

Christ Reformation Church

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God's Word to a Hesitating Church

Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God. (7:1)

“The Inexpressible Gift”

December 21, 2014

Sermon Text: 2 Cor 8-9

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 60

Introduction-

The Lord is gracious, and that means He is the greatest gift-giver in all creation. I suppose that this is the chief reason we connect the giving of gifts with the celebration of Christmas. *Giving* is the heart of the nature of grace. Both chapters 8 and 9 of this

Second Epistle to the Corinthians address this matter of gracious giving, and they relate it to the greatest Gift of all, the Lord Jesus Christ given to us as our Savior. It is quite fitting then that we consider these two chapters this Christmas Sunday.

Before we begin, I want to point out to you by way of warning and in obedience to Christ's command to us that we “test the spirits,” one way in which God's inexpressible Gift to us in His Son is *despised* today. It is an error that we see always lurking, tempting us to embrace. It is the false gospel of *universalism*. Verla and I had a direct encounter with it this week and I was struck with how this lie actually, as Hebrews says, tramples underfoot the blood of Jesus Christ.

Hebrews 6:6 and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt.

Hebrews 10:29 How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has spurned the Son of God, and has profaned [*trodden underfoot, KJV*] the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace?

The lie is simply this: *Everyone is going to heaven. In the end, everyone is saved.* This lie comes at us in different forms: denial of the reality of hell, God loves everyone, acceptance of the wicked in the church...but at its heart, it is this claim of universal salvation.

John 3:17-18 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. (18) Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

Matthew 7:21-23 "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. (22) On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works

in your name?' (23) And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'

I want to ask you – *do you believe this?* Do you believe that everyone who rejects the Lord Jesus Christ, the inexpressible Gift, is going to end in hell for all eternity? Because, and here is my point, *the universalist is guilty of despising God's greatest Gift to us.* If everyone ends in heaven, you see, then Christ died needlessly. The blood of Christ is not necessary, and thus the universalist despises and profanes that blood of the Lamb of God. The universalist, in fact, is laying up greater condemnation for himself.

So let's be warned against the prevalence of this blasphemous doctrine of universalism in all its forms. God is going to be glorified not only for the riches of His glorious grace, but also for the beauty of His glorious justice exacted upon those who despise His Son. You cannot be in Christ AND believe that all human beings are going to end in heaven. In fact, you cannot be in Christ and believe that Jesus is not the ONLY way of salvation. These are the lies of universalism. The church is infected with these lies today.

Let's take the time now to read right through 2 Cor 8-9, and notice in particular how the Apostle Paul connects Christian giving to God's gift to us in His Son. You will remember that Paul is encouraging these Corinthians to renew their promise of the previous year to participate in the contribution being collected for the relief of the persecuted believers in Jerusalem. Due to false teachers among them and their distancing themselves from Paul, they had dropped the ball on this promise, as Titus reported to Paul.

You will also recall that last time we focused in particular on verse 5 of chapter 8, which I have highlighted. **FIRST** we must give ourselves to the Lord and to His Word, else the Spirit of Christ in us will be quenched and we will not find this *gracious work of giving* operative within us. I have also highlighted the recurring "gift" (grace) words:

2 Corinthians 8:1-24 We want you to know, brothers, about **the grace of God** that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, (2) for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in **a wealth of generosity** on their part. (3) For **they gave** according to their means, as I can testify, and

beyond their means, of their own accord, (4) begging us earnestly for **the favor** of taking part in the relief of the saints-- **(5) and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us.**

(6) Accordingly, we urged Titus that as he had started, so he should complete among you **this act of grace**. (7) But as you excel in everything--in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you--see that you excel in **this act of grace** also. (8) I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine. (9) 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 by his poverty might become rich.**

(10) And in this matter I give my judgment: this benefits you, who a year ago started not only to do this work but also to desire to do it. (11) So now finish doing it as well, so that your readiness in desiring it may be matched by your completing it out of what you have. (12) For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what

he does not have. (13) For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened, but that as a matter of fairness (14) your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need, that there may be fairness. (15) As it is written, "Whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack."

(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.

2 Corinthians 9:1-15 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.

(6) The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. (7) **Each one must give as he has decided** in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for **God loves a cheerful giver.** (8) **And God is able to make all grace abound to you**, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work. (9) As it is written, "He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever." (10) He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. (11) You will be **enriched in every way to be generous in every way**, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. (12) For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God. (13) By their approval of this service, they will glorify God because of your submission flowing from your confession of the gospel of Christ, and **the generosity of your contribution** for them and for all others, (14) while they long for you and pray for you, because of the surpassing grace of God upon

you. (15) Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!

As you can see, there are a number of very important teachings in these chapters that we will need to consider in more detail next time. But the one that we are going to spend the rest of our time considering this morning is that stated in 8:9 –

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 by his poverty might become rich.

The Christian Faith is a Giving Faith Because the Spirit of Christ is the Spirit of Grace

As we see here in 8:9, the very foundation of the Christian faith is *giving. Grace.* Specifically, the giving (grace) of our Lord Jesus Christ. As the Lamb of God, Christ left “heavenly thrones and riches above” and became a bondservant for our salvation:

Philippians 2:5-8 Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, (6) who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, (7) but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness

of men. (8) And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

This is the Model that Paul is pointing us to here. Listen to this section again:

2 Cor 8 (6) Accordingly, we urged Titus that as he had started, so he should complete among you **this act of grace**. (7) But as you excel in everything--in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you--see that you excel in **this act of grace** also. (8) I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine. (9) 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 by his poverty might become rich**.

Notice that (vs 8) one proof that our love – our faith – is genuine, is the fruit of gracious giving. Paul calls this offering, repeatedly, an “*act of grace*.” Giving joyfully and sacrificially for the relief of the brethren in Jerusalem *was the grace of Christ in them acting itself out, revealing itself in visible form*. Does the Spirit of Christ dwell within me? Well, do you see Him breaking out in gracious giving when the Lord

puts a genuine need before you? This is how it was among the churches of Macedonia:

2 Cor 8:1 We want you to know, brothers, about **the grace of God** that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, (2) for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a **wealth of generosity** on their part. (3) For **they gave** according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, (4) begging us earnestly for **the favor** of taking part in the relief of the saints--

That is the Spirit of Christ in action in His people. Have you ever known this? I’m sure most of you have. The thing gets to be like Christmas – this joy of giving and giving generously – giving almost wildly – beyond our ability, rejoicing at seeing the needs of Christ’s people met. This is how we are to encourage one another in regard to giving to the Lord.

Now, there is a place for the preaching of the Law in the arena as well. As always, where there are hard, unrepentant hearts, where greed and jealousy and coveting and self-serving rule, especially if such wickedness is being evidenced by someone who

claims to be a Christian, then the thundering of Mt. Sinai is the appropriate tool. Listen to James do this –

James 5:1-6 Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you. (2) Your riches have rotted and your garments are moth-eaten. (3) Your gold and silver have corroded, and their corrosion will be evidence against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up treasure in the last days. (4) Behold, the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, are crying out against you, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts. (5) You have lived on the earth in luxury and in self-indulgence. You have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. (6) You have condemned and murdered the righteous person. He does not resist you.

Anyone who claims to be a Christian, but who is *characterized* by the love of money, who withholds giving to the Lord and the Lord's people, who uses their resources for self-indulgence out of greed and covetousness, is simply not a Christian. The thing is impossible because *the Spirit of Christ is the Spirit*

of grace (gifts) and every Christian is indwelt and led by this Spirit.

But here, Paul is encouraging the Corinthians to excel in this *act of grace* as he calls this contribution to suffering saints in Jerusalem. And he points us to the Lord Jesus as not only the ultimate Gift, but the ultimate Gift-Giver. Listen again-

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 by his poverty might become rich. (8:9)

Here is the very heart of the Christian faith. The Son of God, existing from all eternity in all the glory of heaven, possessor of infinite wealth, *became poor so that we might become rich.* You hear it in Christ's great prayer:

John 17:4-5 I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. (5) And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.

We are greatly moved by stories of kings and queens to chose to give up their royalty for the love of someone. But what was it for the Son of God to relinquish the glory He had in the

presence of His Father, and come down to this earth to die for us? To be hated and despised? The Son of God you see *gave*. And He gave for our wealth:

Ephesians 1:3-12 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, **who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing** in the heavenly places, (4) even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love (5) he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, (6) to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. (7) In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, **according to the riches of his grace, (8) which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight** (9) making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ (10) as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. **(11) In him we have obtained an inheritance,** having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, (12) so that we who

were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory.

Here we were, lost in our sin, fumbling around in the devil's darkness, headed for hell, *we were in need*. Spiritually we were impoverished before God. Christ, from the wealth and glory of heaven saw our need *and came down*. He became poor, even giving Himself on the cross, so that we might become rich toward God. And this model of Christ, this becoming poor, this *giving*, is an attribute of the very character of God – Father, Son, and Spirit. And it becomes the character of Christ's people as well. Think of it. Down through the history of the Christian Church, the Spirit of giving has done some remarkable things. Think of the hospitals for instance. The orphanages and schools. Missions. All of these things are fueled by the Spirit of Christ who moves His people to become poor so that others might be rich in the wealth of Christ.

And as we are going to see next time in more detail, the Spirit of Christ who is the Spirit of Grace moves His people to give even out of their poverty, cheerfully, joyfully, without any threatening or outside compulsion, in a way that perhaps to an outside observer looks crazy. Paul saw it in Macedonia –

8:3 For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord,

Do you know anything of these things? Is this Spirit of grace in you? Maybe there have been times when the Spirit of Christ has prompted you in this regard and maybe you didn't recognize what was really happening. The world and often other immature Christians – or hypocrites – can squelch the Spirit's work in us if we are ignorant of how He compels us and leads us. "Oh, that's foolish!" The world, the carnal "Christian," calls faith *foolishness*. But it isn't.

Conclusion

Let me end now with two points. One is a great truth from Scripture and the second is an invitation to exercise this act of grace in giving.

There is no need in Eden. Right? There was no poverty in the original Eden. No need. No hunger. And that is how it is going to be once again in the New Eden – in the new heavens and earth. You have the thing stated many times in both Old and New Testaments. Isaiah 60 that we read earlier is an example.

Now, here is the thing – *every local church is an outpost of Eden in this fallen world*. We are citizens of the new heavens and earth, new creations. And we are called to live as such in this world. One of the characteristics therefore of life in the local church, of life among God's people here, is that *there be no need*. The widow and the orphan (not the sluggard!) are to be cared for.

Isaiah 55:1 "Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.

This is why Paul had come down so hard on the greed of some of the Corinthians, evidenced at the Lord's table –

1 Corinthians 11:17-22 But in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse. (18) For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you. And I believe it in part, (19) for there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized. (20) When you come together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat.

(21) For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal. **One goes hungry, another gets drunk.** (22) What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God **and humiliate those who have nothing?** What shall I say to you? Shall I commend you in this? No, I will not.

We are outposts of Eden. Remember that doctrine and it will guide us in all of our decisions and practices here.

Finally, let me extend an invitation to you. It is an invitation to participate in an “act of grace.” Not compulsion. This is grace. This is gift-giving.

Right now when it comes to finances, this church is as short as I can remember. We do not have an abundance and I don't see that changing in the near future. At the same time, I wanted to share with you the case of a widow indeed that I am aware of. I know a sound, faithful, Christian lady with several young children. I have known her for over two years through the blog and talk with her frequently. She has suffered horribly at the hands of a wicked abuser, she has been ex-communicated by the cultic “church” she once belonged to because she sought a divorce, and she is still being

persecuted by her abuser through the court system. She has never once asked for money, but in speaking with her recently I learned that she can hardly pay the electric bill, has little money for food, and because of the lingering court process (very typical in these abuse cases) she gets little support income, and that only grudgingly.

I put her case before you and invite you, if the Spirit of Grace so leads you, to give a gracious gift to help her. This won't be tax-deductible because it is designated for an individual. I will take, along with someone else as a witness, any funds given to the bank, get a money order, and send it to her.

Now, you know that I do not hardly ever make these kinds of appeals, and frankly our church finances at this time would dictate that we not give anything outside this church right now. But how can I preach to you on this subject, and all of us hear the Apostle Paul teach us about giving gracious gifts to poor brethren in Christ, giving even out of our own lack, and promising us (as we will see next week) that God will supply more “seed to the sower”) and all the while I know about this lady and her children and their suffering, without extending the opportunity and invitation to you to

participate in a real act of grace, as Paul calls it?

Here is the great promise and challenge we will look more closely at next week. I close with it –

2 Corinthians 9:6-15 The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. (7) Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. (8) And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work. (9) As it is written, "He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever." (10) He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. (11) You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. (12) For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God. (13) By their approval of this service, they will glorify God because of your

submission flowing from your confession of the gospel of Christ, and the generosity of your contribution for them and for all others, (14) while they long for you and pray for you, because of the surpassing grace of God upon you. (15) Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!