercialism and the crowds that we find ourselves drawn in. Even people who do not claim to have a relationship with Christ, react differently at Christmas. What is about Christmas that makes us different? It is not the music, nor the nostalgic memories of the past. It is not cakes and candy or even the trip to Grandma’s house. It is that *Christmas gives us the opportunity each year to deliberately get outside of ourselves and do something tangible for someone else with no thought of or interest in being “paid back.”*

How then can we have the same once-a-year joy that we have at Christmas throughout the year? Tonight we are going to look at the subject of how grace effects our giving to the Lord.

I. What Makes Us So Defensive About The Discussion of Money?

As a pastor I know what it is to look out on a congregation when they discover that you intend to speak on the subject of money. There probably is no other subject that a preacher likes to talk about less. Why is it that people hate to reflect on the privilege that they have to give to the Lord.

1. It Is Often Based on Guilt.

What we have heard about giving is usually the same. Most often the congregation is not instructed so much as they are exhorted with guilt producing remarks. Often the subject has little humor only a large helping of hard-core facts mixed with a little panic because “giving has dropped off.”

2. Because the Gimmicks That Been Used By Some.

3. The Listener Often Feels Manipulated.

The emphasis is seldom on the joy of grace-oriented giving but rather on the obligation and responsibility to give whether you feel like it or not. So let’s set the matter straight on at least one thing.

- How And Why We Give Is Of Far Greater Significance To God Than What We Give.

Attitude and Motive are more important than Amount.

II. What Makes Grace Giving So Wonderfully Addictive?

Grace can liberate us to become models of unusual and consistent generosity, all the while filling us with inexpressible joy.

The original church founded at Jerusalem fell on hard times, so much so, that they were unable to pull themselves out of a financial slump, because of the depressed economy around in Judea. These early believers were faced with a bleak and barren future. But while the economy was bad in Judea it was not so among the Greeks in Corinth. Paul urges them to give financial assistance to their fellow Christian's in Jerusalem. His words to the Corinthian believer's recorded in 2 Corinthians 8 & 9, are two of the finest chapters in all of the Bible on grace giving.

“Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia: (2) that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality.(3) For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing,(4) imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints.(5) And not only as we had hoped, but they first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God.

Paul begins by mentioning the generosity of the struggling churches in Macedonia as an example. These churches in spite of the fact that they were themselves struggling, in spite of their own poverty, delighted in giving to the needs of others. Paul holds them up as examples to the church at Corinth and urged them to follow their example.

Paul admits that he was surprised by their generosity, that their giving was *“not only we had hoped”* (v. 5) or literally as he had *“expected”* (NASB).

First and foremost we are to give ourselves to the Lord, when we do our treasure will follow the leading of our hearts (Matthew 6:21). Their gifts however did not originate in their wallets, because he says *“they first gave themselves to the Lord”* and then they gave their money. Grace giving begins with the heart.

What Is It That Makes Grace Giving Attractive?

1. Grace Giving Helps Us to Keep A Healthy Balance (v. 7)

“But as you abound in everything— in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all diligence, and in your love for us— see that you abound in this grace also.”

Paul reminds believers how easy it is to take, to be blessed, instructed, encouraged, exhorted, affirmed, and strengthened – all those things received in abundance – yet fail to balance the receiving with our giving. Notice how Paul refers to financial support, he says “see that you abound in this grace also.” He says that it is a work of grace.

2. Grace Giving Models The Grace of Jesus Christ (2 Cor 8:9)

“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.”

Notice that he does not say knowing the obligation that you are under to Christ or knowing the duty that you are under, or knowing the requirement that you are under, or knowing the sacrifice that you owe, he mentions only *grace*. It was grace that motivated Christ to come to earth and die on your behalf. When we give expecting no gift in return we model the purest form of the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

3. Grace Giving Counteracts Selfishness and Covetousness. (2 Corinthians 9:1-5).

“Now concerning the ministering to the saints, it is superfluous for me to write to you; (2) for I know your willingness, about which I boast of you to the Macedonians, that Achaia was ready a year ago; and your zeal has stirred up the majority. (3) Yet I have sent the brethren, lest our boasting of you should be in vain in this respect, that, as I said, you may be ready; (4) lest if some Macedonians come with me and find you unprepared, we (not to mention you!) should be ashamed of this confident boasting. (5) Therefore I thought it necessary to exhort the brethren to go to you ahead of time, and prepare your generous gift beforehand, which you had previously promised, that it may be ready as a matter of generosity and not as a grudging obligation.”

It would appear that sometime in the past the Corinthians had promised that they would participate in an offering to answer the needs in Jerusalem. But for some reason their pledge had begun to wear thin. Paul is effect prodding them to finish what they had said they were going to do. Why is it when we get a little extra money it is easy for greed to take hold, to not forget previous promises to the Lord.

Let try to get a handle on the current state of giving in America. In an article entitled “Planned Giving – Legalism or Love?” which appeared Moody Monthly in May, 1996 Sylvia and John Ronsvalle state that *“the average church member gives less than 2.5 percent of his income to the church.”* [Sylvia and John Ransvalle, “Opinion” Moody Monthly (May, 1986) p. 12. as quoted by Charles Swindoll. p. 269.]

The Christian financial counselor Ron Blue mentions an interesting fact in his seminars. Blue says, *“If all the Christians were reduced to a welfare income and they tithed on that amount, the church would double its receipts.”* [From a lecture by Ron Blue. as quoted by Charles Swindoll. p 269.]

Norm Cousins in his book, "Human Options" set forth a fact that puts things in perspective for us Americans, "The cash lost each year in the United States amounts to about seventy-five dollars per capita – money that has fallen out of pockets, is misplaced and so forth. The total average income for most of the human occupants on this planet comes to about sixty-nine dollars per person annually. The average American thus loses more money each year than almost anyone else earns." [Norman Cousins Human Options. (Berkeley Pub., 198) p. 103 as quoted by Charles Swindoll p. 269]

It should be obvious that making more money is not the answer. No one had ever changed his or her giving solely based on an increase in income.

4. *You Can't Help But Be Generous When Grace Consumes You.* (2 Corinthians 9:6)

"But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully."

Neither I nor anyone else can adequately explain the beauty and wonder of grace giving. But one core truth remains, "You cannot out give God!"

III. What Makes Grace So Attractive?

(2 Corinthians 9:7-15)

1. Grace Giving Is Individual. (v.7a)

Paul continues his discussion in verse seven by saying, "So let each one give as he purposes in his heart..." Giving is Always an Individual thing. Paul says that our giving is based on what we have purposed in our hearts. Paul says, "Let each one do just as he has purposed in his heart." The problem comes because most people do not purpose in their hearts, they don't have a well-thought out plan for giving they give on impulse. They don't plan they react.

2. Grace Giving Is Joyful Giving. (v.7b)

"... not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver."

Have you ever wondered why everyone in the church seems so serious during the offering? Can you imagine the looks that would result if laughter were heard as the plates were passed? Yet the word "cheerful" is literally the Greek term from which we get the word hilarious. Thus the verse is literally, "God loves an hilarious giver."

3. Grace Giving Enables Us to Link Up With God's Supply. (v. 8)

“And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work.”

4. Grace Giving Leads To Incomparable Results (vv. 13-15)

“while, through the proof of this ministry, they glorify God for the obedience of your confession to the gospel of Christ, and for your liberal sharing with them and all men, (14) and by their prayer for you, who long for you because of the exceeding grace of God in you.(15) Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!”

Paul concludes his lengthy discussion of giving by announcing, *“Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!”* Although Paul was an educated man with a good vocabulary, when it came time to describe God’s gracious gift of his son, he ran out of words. He simply could not find a word for it so he admits that it is indescribable.

He did however say that grace giving left the three-fold legacy.

- Others give God the glory
- They learn by example to be generous.

The relationship transcends any gift that we can give.