

**Generous Grace**  
 2 Corinthians 8:1-15  
 Pastor Jason Van Bommel

*We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, <sup>4</sup> begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints— <sup>5</sup> and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us. <sup>6</sup> Accordingly, we urged Titus that as he had started, so he should complete among you this act of grace. <sup>7</sup> 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.*

*<sup>8</sup> I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine. <sup>9</sup> 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. <sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> 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. <sup>12</sup> For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have. <sup>13</sup> For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened, but that as a matter of fairness <sup>14</sup> your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need, that there may be fairness. <sup>15</sup> As it is written, “Whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack.” – 2 Corinthians 8:1-15, ESV*

Earlier this morning, we read one of the greatest passages on the grace of God in the whole Bible, Ephesians 2:1-10. In that passage, Paul mentions grace three times. But here in our passage in 2 Corinthians 8, he mentions grace four times. (And the Greek word for grace, *charis*, is translated as “favor” in verse 4, too) In Ephesians 2, Paul’s emphasis is on how God saves us by His grace, but here the focus is on how God’s grace shows itself to be real – living and active - in our lives.

What is the best clear evidence that the grace of God has truly transformed your life? Well, I’d argue that the evidence of the grace of God in your life is most clearly seen when you do things that don’t make sense apart from the reality of the Gospel and the kingdom of God.

In Acts 11:28, a prophet named Agabus declared that a severe famine was coming on the whole Roman world. This famine would affect a wide array of people, but the Jewish Christians living in Jerusalem and Judea would be especially affected. They had been exiled

from their local synagogues for following Jesus, and they were excluded from the community famine relief that came to poor Jewish people through the synagogues.

Now, on a human level, it would be reasonable for Gentiles in Greece to ask what in the world this problem facing poor Jewish people in Judea had to do with them. Most early Christians were not wealthy, and if a famine was coming on the whole Roman world, then they would have enough troubles of their own. Plus, it was more natural for them to provide relief for their neighbors than for strangers hundreds of miles away.

And yet, the early church decided this was a great opportunity to repay a tremendous spiritual debt, to exercise unity in the body of Christ, and to demonstrate the transforming power of God's grace to a watching world. So, the Apostle Paul and others organize a massive famine relief effort, collecting an offering from the mostly Gentile Greek churches to help those in need in Judea. This is crossing all sorts of cultural barriers and prejudices and is potentially a very powerful demonstration of the life-changing grace of God.

### **Flourishing Grace, vv. 1-5**

The Corinthians have already pledged to support this famine relief offering, but they haven't yet made their contribution. Paul is in Macedonia, among the Philippians and the Thessalonians, and the first thing he wants the Corinthians to know about the collecting effort is how amazingly faithful and generous the Macedonian Christians are being –

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Paul focuses his praise not on the amazing generosity of the Macedonians but on the amazing grace of God. The great generosity of these Macedonian believers is not something they are producing out of their own hearts but is sure evidence of the abundant grace of God bearing fruit in their lives.

Paul points out three signs that this “wealth of generosity on their part” comes from the grace of God given them:

- I. Their own dire circumstances: They were “*in a severe test of affliction,*” and yet they had an “abundance of joy” in their giving.

2. Their generosity beyond their means: They had “*extreme poverty*” and yet “*they gave according to their means . . . and beyond their means*” and not because they were pressured to dig deeper, but they gave “of their own accord.”
3. The direction of their giving: They weren’t first and foremost giving themselves to the Judean Christians or even to the Apostle Paul and his fellow ministry workers. No, “*they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us.*”

This kind of giving is supernatural in its origin and profoundly powerful in its impact. It’s easy to give when things are going well, and we have an abundance. It’s harder to give when we’re feeling the effects of tight economic times, too. It’s easy to give of the excess we don’t need, but to give according to our means and more than our means takes grace from God. And it’s easy and, in a sense, natural to give either to people we feel sorry for or to help someone we admire, but it’s God’s work in our hearts that causes us to wholeheartedly give ourselves to Him first and then to others as He wills.

### **Incomplete Grace, vv. 6-8**

Paul gives the account of the Macedonians to the Corinthians so they might also bear similar fruit of the grace of God in their lives. Paul is already overjoyed at their repentance and their reconciliation to Him and to the true Gospel, but he has still been urging the Corinthians in this letter not to receive the grace of God in vain but rather to bear the fruit of God’s grace in their lives. Grace - God’s undeserved favor and kindness – transforms us from the inside out. And a truly changed heart always shows forth in a changed life.

Paul wants the Corinthians to experience same kind of grace-empowered joy and generosity that the Macedonians are already experiencing, and so he writes in verses 6-8:

*<sup>6</sup> Accordingly, we urged Titus that as he had started, so he should complete among you this act of grace. <sup>7</sup> 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.*

*<sup>8</sup> I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine.*

The Corinthians were a remarkably gifted church. They had their problems, but they also had great gifts and blessings. They had been taught personally by the Apostle Paul and Apollos. They had intelligent, knowledgeable, gifted, earnest believers. They had shown the earnestness of their faith and their desire for holiness by their response to Paul’s grievous letter calling on them to do the right thing with the notoriously sinful man in their church.

Now, Paul wanted them to complete this act of grace. If they were to give as generously as the Macedonians, it would only be by the grace of God. But saying that something only comes by God's grace is not an excuse for passivity or inaction. Good intentions and good starts are natural, but persevering in a good work until it is complete takes a faithfulness and an earnestness that is clear evidence of the grace of God at work.

### **Supreme Example and Source of Grace, v. 9**

When we come to verse 9, we come to the very heart of this passage, to the supreme example and ultimate source of the grace of God in our lives.

*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 grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is the perfect and full embodiment of the grace of God in human form. The sacrificial giving and astounding generosity of His grace in stooping from the glories of heaven to the womb of a virgin girl to a manger in Bethlehem is not only the perfect picture, standard, and example for us, but His act of condescending and humiliating grace is what ultimately empowers us to be able to sacrifice in supernatural ways for the benefit of those we do not know and do not really owe anything on a human level.

Jesus didn't need anything from us when He left heaven and came to earth. He wasn't coming to be served by us, as though we could enrich Him in any way. As He said, "*The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many.*" (Matthew 20:28) By His coming, by His perfect obedience, by His willing death in our place as our ransom, and by His victorious resurrection as the Captain of our Salvation, he enriched us beyond what any amount of earthly wealth could ever give us. He brought us to God and brought God to us. And that is a treasure more than all the wealth of all the world.

We never outgive the grace of God. We just serve as conduits of God's grace as it comes to us and flows through us by His grace and for His glory and the good of His people.

### **The Call for Proper Grace, vv. 10-15**

Knowing the faithful abundance of the grace of God, Paul calls on the Corinthians to believe it and act on it, too. He knows that their grace-empowered generosity will be for their benefit:

*<sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> 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. <sup>12</sup> For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not*

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

In this final section, Paul does make some things clear:

1. Having good intentions is good, but completing those intentions with solid action is better.
2. He doesn't expect anyone to give beyond what they're able to give. Some prosperity preacher con artists will manipulate texts like the widow giving her last two copper coins to get people to give them their last money, running themselves completely broke and sometimes even going into debt, in the hopes that the seed they sow in faith will come back to them ten-fold or a hundred-fold. Paul rejects any of that manipulative nonsense. He asks the Corinthians to complete their readiness out of what they have, not out of what they don't have.
3. And the third point he makes at the end here has to do with fairness and reciprocity. Within the church, those who have an abundance should seek to meet the needs of those who do not have anything. Then, in turn, sometime the one who once had an abundance might be in need; in this case, the one he helped before can turn around and help him, repaying the grace of generosity.

One word that's woven throughout this passage that isn't as evident in our English translation is the word “*koinonia*” – often translated as fellowship or partnership. Alone with the word “grace,” Paul really loves this word and sees it as vital to rightly understanding and living as the church.

So, for example, verse 4 combines these powerful words in a way we miss in the English – “*begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints—*” – “for the grace of partnership in the relief of the saints.” The Macedonians begged for the grace or undeserved favor of being in partnership, in *koinonia*, in their relief of the saints in Judea.

Paul will come back to this word “*koinonia*” in chapter 9, verse 13: “*they will glorify God because of your submission that comes from your confession of the gospel of Christ, and the generosity of your contribution for them and for all others.*” The generosity of your contribution is the generosity of your *koinonia*, your partnership.

The grace of God in Jesus Christ which has brought us to God and has brought God to us has also brought us to one another. He has made us members of one another when He made us members of the body of Christ. We are fellow citizens of the same heavenly kingdom, heading for the same destiny, serving the same King. We're in this together. And the world sees the reality of His kingdom the more fully and readily we live out koinonia. As Jesus said in John 13:35, "*By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.*"

### **Conclusion: Kingdom Mindset**

The grace of God comes in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ and changes us deeply and profoundly. It changes what we value and how we see ourselves and our place in this world. It replaces our self-centered natural worldly mindset with the kingdom mindset of Jesus Himself. It is by the grace of God that, as Paul said in 1 Corinthians 2:16, "we have the mind of Christ."

And so, the clear evidence of the grace of God bearing real and vital fruit in our lives is when we think with the mind of Christ we've been given and live according to His kingdom mindset. The world understands religion and religious people being do-gooders, but it doesn't understand and rarely sees a true kingdom mindset, people who just do not think or see or love like the world says we should think or see or love.

Together, by the grace of God, let's strive to imitate the Macedonians and give generously to those in need, stand together in true koinonia, and seek to be a living display of the grace of God to a world in need.