

Principles of Giving, part 1 (2 Corinthians 8–9)

Generosity rather than wealth is the God-pleasing character quality (cf. Luke 21:1–4). Wealth can disguise spiritual poverty (cf. Rev 3:17). Principles of giving, like those found in these chapters, help us grow in generosity. It is noteworthy that this generosity came from churches who were not rich. Their generosity was a work of grace.

I. The source of this grace of giving is God (8:1–7).

1. This truth “bookends” the section (8:1; 9:14) emphasizing it and pointing to it as the central theme.
2. This truth is logically implied in 8:6, 7, 19; 9:8, first by describing their giving as an “act of grace” and then through application of the general principle that God makes all grace abound to you (9:8). (This grace was God’s and not theirs since at least part of their giving was a spiritual obligation (Romans 15:27).

This teaches us that God is a giving God –a God of grace– and that giving is a godly character quality. But it does not say that giving must wait for a “feeling” to give. Giving is both commanded and a work of the Spirit, just like loving, rejoicing, being patient, kind, etc.

Begin this work of God’s grace of giving by seeking out the obligations to give which God has revealed (e.g., 1 Timothy 5:4:17–18). Then seek out wise giving, beyond obligations (1 Timothy 6:17–19). Invest in heavenly treasures (Matthew 6:19–21).

II. The expression of this grace of giving toward people is love (8:8–9).

1. To excel in giving (8:7) was not commanded, but was a standard for the Corinthians to measure the genuineness of their love (8:8), just as the Macedonians had done whose love abounded (cf. Philippians 1:9; 1 Thessalonians 1:3). Love of God and love shown toward your brothers and sisters in Christ in giving are connected (James 2; 1 John 4:20).
2. The Corinthians had benefitted by the selfless, sacrificial, gracious love of God in the Lord Jesus Christ (8:9). When the Son of God took on flesh, His glory was veiled and He exercised His divine powers only in direct submission to the Father. In full obedience He went to the cross to die as the only possible sacrifice for man, to pay the penalty for sin. Paul impressed upon the Corinthians that this was for them. Generosity to others shows understanding and appreciation for what Christ has done (cf. Matthew 18:21–35).

This does not teach that all giving is an act of love (cf. 1 Corinthians 13:3; Matthew 6:1–4). Neither does it teach that giving money is always the loving thing to do (e.g., 2 Thessalonians 3:10). But it does say that your response to real needs can show the genuineness of your love for others. The grace of God working in your heart will produce the love that is an expression of that grace. Look for needs, share needs, think beyond money as the answer to needs.

III. The response to the grace of giving is thanksgiving to God (9:11–15).

When believers understand that giving is a work of God’s grace, then the response is to give thanks to God.

1. The motivation for giving and the response to receiving is God-centered, even when expressing thanks to those whom God uses.
2. Such generous giving comes from a regenerate heart, a heart that has been transformed by the grace of God (9:13). Therefore it begins when a person accepts Christ as Savior and it grows through a work of the Spirit renewing the heart and mind with the Word of God (Romans 12:2).

Therefore, be on guard against the world’s mind set (Colossians 2:8). Take serious the warnings to the rich and God’s wisdom concerning wealth and poverty (e.g., 1 Timothy 6:17–19; Matthew 6:19–34; Proverbs 11:28; 23:5; 27:24; 30:8–9).

We exist to glorify God and enjoy Him. Display the glory of His grace in generosity!