

Lecture 22

2 Corinthians 8-9

Before I get into the lecture, I want to make a few qualifying and foundational statements:

1. I'm not here to ask, convince, coerce, guilt, or influence you to give money to the church. Eastside's leadership has not enlisted me to give this lecture, and I'm guessing they don't have a clue we're even covering this topic. Besides, with my next two statements, they probably would not want me giving this lecture!
2. God does not need your money. He is Almighty God Who has endless resources to draw upon. He can do His business quite nicely without your money.
3. Based on your attitude about giving, He may not want your money.

I'm not asking for your money. God doesn't need your money. Depending on your mindset, He may not even want your money. Hopefully, these statements will put you at ease regarding this lesson's topic of giving. I want everyone take a deep breath and let the peace of God come upon you and listen to His heart about giving.

The context of chapters 8 & 9 is the founding church in Jerusalem is suffering terribly. The early church in Jerusalem had developed a communal approach to providing resources for its membership. The plan was everyone would sell all their possessions and give the money to the apostles, and they would be responsible for distributing the wealth to meet the needs of the members. It was a beautiful thought, but the ongoing needs exhausted the money. Additionally, there was great

persecution on the church and a famine was putting even more strain on the Jerusalem church.

Paul is writing to the Corinthians to ask them to take up an offering, so he could present it to the Jerusalem church. This was a significant issue to Paul as much of the Jerusalem church were converted Jews, and many of them were still struggling with the idea that gentiles could be considered brothers and sisters in Christ. Paul knew that if the largely gentile churches he founded provided an offering to the Jerusalem church, that would help unite the church.

There is a primary message that is in these two chapters. What might surprise you is the primary message is not giving by itself. There's a necessary accompanying theme to giving. I want to introduce you to a Greek word – “*charis*” (pronounced khar-ece). It is defined as *graciousness; the divine influence upon the heart and its reflection in the life including words such as gratitude, grace, benefit, and favor*. This Greek word appears ten times in these two chapters. However, the translators use different English words for charis. This table offers the locations and uses of the word in the KJV and NIV versions of the Bible.

Charis		
Verse	KJV	NIV
2 Corinthians 8:1	Grace	Grace
2 Corinthians 8:4	Grace	Sharing
2 Corinthians 8:6	Grace	Grace
2 Corinthians 8:7	Grace	Grace
2 Corinthians 8:9	Grace	Grace
2 Corinthians 8:16	Thanks	Thanks
2 Corinthians 8:19	Grace	Offering
2 Corinthians 9:8	Grace	Bless
2 Corinthians 9:14	Grace	Grace
2 Corinthians 9:15	Thanks	Thanks

As you can tell by this table, the predominant translated word for *charis* is grace. However, there are also words used such as thanks, sharing, offering, and bless. For Paul to reference this word ten times in a comparatively short exhortation on giving, I believe we need to take notice of the linking of grace and giving. He is calling giving an expression of grace. Giving is a temperament created by the Spirit of God. I like J. Vernon McGee's description of the grace of God, "*It is the passion of God to share all His goodness with others.*"

With that backdrop, let's get into the reading. Looky, looky – what word do we see in the very first verse in today's reading, "*And now, brothers and sisters, we want you to know about the **grace** that God has given the Macedonian churches.*" Macedonia was an independent country located in modern-day northern Greece. In his first missionary journey to this area, Paul established the churches in Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea.

In verses 2-4, Paul describes the dire financial condition of these churches – they were very poor and experiencing a severe trial. However, despite their difficult circumstances, we see an extraordinary Godly mindset. They're looking beyond themselves – their own painful situation – and have "*overflowing joy*" and "*rich generosity*" for their fellow brothers and sisters. This mindset was developed entirely on their own – with no coercion or paying for a consultant to come up with a campaign to get people to give. Not only did they want to give what they have, but also to give beyond their ability. They saw giving from their poverty a privilege. In the first half of verse 5, Paul tells us that their giving exceeded his and his team's expectations.

Can we say that? Do we look at giving as a privilege? Do we disregard our tough times and look beyond our suffering to find a way to help others? It's not easy, is it? I would be lying to you if I told you I had that mentality all of the time. How does someone develop this extraordinary sacrificial mindset?

Paul tells us how in verse 5b, *“They gave themselves first of all to the Lord.”* Jesus said in Matthew 6:33, *“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”* What are the *“these things”* Jesus is referencing in this foundational component of our faith? They are the things in life we worry about. Please allow me to ask you a question. Are any of you worried about anything at this moment? Worry is another word for fear. For the believer in and the follower of Jesus Christ, fear *should*, and I am emphasizing the word *“should”* have no place in your life. John the Apostle makes this foundational statement of faith in the 18th verse of the 4th chapter of his first epistle, *“There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.”*

God is perfect (Psalm 18:30) and God is love (1 John 4:8), so what John is telling us is God’s perfect loving presence in our life *should* eliminate the fears in our life. Well, how many of us raised our hands when we said we’re worrying about something? What does that tell us? – We have a disconnect between what the Bible tells us is true and how we are living. That disconnect can be summed up in one word – faith. In Jesus’ talk about worry, He plainly says the problem with those who worry have little faith. He makes a couple of blunt comments about the futility of worry. From verse Matthew 6:27 He says, *“Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?”* Then He lays down a concluding command in Matthew 6:34, *“Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”*

Please know my motivation for emphasizing the folly of fear to the believer is not an attempt to get you to give more money to the church. Frankly, as I was writing this, giving money was the furthest thing from my mind. As I was writing this, I was trying to imagine what a worry-free life would look like. The only way I can imagine such a state of mind is to have unshakable trust in Someone’s desire

and ability to provide for my every need and circumstance. If I only had an example of such faith, maybe that would move me further down that path. Well what do you know, I opened my Bible, and look at what I found?!

Probably my favorite non-Jesus story on the issue of trusting God is from Genesis 22. Most of you may know the story. Abraham has been told by God that he is to sacrifice his only son, Isaac. He did have an older son, Ishmael, but he was conceived by a lack of faith. Therefore, God only acknowledged Isaac as his true son. Abraham takes Isaac – a fully grown man – to Mount Mariah. As they're getting close to the Mount, Isaac asks his father where the lamb is for the sacrifice? Abraham responds in verse 8, *"My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering."* (KJV) Abraham lays Isaac on an altar and is about to go through with the sacrifice when God tells him to stop. God sees Abraham's obedience and faith and stops the scene. Abraham looks up and sees a ram stuck in the thicket and uses it as the sacrifice. Abraham called this place on Mt. Mariah *Jehovah Jireh*, which means *the Lord will provide*.

In giving Himself the name of Jehovah Jireh, God is presenting to us a central component of His character – He *will* provide. God's provision is not a *"maybe"* or *"if I'm in a good mood."* It is constant. For those of us worry-warts, if we can take a step back from our suffering and look at the abundant provision God has given to each of us over our lives, the question we should be asking ourselves is, *'If God provided all this abundance to me up to this point, why would He change His providing ways?'* What's driving the worry and fear in our lives is our listening to the lies of Satan. In the midst of our pain and suffering, which by the way he either initiated or God allowed, he is whispering lies into our ears. Have any of you had the following thoughts? *"God is mad at me, so He is punishing me."* How about *"I'm not being good enough, so God is disappointed with me."* Then there's, *"What kind of God would allow you to experience such pain and*

suffering?” Finally, there’s the concluding thought, “*Well, God’s not doing anything, so I better take control.*”

Do you think any of those thoughts come from a God whose name is “*He will provide*”? You only have to look as far as the cross to find God’s providing heart for you. While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. *The absence of worry and fear allows us to more freely love and give.* The Macedonian churches had developed such great trust and faith in God as their provider, they were free to let their love for their brothers and sisters be expressed in giving from their poverty. This is an amazing testimony not so much of giving but of trust in God’s passionate desire to demonstrate His faithful provision.

Getting back to our reading, we find the third and fourth uses of *charis*, or grace, and look at its connection point, “*So we urged Titus, just as he had earlier made a beginning, to bring also to completion this act of grace on your part. But since you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in the love we have kindled in you - see that you also excel in this grace of giving.*” (2 Cor. 8:6-7) Paul has sent Titus ahead to take the collection because he does not want his presence to be the motivating force for giving. Twice he links their giving to grace. He wants God’s grace – not human coercion - to fall upon and commune with the believers, so whatever they choose to give is between each of them and God – not due to Paul’s or anyone else’s influence.

In verse 9, Paul invokes the fifth use of *charis*, but this time, he links the grace of God to the sacrifice Jesus made to be our Lord and Savior, “*For you know 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.*” I don’t believe we can know the true depth of what Jesus signed up for to be the Lamb of God for us until we get to heaven – if even then. However, I believe it is useful to spend some time contemplating the enormity of what Jesus did for us - the fact that of

His own will and obedience to the Father, He left His beloved Father's side, denied His deserved glory, came to earth in the form of a helpless baby, and subjected Himself to the horrors of this sin-drenched world. *He gave up all that He had, so He could give you all He has.* That is God's love for you, brother and sister. And He didn't do this because we deserved it or earned it. His providing love is rooted in grace.

In verse 10, Paul indicates the request for this offering has been on the table for a while, and the Corinthians were the first to express their desire to give. This letter is now making it clear it is time to step forth and make the gift. I think this is an important point. There are times we're to pray about things, but then there are times to take action. Praying is indeed valuable, but rolling up your sleeves, getting your hands dirty, and getting physically involved in ministry is a deeper testimony to our faith. For some of us, we are limited physically, so praying may be all we can do – and God will honor that. For those of us who are only limited by our unwillingness to give – not necessarily just our money but our time and talents - we need to remember Jesus' convicting statement in Matthew 9:37, *"The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few."*

At the end of verse 11, Paul makes a noteworthy comment about one's desire to give. He tells them to give *"according to your means."* He goes on in verses 12 and 13 to tell them they're to give from what they have – not from what they *don't* have. There should be a balance between using the resources God has provided you to take care of yourself and to give to others. God does not want you borrowing money or starving yourself to give. That mindset is actually a rejection of God's provision for you. *Not only does He give you what you need, but He gives you an abundance as an opportunity to share it with others.* Paul confirms this principle of Godly giving in verse 14, *"At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need."*

Paul mentions the heart of Titus, who is coming to collect the gift – he has the same heart for the Corinthians as Paul. He notes in verses 18 & 22 unnamed brothers are coming with Titus who are *“praised by all the churches for his service to the gospel”* and *“has often proved to us in many ways that he is zealous, and now even more so because of his great confidence in you.”* We don’t know who these men are, but many Bible scholars speculate one of them could be Luke. In verses 20 and 21, Paul invokes good wisdom regarding the handling of money – the concept of multiple people being involved in the handling and distribution of offerings. He is acknowledging the need for accountability for the proper handling of money. Integrity is the mark of a believer, and Paul never wanted anyone questioning his. However, his motivation for living a life of integrity wasn’t selfish – it was a recognition that the absence of integrity destroys the witness to Jesus Christ.

In verse 2 of Chapter 9, Paul offers another fruit of giving – it’s contagious. *“For I know your eagerness to help, and I have been boasting about it to the Macedonians, telling them that since last year you in Achaia were ready to give; and your enthusiasm has stirred most of them to action.”* If your heart and faith is in the right place, you should recognize the joy, the love, and the excitement that comes when you see others giving either their money or themselves to others. Giving should never be out of guilt – if the emotions you are experiencing when you see or hear of others giving are those of guilt, shame, and obligation, then don’t bother giving. This is not how God wants you to give. There is no grace in that kind of giving. Giving should come from a personal and peaceful place between you and God.

I’m going to use this as an opportunity to speak a little about tithing. Did you know that the word *“tithe”* is found nowhere in the New Testament? Tithing is an Old Testament concept. It means to give a 10th of what you have to the Lord.

I've heard multiple teachings on the subject of tithing – do you give 10% on your gross income – before taxes and other deductions – or do you give 10% on the net paycheck – after taxes and other deductions? We first learn about tithing in Leviticus – the book that brings up all the other laws. Tithing is part of the law. Praise God and thanks be to Jesus, we are no longer living under the law. We are living under what? – *Charis* – grace. Am I saying tithing is a bad thing? – No. However, it is not a New Testament principle. It's a good starting point, but what or how much you are to give to the Lord is between you and Him. We need to remember that none of what we have is really ours – it's all God's, and He has given what we have by His generous grace. Accordingly, He is looking for us to have the same mentality – to not begrudgingly give – but to give generously.

In verse 6, Paul invokes another principle of giving, “*Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously.*” There is a correlation between what we give to the Lord and what He gives to us. However, *it's not the amount that we're giving that indicates what we get back from the Lord – it's the cost.* If I make \$1 million dollars per year, and I give \$100,000 to the church, that may seem like a lot of money, but from what it cost me, it wasn't all that much – I still had \$900,000 to live on. However, if I made \$10,000 per year and gave the church \$1,000, then that is a greater sacrifice.

A Biblical picture of what I'm talking about is found in Luke 21:1-4, “*As Jesus looked up, he saw the rich putting their gifts into the temple treasury. He also saw a poor widow put in two very small copper coins. “Truly I tell you,” he said, “this poor widow has put in more than all the others. All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on.*” Jesus did not care about the amount the woman gave. What He cared about was what was in her heart – the cost of what she gave. Her giving was a testimony

of her love for God, her trust in His character, and confidence of His grace to continue to provide for her. May we all arrive at such a faith.

What is your favorite part of a church service? Is it the worship - or is it when it stops? Is it the sermon? Is it communion? Based on Paul's comments in verse 7 that God loves a cheerful giver; I would argue the best part of a church service should be when they take the offering. The real meaning of "cheerful" is *hilarious*. Giving your tithes and offerings should be a joyous time – a time to celebrate and give thanks for all that, out of His grace, God has given you and give back to Him with a cheerful and hilarious heart. This is why I have gotten so offended with churches who relentlessly implement secular campaigns to coerce people to give more and more to the church. How about they take all that time and money and invest it in teaching the always-providing abundant love God has for each of them? Paul says it plainly regarding what our mindset should be regarding giving, "*Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion.*" (2 Corinthians 9:7)

Verse 8 tells us, "*And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.*" Take a look at the words "*all*" and "*abundant*". One of the things on my "to do" list in my studying of the Bible is to do a study on the word "all" in Scripture. What does "all" mean? It means the whole amount, totality, and as much as possible. What I am expecting to find in this study is the resounding truth of the "*allness*" of God. He doesn't short-change in His provision. Our flesh will tell us this isn't true, because it is insatiable – it can't comprehend "all". Our flesh is focused far more on our wants than our needs. *When it comes to our true needs, we can fully trust God to provide for all of them.* This kind of trust leads us to more freely give.

Verse 9 links giving to another component of God – righteousness. Paul invokes Psalm 112:9, *“They have freely scattered their gifts to the poor; their righteousness endures forever.”* Where does our righteousness come from? Romans 4:24 says, *“but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness—for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead.”* Paul also wrote in Ephesians 2:8-9, *“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.”* Guess what the Greek word is for “gift” in Ephesians 2:8? – *Charis*. Once again, we see the link between grace and giving. *A spirit of giving is preceded by a surrendering of self and submission and rejoicing in God’s grace of His constant provision.*

Verse 10 tells us, *“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.”* What Paul is telling us is God provides for us, and if we choose to sacrificially give a portion of His provision to others, He will enlarge the harvest – or fruit – of this act of righteousness. This tenet is building on Malachi 3:10, *“Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house, and try Me now in this,” says the LORD of hosts, “If I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it.”*

There is no other place in Scripture that God encourages us to test Him. In fact, with the exception of Malachi 3:10, Deuteronomy 6:16 clearly commands we are forbidden to test the Lord. So why the exception when it comes to giving? I would argue God knows how tightly we hold onto our wealth, so He is willing to allow this lone exception to test Him to demonstrate the faithfulness of His abundant provision. Paul confirms my argument in verse 11, *“You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through*

us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.” If you give to God, He will enrich you in every way so as to continue to build up in you a spirit of generosity. What this principle isn’t saying is give more to God, so He’ll give more to you to *keep*. What He is telling us is that if we give generously, He will return generous blessings to you to *give more of them to others*.

Giving is an expression of thanksgiving to God. It releases the vice-grip on our money and allows us to tangibly demonstrate our appreciation for what God has provided us by giving some of it to others in need. There’s a dual blessing in our giving. Not only is it an expression of thanksgiving on our part, but the receiver of the gift now has a reason to give thanks to God. Have you ever thought that what you have – not just money, but time, talents, experiences, etc. – could be the provision that God is looking to give to another? Paul confirms the multiplying of blessings in giving when he says in verses 12-13, *“This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of the Lord’s people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, others 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.”*

Paul sums up this reciprocal principle of giving in verse 14, *“And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you.”* There’s that word “*charis*” again. Paul is telling the Corinthians that their response to the grace that God has bestowed upon them produces a fellowship and a bond with the Jerusalem church believers. Giving is a unifying force in the Kingdom.

Paul concludes chapter 9 with an emphatic, *“Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!”* The 10th and final use of *charis* is found here in verse 15 – the translated word is “gift.” The indescribable gift, or *charis*, Paul is referring to is the

greatest demonstration of God's grace in the giving of Jesus Christ as the atonement for our sins. And guess where Jesus was crucified? – On Mount Mariah. As Abraham said in Genesis 22, Jehovah Jireh indeed had provided Himself a Lamb.

As a confessed believer in and follower of Jesus Christ, each of us is given, by grace from God the Father and God the Son, the third member of the triune God – the Holy Spirit. By having the Holy Spirit dwelling in us, we have the character of God living in us. Therefore, the believer should reflect God's giving nature via the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and, therefore, should want to give as well. Let me conclude with some undeniable links to giving that we've covered:

- Giving is an expression of grace
- Giving is a privilege
- Giving is contagious
- Giving is joyous
- Giving is a testimony to our righteousness
- Giving is an expression of thanksgiving
- Giving is a unifying force in the Kingdom

According to Acts 20:35c, Jesus said, "*It is more blessed to give than to receive.*" If we're honest with ourselves, we should realize we are most blessed people. We have the gift of grace of salvation in Jesus Christ – everything else is just gravy. We have received so much from God. Yet, there is a greater blessing, and that is to give – to give a portion of what we have received to others in need. Each of us has God's love in us via the Holy Spirit, so love is available to share with others. Giving money is one way to demonstrate that love. As for what that amount should be for each of you, my prayer is His charis – His grace – will lead you to that number. God bless you!