

## GRACE GIVING

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*By the Book™* A Chapter by  
Chapter Bible Study Series  
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## Let's Begin

*Perhaps you have heard the story of a small boy whose mother gave him two apples, telling him to divide them with his sister. Attempting to teach her son the virtue of generosity, she informed the boy to give his sister the larger one. Looking perplexed, the boy said to his mother, "Look Mom, give her the apples and ask her to be generous." While humorous, the scenario is far too often accurate even among church people. Generosity is something we think others ought to do, but we are unwilling to do so ourselves.*

*The fact is, however, generosity is directly connected to the level of our love for the Lord Jesus Christ. In other words, the Bible teaches being generous is being godly. No Scripture passage stands more compelling for the Christian to be generous than this section Paul wrote to Corinth.*

*Hence, as we begin our study of what grace giving is all about, let's follow the outline below:*

- I. We Must Display Liberality in Giving (vv. 1-5)**
- II We Must Display Sincerity in Giving (vv. 6-9)**
- III. We Must Display Equality in Giving (vv.10-15)**
- IV. We Must Display Integrity in Giving (vv.16-24)**

## I. We Must Display Liberality in Giving (vv. 1-5)

For many people the subject of giving is a grind. Unfortunately, more times than not, those who hold reservations concerning any talk about giving are the very ones who possess a miserly understanding of stewardship. For them, life is about getting all we can, keeping all we can, and dying with all we can. And, when these people do happen to give, they view their giving as a grim duty, never a gracious delight.

Grace giving begins with liberal giving. Listen carefully to Paul's words, "Moreover, brethren, we do you to wit of the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia; How that in a great trial

of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality. For to *their* power, I bear record, yea, and beyond *their* power *they were* willing of themselves; Praying us with much intreaty that we would receive the gift, and *take upon us* the fellowship of the ministering to the saints. And *this they did*, not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God." (2 Cor. 8:1-5). The believers in Macedonia were very poor. They lived in virtual poverty, barely scraping by every day. Being people of little means, they were readily despised and even persecuted for their poverty. Being poor meant paying little, if any, taxes; consequently, they were viewed as liabilities rather than assets.

Yet the Apostle Paul deeply loved the Macedonians. He never forgot the vision God placed in his heart to minister the Gospel to them (Acts 16:9). Could one of the reasons Paul's love was so undeniably visible for them be— the self-sacrificial spirit the Macedonians produced? Even during a "great trial of affliction" their joy was non-stop. Though they experienced "deep poverty" their lives nonetheless "abounded unto the riches of their liberality." Contrasting the profile Paul gave of the Macedonians with the average American Christian should drive us all to our knees!

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**Reflection Connection**

*Think of a time in your life when you felt like you could not afford to give but you gave anyway. How did you feel afterward? What did you learn from the experience?*

Concerning their desire to give, Paul said, in essence, they begged for the opportunity to give, “Praying us” that Paul would, “receive the gift.” Evidently, Paul may have seen the Macedonians’ horrible plight and counseled them to forego an offering to assist the Jerusalem saints. The Macedonians’ deplorable conditions were identical to or worse than the Jerusalem church! Yet the Macedonians insisted Paul take the gift even if it was “beyond their power” to give.

From this background, we learn two keys to unlock a spirit of liberality in giving. The first key is from a negative perspective and has to do with *affliction* (vv. 2-3). Outward circumstances ultimately have little to do with whether or not a person possesses a spirit of liberality in giving. Though the Macedonians were dirt poor, no one possessed a more generous spirit than they. In short, being a grace giver has nothing to do with ability. The Macedonians went “beyond their ability.”

The second key is from a positive perspective and has to do with *affirmation* (vv. 4-5). Not being deceived by thinking to buy God’s favor by giving or self-sacrifice, the Macedonians “first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God.” God does not want our money; God does not need our money. God wants us; He wants our heart. A grace giver affirms his or her first love—the Lord Jesus Christ.

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**II We Must Display Sincerity in Giving (vv. 6-9)**

Grace givers are *liberal* givers. Grace givers are also *sincere* givers. Paul continues, “Therefore, as ye abound in every *thing*, in faith, and utterance, and knowledge, and in all diligence, and in your love to us, see that ye abound in this grace also. I speak not by commandment, but by occasion of the forwardness of others, and to prove the sincerity of your love. For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.” (2 Cor. 8:7-9).

Giving the Macedonians’ faithfulness as an example for the Corinthians to consider, Paul now calls on them to complete what they began. In others words, he challenges them to “prove the sincerity of your love” by following through with what they committed to do. True, genuine giving is always born of pure motives. Giving is proof of one’s love. Giving is the best barometer to gauge the depth of one’s love for the Lord.

How do we know giving is the proof of our love? Paul reminds us that the greatest expression of love imaginable was Jesus Christ giving Himself. First,

**Reflection Connection**

*If someone asked, “How do you know God loves you?” what would you say?*



Paul speaks of His *prosperity*. He characterizes Jesus as being “rich.” Here Paul speaks about Christ’s pre-incarnate glory with the Father (cp. John 17:3). He was rich in *possessions*. Indeed His possessions filled the entire universe. Every planet, every star, every speck of cosmic dust belong to Him. Jesus was also rich in *power*. Through Him all things exist by the word of His power (John 1:1-4). He was rich in *position*. Every angel in Heaven bowed down to Him. They sang His praises continually. In fact, Christ Jesus was God (Phil. 2:5-11).

Paul also reveals Christ’s *poverty* as proof of His love. For our sakes, Paul says, “He became poor.” The gift of Christ did not begin when Jesus died on the cross. Giving began in Heaven before the world was. If any story was ever a “riches to rags” story it was the story of the cross. He Who was rich became poor for us. Finally, Paul cites the *purpose* of Jesus as proof of His love. He became like us so we could become like Him. Jesus proved the sincerity of His love by giving. No less is expected from us.

### III. We Must Display Equality in Giving (vv. 10-15)

Grace giving is liberally giving with a sincere heart. Grace giving also bears *equality* in giving. Note the words Paul writes, “And herein I give *my* advice: for this is expedient for you, who have begun before, not only to do, but also to be forward a year ago” (v. 10). The Corinthians had committed a year earlier to giving assistance to the fledging church at Jerusalem. Now Paul reminds them it’s time to make good their promise. Performance must match their pledge (v. 11).

He further instructs them to give only as they have received from God, “For if there be first a willing mind, *it is* accepted according to that a man hath, *and* not according

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to that he hath not. For *I mean* not that other men be eased, and ye burdened: But by an equality, *that* now at this time your abundance *may be a supply* for their want, that their abundance also may be a *supply* for your want: that there may be equality: As it is written, He that *had gathered* much had nothing over; and he that *had gathered* little had no lack.” (2 Cor. 8:12-15). The principle Paul reveals remains clear: equality. Is it fair to receive benefits while others bear the burden alone?

In addition, equality suggests a *mutual sacrifice*. Grace giving is proportionate giving. As Paul said elsewhere, you are to give as “God prospered you” (1 Cor. 16:1). Is there an amount given in Scripture which reflects proportion? Yes, the Bible plainly teaches the tithe is proportionate giving and equitable giving. For the believer, tithing is not law-giving but love-giving. While one person may not be able to give the same amount as another, it makes not the least difference for the proportion is the same; it is equitable.

Finally, equality also suggests *mutual sharing* (vv. 14-15). The Macedonians shared with the Jerusalem church out of their poverty. Paul expected the Corinthians to share out of their bounty. Jerusalem shared the message of Jesus with the Gentiles. Now the Gentiles were to share the means with which God blessed them. Grace giving is equitable giving.



## IV. We Must Display Integrity in Giving (vv. 16-24)

We have learned grace giving is liberal giving from a sincere heart. Next we observed that sincere giving never complains about the amount. Instead a sincere, gracious giver stands on the principle of equity. Finally, we learn a grace giver is to give with integrity. In fact, integrity is the watchword of every person who gives graciously, liberally, and sincerely to the Lord.

Paul records these words, “But thanks *be* to God, which put the same earnest care into the heart of Titus for you. For indeed he accepted the exhortation; but being more forward, of his own accord he went unto you. And we have sent with him the brother, whose praise *is* in the gospel throughout all the churches” (vv. 16-18). Rather than risk being seen as being too close to the money collected, Paul puts in place instructions for precisely how the money is to be handled. Both when we give and the church receives, we are obligated under God to be responsible stewards to oversee the gifts.

First, note the selection of a committee to care for the collection (vv. 16-19; cp. 22-24). Many times churches make mistakes placing the wrong people on a committee like this. Of course, it goes without saying that giving people must be placed on this team. Why? Because giving people are responsible stewards. Paul puts together a three-man committee.

In addition, the men on the team must be respected men. Paul describes one member as “the brother, whose praise *is* in the gospel throughout all the churches.” Imagine being described as this church member! He was accepted in a wider community as a good steward, an honest soul, and “praised” everywhere. Unspiritual men can greatly hinder the purpose of the church and destroy the Gospel witness to the world. God demands integrity from His stewards.

Second, note how they administered the collection (vv. 20-21). On the one hand, they sought to avoid difficulty (v. 20) and on the other they once again sought to provide integrity. Paul writes, “Providing for honest things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men” (v. 21). While God looks on the heart and it is therefore futile to attempt deception, good stewards are to behave properly, “in the sight of men.” How we act before others affects our integrity as well as our Gospel witness (cp. Rom. 12:17).

Third, note the appreciation of the church (v. 24). Before the entire church the, “proof of our love” becomes evident. God has a special love for men who handle the money well, men who possess integrity. And, men who have integrity are men who are undoubtedly grace givers themselves.

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### Reflection Connection

*How does your church account for the gifts it receives? Does integrity characterize the process?*



### Golden Greek Nugget

Paul exhorted the Corinthians to fulfill the commitment they had made a year earlier to contribute to the Jerusalem fund and by doing so they would, “prove the sincerity” of their love (v. 9). The Greek term translated “prove” is *dokimazō*, which means “to try” or “to distinguish.” Often the term carried the notion of testing whether or not a thing was worthy. For example, precious metals were tested in the fire to gauge their authenticity. For Paul, giving was the fire which discerned whether or not the Corinthians’ faith was authentic.

### Wrap Up

*What does it mean to be a grace giver? It means, first of all, to give liberally. In fact, the Bible knows of no other kind of giving in the end except liberal giving. In addition, liberality is always sincere; liberal giving comes from the heart. And, when one is a grace giver, one is not obsessed with amounts; rather, there is a spirit of equity which saturates the grace giver. Finally, integrity characterizes the one who graciously gives. Being irresponsible in accounting for either one’s own gifts or the gifts of others is unthinkable to him or her who has learned the Biblical virtue of grace giving.*

