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THE GRACE OF GIVING part one

Greetings fellow joint heirs of Christ's kingdom!

We hope everyone had a wonderful Christmas holidays- experiencing the peace and joy that comes through knowing God's greatest gift to the world, our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Dickerson's had a wonderful holiday season as we celebrated our first Christmas with our new family @ High Point Church. What a blessing it is to have a church family! You know, we live in an age where being faithful to a local church body is not as important to people as it used to be. This is mainly due to the fact that people have gained the revelation that sitting in church does not make you a Christian any more than sitting in a garage makes you a car. But the problem that occurs when we begin to realize these things is that the practice of them begins to wane. For example, as people have begun to realize that water baptism does not have any bearing on whether one is born again or not, what has been the result? We rarely see water baptismal services anymore. How many of you know that just because we do not have to be water baptized to be a Christian, this does not mean that we should not endeavor to follow through with this biblical practice?

Well, likewise the local church is still an integral part to spiritual growth and maturity. It is a blessing to have a church family that you can regularly gather with and grow with. I for one did not realize just how important and vital that the local church was until I began to pastor and see things from this perspective. Friends, I can assure you that having a church family is super important to your spiritual walk.

So, yes, we enjoyed our holiday season immensely, but one of the main reasons for the joy we experienced is because the Dickerson's understand this one thing- that Christmas is not about getting; Christmas is about giving!

One thing, our family has adopted a tradition of is on Christmas Eve, we hop in our little white sleigh bearing gifts, and take them to a few different individuals or families that God places on our heart. One of the greatest benefits of this tradition obviously is that we get to show Levi first hand that it truly is more blessed to give than to receive. And it is, saints! It truly does yield more joy in our hearts when we focus on what we can do for other people rather than what they can do for us. And this is exactly what I felt led to share with you over the course of the next two months- the grace that is found in giving.

THE MONEY SUBJECT

As I considered what would be a good subject to cover as we begin a new calendar year, it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and me that I share on the principles that govern giving. Why, you ask? It is because understanding the laws that govern giving is so vitally important to our prospering in the kingdom of God. Therefore, when we traditionally begin our new calendar year through making resolutions, making the commitment to be better financial stewards is an honorable and wise decision.

Now if there is one subject that is shunned the most by the body of Christ, it would probably be the subject of financial stewardship and prosperity. Understandably so, for this is one of the most twisted and perverted subjects to pervade the body of Christ over the past several decades. But what we need to understand is that we shouldn't throw the baby out with the bath water! There are still truths concerning this subject that need to be taught, understood and embraced by the church.

The fact is that Jesus spent more time talking about money than He did heaven and hell. And we know those two subjects certainly need to be taught and emphasized, right? But the reason we see Jesus spending so much time teaching on the subject of money and how we steward it is because it is oftentimes a direct revelation of the condition of our heart. Now I know that some do not like to hear that, but those are usually the people who are not seeking first the kingdom of God with their finances anyways. So I am not real concerned with the opinions of those.☺

The fact remains that this is a huge subject that we need to feed our faith on because if faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God (and it does), then faith for financial stewardship is going to come by hearing God's Word concerning this subject. Amen? So I encourage you to take heed to this teaching and don't go into it thinking you know all there is to know about giving and prosperity. That will close you off from receiving the nourishment that can come into your spirit through these words of faith.

TO PROSPER OR NOT TO PROSPER?

Now the first thing we need to understand concerning this subject is that **since it is undoubtedly God's will that we be givers, then we must also embrace the truth that it must be God's will that we have something to give.** Amen?

How many of you believe that God's Word teaches us that we should give of our finances into the kingdom of God by helping the poor, supporting good Christian ministries, and honoring those who serve our Lord? This is crystal clear in God's Word. No one can argue that it is God's will for all Christians to be givers. But how are we ever going to be givers if we do not ever have anything to give? I mean, if we are in debt up to our eyeballs and struggling to pay our own bills, then how are we ever going to be able to help others meet their needs? We won't. This is why we need to walk in the blessing of Abraham that declares that God's people are blessed so that we can be a blessing! Amen?

You know, this should be our motive for all that we desire to receive from God. For example, we should believe God for our healing, not just for us to be free from pain and weakness, but so that we can more effectively help others and be better equipped to focus on the physical needs of others. Likewise, we should desire to prosper according to God's Word, not because we are seeking to store up more for ourselves, but because we want to be able to be more benevolent and gracious givers. Amen!?!

And like I said earlier, there are those who pervert this truth concerning God's will for us to prosper, but there is still a valid truth concerning it in the Word of God. Yes, God does want all of His children to prosper. Of this, we have no doubt because His Word positively declares it. But the main reason He wants us to have more than enough is so that we can have enough to give.

The Apostle Paul declares this in 2 Corinthians 9:8 when he says, "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." Notice the repeated references here to "all, always, & every." Again, God is able to make all grace abound toward us so that we always will have all sufficiency in all things and may have an abundance for every good work. This verse reveals the extravagant nature of our God and His will for us to have all we need to give into every good work. Glory to God!

But oftentimes, as is the case with verses like this, there is usually a truth before it that shows one how to get to this place... For example, many are familiar with Philippians 4:19 which says, "And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus." However, what many are unfamiliar with is how this verse begins with a conjunction. In fact, both Philippians 4:19 & 2 Corinthians 9:8 both begin with the same conjunction- "And." What does this mean, you ask? It means that they are conditional promises based on the things said prior to these verses. And can you guess what the subject matter is before both of these verses? GIVING- faithful, gracious, and benevolent giving!

THE GRACE OF GIVING

Now when it comes to the subject of giving, there is perhaps no greater passage of Scripture than the one preceding the verse we just covered, 2 Corinthians 9:8. As a matter of fact, 2 Corinthians chapters 8 & 9 both completely deal with the subject of our financial stewardship. And, in my opinion, they give us the best description of the principles that govern giving in all of God's Word.

So what I want to begin to do this month is look at some of the principles of giving that the Holy Spirit reveals to us in these two chapters so that we can grow in this area. Let's begin with 2 Corinthians 8:1...

In 2 Corinthians 8:1 Paul begins by saying, *“Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia:”*

Now as we consider what the Apostle Paul was saying here, it is important that we go into this study with the understanding that our financial stewardship is the subject at hand. So when he made this statement that he wanted to make known to us the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia, what he was apparently saying was that the principles of giving that the churches of Macedonia operated under and he was about to spend two chapters on, were examples of God’s grace being bestowed on them.

Now to me, to demonstrate the true heart of giving is a distinguishing characteristic of those who have truly received and embraced the grace of God. You know, it is easy for one to say that they believe in God’s grace, mercy, and forgiveness, but the proof of the pudding is in the eating.☺ What do I mean by that? I mean if you believe in something, then the proof of your faith is that truth you say you believe in will be demonstrated through your life. For example, if you say you believe in God’s forgiveness, then what should be the fruit of your faith? Well, the fruit should be that you practice that same forgiveness towards others. It seems to me that the Lord thought this as well with all the references He gives us in His Word to forgiving even as we have been forgiven.

You see, this is why it is so important to understand all the wonderful dimensions of God’s love. Why? Because when you truly see God’s awesome love towards you, the by-product is it will reflect in His love flowing through you. Glory to God!

So what do you think is the by-product of receiving the grace of God? Well, grace, in its simplest definition, is a gift that is freely given, right? So to receive the grace of God would result in us becoming more gracious givers! In other words, **when God’s grace is bestowed on us, it will be bestowed through us being better givers.** Amen?

So beginning in verse 2, let’s start to look specifically at how God’s way of giving was reflected in these Macedonian churches...

FAITHFUL IN LITTLE

Verse 2 goes on to say, *“that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality.”*

You see, even though these churches were experiencing severe trials, their joy mixed even with their deep poverty overflowed into their great liberality. In other words, even though they had problems and needs of their own, they still gave; and not only did they just give, but they gave liberally!

You see, many say things like- *“Well, when I hit the jackpot, I’ll give this and that.”* But the truth is- if you do not learn how to give when you have just a little, you will not give when you have a lot. Why? Because giving is an issue of the heart and not necessarily situational or circumstantial. In other words, someone will not automatically become a giver just because they have something to give.

I’ll tell you, I’ve worked in banking for 10 plus years and that statement is most certainly true. Some of the most stingy penny pinchers you will find have 6 figures sitting in their bank accounts. But I have also seen those who do not have a lot, yet they give liberally and lavishly. So here is my point: **when it comes to giving, it doesn’t matter what you have to give; it matters what kind of heart you have.**

So one of the principles regarding giving that we can learn from is this- We ought to learn to be liberal in spite of our own trials and needs and not wait until we have an abundance to give from. Remember, giving always starts now!

HOW TO EAT THE GOOD OF THE LAND

Then Paul goes on to say in verse 3- *“For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing.”*

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This verse simply reinforces what we just said- that these Macedonians gave more than they had to give and, therefore, gave sacrificially! And here we see that they not only gave beyond their ability, but they *willingly* gave in this sacrificial manner. Saints, this is such an important principle regarding giving.

Now our willingness to give might not seem to be that big of an issue, but I can assure you it is with the Lord... In Isaiah 1:19, the Lord told Israel, "If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land." Notice that this verse does not just say that obedience will cause us to eat the good of the land. While obedience is good and acceptable, what the Lord is looking for is a willing heart to obey. For instance, we can give our tithe simply because God teaches us to in His Word, but if our heart is rebelling against it, we can lose some of the reward from it. In other words, the Lord wants us to be more than just obedient; He wants us to be *willing* and obedient, and this is what causes us to eat the good of the land.

You see, some people give their tithe for all kinds of wrong reasons. Some give 10% out of fear- fearing that they will be cursed with a curse and God will be angry with them. Some give 10% out of pressure- giving because the preacher twists their arm and manipulates them. There are all kinds of motivations that people give out of and, unfortunately, in many situations the givers are unwilling.

Now I certainly believe that God still honors our simple acts of obedience to where we will eat of the land (generally speaking)- meaning, we will not lack and suffer loss. But this is certainly not God's best! **He desires for us to not just eat of the land; His will is for us to eat the good of the land!** In other words, He doesn't just want us to have enough; He wants us to have more than enough! And we eat of God's highest and best when we are not just obedient, but we are willing to obey.

So why is our willingness so important to the Lord? It is because, as in everything, He wants us to want to. He wants us to give because we love to give and are seeking to be a blessing. Just as we don't want our children to do things just because they have to, likewise God does not want us to do things for Him unwillingly either. As we will eventually see in 2 Corinthians 9:6, God loves a cheerful giver- that is, a giver who has his or her heart in their giving.

DYING TO GIVE

This leads us into the next verse of 2 Corinthians chapter 8 which says, "*imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints*" (verse 4).

Notice that this picture that Paul paints here is the exact opposite that we see in much of the Body of Christ today... In most churches and ministries, we see the preacher "imploring us with much urgency" that they receive our gift, not the other way around! But, no, the churches of Macedonia were actually imploring him with much urgency to receive their gift and let them partner (i.e. fellowship) with him. Oh, that we would see a revival of this in the Body of Christ today!

Saints, this is so important to understand- that it is our privilege and honor to give into the kingdom! We need to see supporting churches, ministries, and missions in this light. For when we see things from the perspective that we are making an impact on God's everlasting kingdom, we will look for ways to give instead of looking for reasons not to give.

So this verse shows us that these believers actually took the initiative in their giving! They did not wait for "offering time!" They actually approached Paul and begged him to let them "get in on" ministering to these other saints. And, undoubtedly, one of the reasons they were so pushy to get in on this ministerial opportunity was because they saw it as a "fellowship" with Paul's ministry. In other words, they saw it as a good investment to become partners with Paul's ministry.

How many of you think the Apostle Paul's ministry was good ground to sow into? You can bet it was! And the Macedonian churches understood this too! So they wanted to get in on that solid investment of advancing God's kingdom, and they did so by taking the initiative in their giving.

Now in verse 5, Paul goes on to say, *“And not only as we had hoped, but they first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God.”*

Notice that these churches not only gave to Paul’s ministry as expected, but they gave their lives over to the Lord first. This is a very important principle for us to understand because this is the foundation of financial stewardship: giving all of ourselves to God (which will obviously include our finances).

You see, we need to understand that when we become a born again Christian, we become crucified with Christ (see Galatians 2:20). In other words, from a spiritual sense, we die and our life is hidden with Christ in God (see Colossians 3:3). What does this have to do with our giving, you ask? Well, when we identify with these positional truths and give ourselves over to the Lord as a result, then we will see that our money is not “our” money anymore; it is the Lord’s money and we are simply stewards of what is His. When we understand that our money is not really ours in the first place, it makes it a whole lot easier to release it. Amen?

This is why I do not completely agree with the following statement from the Old Testament that we quote all of the time- “The tithe is the Lord’s!” You see, this might have been true for the Old Testament saint because their life was still their own, but it’s not for us under this new and better covenant. You see, the Lord told them that the first 10% of their increase was holy unto the Lord. But now, under our dispensation, it is no longer us who live, but Christ living in and through us (see Philippians 1:21). Therefore, since we are reckoned dead, 90% cannot be ours anymore. **Now under the New Covenant, 10% is not the Lord’s; under the New Covenant, 100% is the Lord’s! Amen!?!**

Now am I saying that we shouldn’t tithe anymore? Heaven’s no! The principle of the tithe was practiced in the Book of Genesis before the Old Covenant was even established; so it is a good principle to start with in our giving habits. But now in this church age, we need to be spirit led in our giving.

However, let me caution you: if you are consistently “led” to give less than 10% under this new and better covenant, you are not being led by the Spirit of God! No, if this is a better covenant established upon better promises, then we should not be giving less than they did under the Old Covenant; we should be giving more! And I for one, have that target at heart- that I am not just going to give my tithe, but I am going to give much more than 10%. Now 10% is certainly a good starting point; but make sure you are giving with the right motive and are listening to the Spirit of God’s directions.

This is what Paul concluded verse 5 with ... After he made the reference to them first giving themselves to the Lord, he said that they then gave to his ministry *by the will of God*. Notice that the reason they gave to him was because it was the will of God for them to do so.

You know, it is not always God’s will for us to give to every ministry or person that comes down the road. This should be obvious because most of us don’t have enough to give into every good work that we come across. So then what determines who we give to and who we don’t? The will of God! In other words, we need to give where the Holy Spirit leads and directs us to give. Always remember: **the best ground to sow into is the ground God tells you to sow into!**

BEING AN AUTHOR AND FINISHER IN GIVING

Now if we skip down to verses 8&9 we can find another important principle regarding giving...

Here Paul says, *“I speak not by commandment, but I am testing the sincerity of your love by the diligence of others. 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.”*

The Apostle Paul wanted to make sure that this giving that he had been referring to from the beginning of this chapter was not a commandment. He did not want the Corinthians to begin to view these things that he was saying as a “law” and then start giving out of compulsion. No, he was simply trying to spur them on to start giving like the

Macedonian churches by using these other churches as an example of how they should be giving.

Again, these churches were freely willing. God does not want us to give legalistically! That kind of giving does not please Him. No, God wants us to want to! The motivation that Paul used was not legalism, but it was the example of others. He used the example of these Macedonian churches and then capped it off with this example of Jesus in verse 9...

You see, Jesus was and is and evermore shall be the greatest example of a giver. The reason being is because no one has ever given any more unselfishly and lavishly than Him... He willingly laid down His glory and riches in heaven and became poor by coming to earth as a man. He lived this lifestyle of laying His life down every day on the earth and then ultimately took up His Cross for us so that we, who were impoverished, could be made rich. Therefore, He gave the gift of Himself selflessly and lavishly.

Then in verses 10&11 Paul says, "And in this I give advice: It is to your advantage not only to be doing what you began and were desiring to do a year ago; but now you also must complete the doing of it; that as there was a readiness to desire it, so there also may be a completion out of what you have."

Notice first that Paul said it is to our advantage to follow through on our giving. Saints, we need to see giving this way-that we are actually profiting in several different ways when we give. We, of course, profit spiritually as we are bearing the fruits of righteousness through our gifts of love. But we need to understand that we also profit naturally because, as Jesus taught us, when we give, it shall be given unto us pressed down, shaken together, running over shall *men* give unto our bosom (see Luke 6:38). Praise God! If we truly had a revelation of this, we would be more apt to be givers than we are to be receivers. So truly, as the Apostle Paul said in Acts 20:35, it is more blessed to give than to receive.

However, the major point of these two verses is that we need to make sure we follow through with our commitments regarding giving. You see, while many believers get pumped up to give initially and immediately make a pledge to partner in a work of God, when the emotional high wears off, oftentimes their giving slips as well. So Paul, being aware of this tendency in people, was encouraging the Corinthian church to complete what they had desired to do a year ago (i.e. to be faithful to their commitment). So the lesson we should learn from this is that if we committed to partner with someone financially, then we ought to be diligent to do it until God tells us differently, not when the emotional high wears off.

Aren't you glad that Jesus did not do this with us? He gave Himself for us even when He didn't feel like it. He came to that place in the Garden of Gethsemane where His flesh wanted that cup to pass by but He put His flesh under and said, "not My will but Your will be done." And this is the same mentality we need to have concerning our giving: We need to follow through with it even when we don't feel like it anymore! Yes, **just as Jesus was called "the author and finisher of faith" in Hebrews 12:2, likewise we also need to be "authors and finishers of giving"!**

Friends, giving is such an important part of the Christian life! It really is the Christian life! Therefore, we should endeavor to grow in our giving habits- both learning how we can become more gracious, willing, and benevolent givers.

Next month, we will continue on with this subject by moving into 2 Corinthians chapter 9 and uncover more lessons on giving!

Until next month... Grace and peace be multiplied in you and yours!

Victoriously,

