

Grace-Oriented Giving

An Explanation of Grace-Oriented Giving

2 Corinthians 8:16-9:5

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Scripture

Today is the third in my four-week series of sermons titled, “Guidelines for Grace-Oriented Giving” from 2 Corinthians 8-9.

The first week we looked at “An Example of Grace-Oriented Giving” from 2 Corinthians 8:1-5.

The second week we looked at “An Exhortation to Grace-Oriented Giving” from 2 Corinthians 8:6-15.

And today I would like to look at “An Explanation of Grace-Oriented Giving” from 2 Corinthians 8:16-9:5.

So, let’s read 2 Corinthians 8:16-9:5:

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.

⁹ Now it is superfluous for me to write to you about the ministry for the saints, ² for I know your readiness, of which

I boast about you to the people of Macedonia, saying that Achaia has been ready since last year. And your zeal has stirred up most of them. ³ But I am sending the brothers so that our boasting about you may not prove empty in this matter, so that you may be ready, as I said you would be. ⁴ Otherwise, if some Macedonians come with me and find that you are not ready, we would be humiliated – to say nothing of you – for being so confident. ⁵ So I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to go on ahead to you and arrange in advance for the gift you have promised, so that it may be ready as a willing gift, not as an exaction. (2 Corinthians 8:16-9:5)

Introduction

Hudson Taylor, in many ways the father of faith missions, once said, “God’s work done in God’s way will never lack God’s supply.” As pastor and author John MacArthur says, “That’s axiomatic, that’s a self-evident truth.” God always supports his own program. If God has decided that he wants to accomplish a certain project, then God always supplies all the necessary means in order to accomplish his purposes.

Our task as a church is to make sure constantly that we are doing what God wants us to do. After all, this is Christ’s church, and we are simply serving him as he builds his church in this place.

So, the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is not my church. It is Christ’s church. I am simply the pastor of the church to which Christ has called me. And all of us together are worshiping and serving Christ in his church here in this place. And that is why it is so important for our leadership to make sure that all we do in terms of ministry is because that is what Jesus wants us to do.

I say this because you and I receive many pleas from all kinds of ministries for support. It is vitally important that when money is given to any church or ministry that we have some basic principles about giving to support that ministry. And that is what we

have in our text for today.

Review

But, before we get into an explanation of how we should give our money to support a ministry or church, let's review briefly what we have covered so far.

Paul planted the church in Corinth in 51-52 AD, during his second missionary journey. After Paul established the Corinthian Church he returned to Antioch, thus concluding his second missionary journey.

On his third missionary journey Paul traveled to Ephesus and stayed there for three years. During his stay at Ephesus, Paul wrote several letters to the Corinthian Church, addressing several concerns that had arisen at that church. Most likely Paul wrote this letter about 55 AD.

The Corinthian church was in southern Greece and was rather prosperous. The Macedonian churches at Philippi, Berea, and Thessalonica were in northern Greece, and they were extremely poor. Moreover, they experienced severe persecution.

Paul was raising money for the church in Jerusalem. The church in Jerusalem was experiencing an extremely difficult time financially for several reasons. There had been an explosion of new Christians in Jerusalem from all over the world that needed to be housed and fed. There had also been a persecution of Christians, so that they could not easily find work. And finally, there had been a massive famine that impacted the availability of food.

And so Paul was raising money for the church in Jerusalem. Wherever he went he asked for financial support for the church in Jerusalem. He had previously asked the churches of Macedonia, and now he was asking the church of Corinth to support the work.

Actually, he had already asked the church of Corinth to support the work about a year earlier, and so now he was repeating his

request to them. In fact, the Corinthian church was the first to respond to Paul's request a year earlier, but now they did not seem to be doing anything to follow through on their pledge to give.

Lesson

And so, Paul explained how grace-oriented giving works. The principles he set down for the Corinthians are still valid for us today. I want us to look at Paul's explanation of grace-oriented giving. Let's examine some principles of grace-oriented giving.

Let's use the following outline:

1. Grace-Oriented Giving Calls for Leadership That Is in Agreement (8:16-17)
2. Grace-Oriented Giving Is Handled with Accountability (8:18-23)
3. Grace-Oriented Giving Exhibits Love (8:24)
4. Grace-Oriented Giving Sets an Example (9:1-4)
5. Grace-Oriented Giving Overcomes the Sin of Covetousness (9:5)

I. **Grace-Oriented Giving Calls for Leadership That Is in Agreement (8:16-17)**

First, grace-oriented giving calls for leadership that is in agreement.

Paul said in verses 16-17, **“But thanks be to God, who put into the heart of Titus the same earnest care I have for you. For he not only accepted our appeal, but being himself very earnest he is going to you of his own accord.”**

Paul made it clear to the Corinthian church that this was not just his enterprise. It was not just his own little project that he wanted them to support. Indeed, he **thanks God, who put into the heart of Titus the same earnest care** that Paul had for the

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Corinthians. Moreover, Titus **not only accepted** Paul's appeal, **but being himself very earnest** about the fund-raising project, **he** went to the Corinthians **of his own accord**.

So, God's work was being done with God's men that he was raising up. If the Corinthians had any doubt that Paul might be working on his own, without the support of other leaders, here is proof that he did in fact have the support of other leaders.

Grace-oriented giving calls for leaders to be on the same page about what God is doing. It calls for men who know God and love God. It calls for men who understand doctrine and therefore the ways of God. God doesn't act in a divided way. He doesn't tell one leader one thing and another leader a different thing.

You know the story about the Christian guy who falls in love with a girl. He goes to her and says that he believes that God has led her to him and that they are to be married. If God has worked in the same way in the girl, she will of course agree with him. But, if God has not worked in the same way in the girl, the guy's proposal will come as a bit of a surprise to her! God will not tell one person one thing and tell the other person a different thing.

So, grace-oriented giving calls for leadership that is in agreement.

II. Grace-Oriented Giving Is Handled with Accountability (8:18-23)

Second, grace-oriented giving is handled with accountability.

In verse 18 Paul made it clear that along with Titus he was sending two other brothers. Paul did not name these brothers. The one **brother** was apparently **famous among all the churches for his preaching of the gospel** (8:18). The other brother was **often tested and found earnest or diligent in many matters** (8:22). The Corinthians would know who they were when Titus arrived and read the letter to them.

Moreover, this first brother had **been appointed by the churches to travel with Paul** (8:19). Once again Paul made it clear that he was not acting on his own, but now he made it clear that he was acting with the approval of **the churches**.

Paul said that the three – Titus and the two brothers – were carrying out **this act of grace** (8:19). By that he meant that they were collecting money for the relief of the poor in Jerusalem.

So, why was Paul being so cautious? Why was he sending Titus along with two other brothers? Paul said, **“We take this course so that no one should blame us about this generous gift that is being administered by us, for we aim at what is honorable not only in the Lord’s sight but also in the sight of man”** (8:20-21). I like the way the *J. B. Phillips Version* translates these verses, “Naturally we want to avoid the slightest breath of criticism in the distribution of their gifts, and to be absolutely above-board not only in the sight of God but in the eyes of men.”

Paul’s point is that church finances should always be handled with superior financial accountability. There should be all kinds of checks and balances so that no-one can ever point to financial scandal in the church.

When Dr. Billy Graham was a young evangelist, his work was financed entirely by a love offering received at the end of each crusade. From this offering he had to take care of his living expenses and those of his team members. As the costs of the crusades grew and the offerings got larger, Dr. Graham became concerned that the way in which the money was handled would become a source of criticism. So, upon the advice of an older minister, he formed a board of Christian businessmen to handle all the money. Then everyone in the crusade organization was put on salary and the organization’s books and Dr. Graham’s personal finances were audited and the results made public each year. As a result of his sensitivity and care, his operation has been a model of financial accountability through the years.

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It is our desire to handle the money that you entrust to us with accountability. Whether you give to the General Fund, the Benevolence Fund, the Missions Fund, to By His Grace, For His Glory II, or to some other designated cause, we seek accountability in *every* area of our finances.

So, grace-oriented giving calls for leadership that is in agreement. And grace-oriented giving is handled with accountability.

III. Grace-Oriented Giving Exhibits Love (8:24)

Third, grace-oriented giving exhibits love.

Paul said in verse 24, **“So give proof before the churches of your love and of our boasting about you to these men.”**

Paul reemphasized his previous appeal (in 8:7-15) to fulfill their commitment. They were to **give proof** of their love to these men and the churches. This exhortation shows that the proof of their love was not shown by simply receiving these brothers with open arms but by giving generously to help the saints in Jerusalem.

The notion of showing proof of faith or love can be theologically dangerous. God does not say, “If you love me, then prove it by doing this or giving this.” Paul understood, however, that the Corinthians’ generosity was proof that God’s grace was at work in them. Grace-oriented giving is not something that one can fake or produce on demand, because then it will always be begrudged. Grace-oriented giving is the result of experiencing God’s grace.

Paul’s appeal to their pride to show others their generosity is also theologically dangerous. But Christians and churches do not always make the right ethical decisions when left to themselves. Accountability to others keeps us from always doing what we want and serving our own selfish desires. Paul assumed that Christians live and act out of a communal context and that they are answerable to each other. The decisions made by the Corinthians regarding this matter will have immediate repercussions for the whole

church. Knowing that our fellow Christians are watching what we do may help us to be more responsible in allowing God's grace to work in our lives, and thus to show our love to others.

So, grace-oriented giving calls for leadership that is in agreement. It is handled with accountability. And it exhibits love.

IV. Grace-Oriented Giving Sets an Example (9:1-4)

Fourth, grace-oriented giving sets an example.

Paul said in chapter 9, verses 1-4, **“Now it is superfluous for me to write to you about the ministry for the saints, for I know your readiness, of which I boast about you to the people of Macedonia, saying that Achaia has been ready since last year. And your zeal has stirred up most of them. But I am sending the brothers so that our boasting about you may not prove vain in this matter, so that you may be ready, as I said you would be. Otherwise, if some Macedonians come with me and find that you are not ready, we would be humiliated – to say nothing of you – for being so confident.”**

What is Paul saying in these verses? Paul says that he would be very embarrassed if he came over there, having boasted of them to others, and then found out they hadn't given anything.

Generous giving is a real test of any church. And why is that? People who are spiritually dead don't give to God. They give token gifts, hoping to appease him. But people who have experienced the grace of God in their lives know that all that they have is God's. They are simply stewards of his gifts. Their desire is to see as many people as possible come to know the same grace that they have experienced. And so they give to fund kingdom causes. They give to finance global missions. They give to fund local ministry.

Now, these Corinthian Christians had made a pledge that they would give something toward the relief of believers in Jerusalem. Any pledge that a Christian makes is between that person and

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the Lord. It is a pledge *to the Lord* that you will do something or that you will give something.

I heard a story about a wealthy man who was asked, “How in the world did you become so rich when you give so much away?”

“Well,” he answered, “The Lord shovels it in and I shovel it out, and God has the bigger shovel!”

Friends, we can never out give God.

So, grace-oriented giving calls for leadership that is in agreement. It is handled with accountability. It exhibits love. And it sets an example.

V. Grace-Oriented Giving Overcomes the Sin of Covetousness (9:5)

And fifth, grace-oriented overcomes the sin of covetousness.

Paul said in verse 5, **“So I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to go on ahead to you and arrange in advance for the gift you have promised, so that it may be ready as a willing gift, not as an exaction.”**

Paul was arranging for the pledge of the Corinthians to be collected. But he did not want them to give unwillingly, but rather for the gift to be received as **a willing gift, not as an exaction**. The word translated in the *English Standard Version* as **exaction** means “a greedy desire to have more, or covetousness.”

Paul identified the one great sin that affects giving, and it is an **exaction**, or covetousness, or greed. It indicates grasping to hold more, grasping to get more at the expense of others. It is built around selfishness and pride. In the end, churches succeed because God’s people are not covetous.

John MacArthur says, “If the enterprise is of God, if it is God’s work, if it is done in God’s way, and if it deserves your gifts, and if you have them to give and you don’t, sin is the issue.”

But grace-oriented giving overcomes the sin of covetousness. How? We recognize it for what it is. We call it sin. We repent of it. And we ask God to change our hearts so that we can be generous.

So, grace-oriented giving calls for leadership that is in agreement. It is handled with accountability. It exhibits love. It sets an example. And it overcomes the sin of covetousness.

Conclusion

John MacArthur says that someone put together a checklist to evaluate any church fundraising, or any para-church fundraising before you give your money to it. Here are some questions you need to have answered:

Do they have a definite and personal commitment to Christ? Do they have an unclouded commitment to the authority of Scripture? Are they involved in that which is defined as a biblical mission? Is there prayerful dependence on God more than dependence on current strategies and techniques? Is there an obvious love and concern for those ministered to? Is there evidence of maturity, Christlikeness and integrity? Is there the spirit of servanthood and humility rather than presumption or arrogance? Is it a God-centered rather than a man-centered operation (without constant pictures of particular men)? Are the furnishings and life styles in that ministry modest and unpretentious? Have they demonstrated responsible use of funds for purposes that are given? Are their fund-raising tactics non-manipulative? No continuous crisis or inducements to give that will result in you losing your eternal reward? Is there a track record of spiritual fruit? Have you seen it? Is there responsibility to the leadership of a local church? Are there good personal relationships among the ministry staff? And is there a pronounced eternal perspective?

There is a lot of wisdom in that. And that is just a way to summarize what the apostle Paul has been saying as we've walked through this great passage. Amen.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

This sermon, and other sermons, by the Rev. Freddy Fritz can be found at:

1. www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/sermons
2. www.sermoncentral.com/contributors/freddy-fritz-sermons-11181.asp
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PRAYER:

Our Father, we have been instructed and we acknowledge that. Now we are responsible for that instruction which we have received. Lord, thank you for the opportunities which are so numerous for us to give. We are so wealthy. There are many of our brothers and sisters in Christ around the world who have nothing, and we have so much. On the one hand, we feel somewhat cheated by having so much because our dependency upon you is not as great as others, and so we don't see your incredibly providential and powerful hand as clearly as others who have nothing see it. But on the other hand, we do thank you and we rejoice in the bounty of what you have given us. We don't take it lightly, and we don't disregard it. Lord, we are thankful for it. But like those children of Israel who of old gathered more manna than they could possibly eat and knew it would perish before the dawn, make us eager to give away our surplus in the meeting of needs of those who have not enough.

We thank you that we can enjoy all things that you have given us. You haven't asked us to become poor. You have just told us to share. Lord, help us to give. Help us to have the discernment to recognize what to give in order that we might use our resources in a stewardship that brings glory to your name both for time and eternity. Thank you again, Father, for such clear instruction to us, in Jesus' name. Amen.

BENEDICTION:

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.

CHARGE:

Now, brothers and sisters, go and serve God wholeheartedly!