

***All scripture from NKJV unless otherwise noted.

Paul now changes the conversation and moves away from the subjects of separation and repentance (as we studied last week) and moves to the topic of giving. He will show us what Christian generosity should look like. Then next week, we will see how he gets into the details of what true New Testament giving looks like. Paul begins this chapter talking about the churches in northern Greece. Remember that Corinth was in what is now southern Greece. The northern part is called Macedonia and the south is Achaia.



The northern churches were not as prosperous and rich as Corinth, yet they were exemplary in their giving. There was a famine in Jerusalem caused by drought, and as the churches in Macedonia heard about the suffering, they were anxious to get involved in the relief effort. What is interesting is that this famine was predicted in Acts 11:27-29.

27 And in these days prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch. 28 Then one of them, named Agabus, stood up and showed by the Spirit that there was going to be a great famine throughout all the world, which also happened in the days of Claudius Caesar. 29 Then the disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea. (Acts 11:27-29).

8¹ We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, ² for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. ³ For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, ⁴ begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints— ⁵ and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us. ⁶ Accordingly, we urged Titus that as he had started, so he should complete among you this act of grace. ⁷ But as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you—see that you excel in this act of grace also. (2 Corinthians 8:1-7, ESV).

v.1 It is interesting to see what Paul focuses on when he starts this part of the letter. He doesn't focus on how wonderful the churches in Macedonia were in their giving. He doesn't even mention their generosity. He focuses on God's grace. He tells the Corinthians something like "I want you to know about how God's grace has been evidenced by the giving of those churches."

v.2 Notice that there are four ways that Paul describes these churches: (1) they are in a severe test of affliction, (2) their joy is abundant, (3) they are in extreme poverty, and (4) they possessed a wealth of generosity. These are amazing descriptive terms because we don't generally think of these things being congruent. We don't think of affliction as being something accompanied by joy. We don't think of extreme poverty being something that would predict an attitude of wealthy generosity. This can only happen by the grace of God.

vv.3-4 Paul boasts that these poor Christians have given of their own accord. That means they were motivated on their own when they heard about the need. So they gave as they could, and some even gave beyond what they were able to do. They did so through the power of the Holy Spirit. These believers were amazing. They heard about the need and they begged earnestly to be part of it. This demonstrates the priority of our giving. It starts with us first committing ourselves to the Lord.

v.5 The first step in becoming a Godly giver is to give yourself wholly to the Lord. Paul trumpets the fact that the Corinthians were sold out to Christ. This should encourage each of us to pray about our attitude when we see a need. I know in my own case I'll often wonder if: (1) it's a legitimate need, (2) whether the person is deserving of it or not, and (3) whether I'll be rewarding bad behavior or not. These are all legitimate concerns, but they should not be the primary concern. The primary concern should always be "am I doing what God wants me to do in this situation?"

vv.6-7 Paul mentions that Titus has been at the spear point of this giving endeavor. Titus was a trusted fellow pastor who came alongside Paul and went and encouraged the ministries that Paul had started. He worked in discipling those ministries. When we realize that all that we have belongs to God, it frees us to turn loose of what we might call "our stuff." When you first give yourself to the Lord, it becomes easier to release your possessions into the hand of the Lord. It frees you to have a generous heart beyond your own ability.

⁸I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine. ⁹For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich. ¹⁰And in this matter I give my judgment: this benefits you, who a year ago started not only to do this work but also to desire to do it. ¹¹So now finish doing it as well, so that your readiness in desiring it may be matched by your completing it out of what you have. ¹²For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have. ¹³For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened, but that as a matter of fairness ¹⁴your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need, that there may be fairness. ¹⁵As it is written, "Whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack." (2 Corinthians 8:8-15, ESV).

vv.8-15 There are several main ideas in these verses. We see that they were relatively new believers, but they were ready and willing to be involved in the giving. They were reminded that Jesus had nothing while He was here on earth. Most of us are materially much more wealthy

than Jesus ever was. This too is an act of grace and we should respond accordingly. Paul mentions that we are to give out of what we have and not be guilty about what we don't have. That's a principle of proportionality. What does proportionality mean? Perhaps God calls us to make equal sacrifices instead of equal gifts? Some of us have been entrusted with much and our giving should be defined in those terms. Some have been entrusted with less. I will say however, that I think it is a God principle that ALL should give something. The person that never gives a dime (considering themselves poor) are missing out on a discipline and a blessing that God wants for each of us. When we give to something, we are appreciative of it. To whom much is given much is required (Luke 12:48). Generosity that is born out of guilt has no spiritual value. I have heard it said that "We should give till it hurts." I don't think that's accurate. I think we should give to the point where we're sometimes surprised. What is the promise of Philippians 4:13? *"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."* It is not a promise that **you** can do anything. It is a promise that **through the strength of God's** grace you can do anything. This includes giving. I am selfish like all human beings, I can do anything and give anything that He gives me the grace to give or do. Those who live in abundance should understand that we should be taking care of one another. Of course there are caveats. If one doesn't work, neither should he eat (see 2 Thessalonians 3:10).

Commendation of Titus

¹⁶ But thanks be to God, who put into the heart of Titus the same earnest care I have for you. ¹⁷ For he not only accepted our appeal, but being himself very earnest he is going to you of his own accord. ¹⁸ With him we are sending the brother who is famous among all the churches for his preaching of the gospel. ¹⁹ And not only that, but he has been appointed by the churches to travel with us as we carry out this act of grace that is being ministered by us, for the glory of the Lord himself and to show our good will. ²⁰ We take this course so that no one should blame us about this generous gift that is being administered by us, ²¹ for we aim at what is honorable not only in the Lord's sight but also in the sight of man. ²² And with them we are sending our brother whom we have often tested and found earnest in many matters, but who is now more earnest than ever because of his great confidence in you. ²³ As for Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker for your benefit. And as for our brothers, they are messengers of the churches, the glory of Christ. ²⁴ So give proof before the churches of your love and of our boasting about you to these men. (2 Corinthians 8:16-24, ESV).

vv.16-24 Paul is grateful that Titus is in harness with him. The churches loved Titus and he loved them. It was Titus' own desire to get up there into Macedonia and to spirit the aid that was being given. Paul is using this to encourage the Corinthians to be like givers. There was some companion that was sent as well who was a very popular speaker. The churches loved him and he was a tested and earnest guy whoever he was.

By selecting trustworthy people, the church avoided criticism and ultimately scandals. We do the same thing. We should only have godly, capable people handling the money in our congregation, and we do. We are blessed in that. No one will ever understand the amount of

effort and work that goes into what our directors do. They love the Lord. They love His people. They are dedicated to His work.

Let me take a moment to talk about giving in general. I don't ever preach about giving unless we come to a passage that mentions it.

GENERAL PRINCIPLE: GOD LOVES GENEROSITY. HOLD WHAT HE'S GIVEN TO YOU LOOSELY. FOLLOW THE GUIDE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN ALL OF YOUR GIVING. GIVING IS AN ACT OF WORSHIP.

General thoughts about Christian giving and generosity. True giving is born out of a pure unselfish heart.

- 1 All of us are born loving ourselves and preferring ourselves over others. This is manifested in our desires to please and provide for ourselves. There is no great sin in this, but if we never get beyond providing for ourselves, we are stunted spiritually. Generosity is pleasing to God because true giving comes from an unselfish heart.
- 2 God ties blessings towards His people with the generosity of their hearts. *Give generously to them and do so without a grudging heart; then because of this the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in everything you put your hand to. (Deuteronomy 15:10, NIV).*
- 3 God loves generosity and rewards it in His own way. *The generous will themselves be blessed, for they share their food with the poor. (Proverbs 22:9, NIV).* A person who sees needs and feels moved by compassion is near to the heart of God. I think many of us want to help in God's work, but we're not always sure of what that work truly is.
- 4 True giving is accompanied by joy. It is not burdensome. *1 Chronicles 29:9 The people rejoiced, for that they offered willingly, because with perfect heart they offered willingly to the Lord. (1 Chronicles 29:9, KJV).*
- 5 There is a spiritual principle that God prospers those who are givers. Prosperity is a funny/tricky thing because it can't always be measured by bank accounts. However, there is a general principle stating that how a person gives or holds tightly to what they have is reciprocated by God.
- 6 Don't focus too much on what you give. Just pray about certain needs and do it. If you think about these things for too long, you'll usually talk yourself out of giving. Our minds wonder: does this person deserve what I'm giving, or am I just empowering or enabling wastefulness? (Sometimes that is true, and sometimes it is

not. Let the Holy Spirit be your director in your giving.) Never give with multiple strings attached to your giving. You'll end up cynical and sour.

God is telling us that there is a spiritual principle that our heart attitude toward giving to His work and to others will affect God's provision in our own lives.



Here are a few Scriptures that give us a glimpse into the heart of God and what He thinks about generosity and giving.

"Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you." (Luke 6:38, NIV).

In Acts 20:35 Paul recalls Jesus' words: *"It is more blessed to give than to receive."*

Let us pray.

Union Grove is one of the oldest Baptist communities of faith in the State of Texas dating back to 1844. Pastor Faber McMullen may be reached by email at uniongrove362@gmail.com or by snail mail at: 15301 FM 362, Navasota, Texas 77868. Tel: 936-825-1227 (Edited and proofed by Amanda Neese- Webster, Texas.) All financial gifts to this ministry are tax-deductible as a 501 (c) (3) Corporation.