

Truth and Spirit Ministries

Grace Giving Part IV

Grace Giving

By Denise Bostic

Through the writings of the Apostle Paul we can learn much about how God desires us to give under the New Testament. God gave him great insight into the subject of grace and how it is to be connected to our giving. Believers that are reading about grace giving for the first time may be astounded as to how this message could be so overlooked by the majority of the Church world. This message has not only been overlooked but *lost* in the process of time due to the infiltration of much legalism in the Church. However, the good news is that the Lord is restoring this vital truth to the body of Christ in these last days. I believe that Jesus desires to refine His people and make her the glorious bride that He intends for her to be.

In II Corinthians chapters 8 and 9, we find Paul teaching the Church on the subject of Christian giving and he makes it plain that it is by grace and not law. Within these two chapters we will find a message diametrically opposed to most teachings on giving in the Church today. If we embrace these teachings however, instead of resisting and rejecting them due to preconceived mindsets or erroneous teaching, we will find that God will impart to us fresh revelation in the area of giving and set us free from false doctrine. When we understand that grace is not just limited to certain areas of our lives but is meant to permeate every area, we will also receive a supernatural grace and ability to give beyond our own human limitations and take off the limits that we have placed upon God.

The Grace of God on the Macedonian Churches

II Corinthians chapter 8 begins with Paul commending the Macedonians in their giving and holding them up as an example to the Corinthians. In what way did the Macedonians serve as a great example? They were an example of what God's grace could do in the lives of others. In the natural, they had every excuse not to give. They were financially poor and they had been through great troubles but yet Paul says that they gave beyond what little they had or what they could even afford. This was all possible through God's abundant grace in their lives.

Paul makes it clear in this chapter that giving is a grace of God. The Macedonians gave by the grace of God. What does this mean? It means that what they were governed by the divine power of grace. What they had came from God and they lovingly shared it with others without reservation. Their desire to give had actually been roused by God and their response to that grace literally showed the condition of their hearts through their offerings. Their attitude in giving more than proved their love, sincerity and obedience to the Lord and His people. All of this was proof that divine grace was truly in operation in their lives. Paul encourages the Corinthians to give according to this same grace. God is not a respecter of persons. What he gives to one, He will give to another. All believers are under this same grace.

The Grace of Our Lord

It is one thing to say that we should give by grace and another to understand what this truly means and how it is to be applied to our lives. Not only can we learn from the example of the Macedonians but we can also learn from the example and sacrifice of the Lord Himself. In II Corinthians 8:9, Paul mentions how the Lord has bestowed grace upon all believers by exchanging His divine richness for poverty that we might become rich. Jesus went from the unlimited depths of divine richness to the limitations of earthly poverty for us and sacrificed His all so that we could inherit all divine blessings with Him. Because Jesus did all this for us, we are now the recipients of God's abundant grace. The Lord will not only give us personal blessings but can enable us to be overflowing with them so that we might be a blessing to others! We can share our divine blessings by giving to others out of our substance. Paul made mention of the fact that God had

made the Corinthians rich in everything and goes on to list those blessings. We find that Paul taught them to also add the grace of giving to their list of divine blessings and practice this as well. (*II Corinthians 8:7*)

What Grace Is Not

In these Grace Giving articles, we have been learning about the definition of true grace but we must also understand what grace is not. In these same chapters, Paul does an excellent job of teaching us about this. Beginning in II Corinthians 8:8, Paul taught that giving was not something that should be done by *command*. If we do, then our giving is not truly fueled by God's grace. Again, this goes contrary to the message of those that teach that we must give according to the commands of the Law of Moses. If God wanted the Church to give by the commands of the Law or even as a command because Abraham tithed to Melchizedek, Paul would have surely brought this up somewhere within all his many epistles but we find that he did not. Why? It is because believers are not under law but grace.

Be Led By the Spirit, Not the Law

We have been given the liberty under grace to give freewill offerings from the heart. No longer do we have to give by command because the Lord has set us free from the yoke of the law. We have been given a new nature of Christ and have received the Holy Spirit and are now to be subject to Him. The bible teaches us that when we are led by the Spirit, we are not under the rules of the law. The Holy Spirit can and will at times, lead us in our giving because God knows what others have need of. If we crucify our old sinful nature and live by the life of the Spirit, He will produce godly fruit in our lives including having a generous nature in giving. God does not desire us to walk according to commandments written on stone but instead to follow the Spirit. If we do this, we will truly be empowered by God's supernatural grace. (*Galatians 5, II Corinthians 3:6-11, Romans 8:3-9*)

No Condemnation in Christ

It is sad that so many today experience judgment or condemnation in the area of giving tithes and offerings, not realizing that the Lord has set us free from the condemnation of the Law. (Romans 8:1-2) Many are told that they will not be blessed by God if they don't tithe or give offerings or worse yet, that they will be cursed. These teachings go contrary to the New Testament doctrine of giving by grace though. When we go back to II Corinthians 8:11-15, we find the Apostle Paul practiced what he preached by ministering grace, not condemnation to the Corinthian Church in the area of giving. A few chapters earlier (in chapter 3) we find that Paul declared himself to be a competent minister of a New Covenant and of the Spirit; not of the letter of the Law. How did he minister grace to the Corinthians? *He did this by not judging their giving according to the Law.*

Paul wrote, **“Give from what you have. If you want to give, your gift will be accepted. It will be judged by what you have, not by what you do not have.”** (*II Corinthians 8:11-12 NCV*)

Please note that Paul said “if” you want to give. Why? It is because giving in the Church is entirely of one's own free will. Those believers that had nothing to give would not be judged or condemned by God. Thank God for our liberty in Christ!!

Paul goes far above and beyond not condemning those who had nothing to give however by showing love, care and concern for the welfare of those believers that may have been financially unable to give by saying:

“We do not want you to have troubles while other people are at ease, but we want everything to be equal.” (*II Corinthians 8:13*)

Paul truly set an example of walking in love for the brethren. How refreshing it would be to find this attitude within every Church today. Unfortunately, many Churches take up tithes and offering without little regard for the welfare of those in their congregations. If we minister grace instead of legalism however, we will have a totally different attitude towards our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Reciprocal Giving

It seems that in so many Churches today that the giving-receiving ratio is very unbalanced. In what way is that? Many in the leadership are taking up tithes and offerings but yet do not see to the material needs of those in their congregations. Most often ministers teach that brethren are only to receive the spiritual benefits that the clergy give them through preaching, teaching and ministering but brethren can have monetary needs

as well. Many times the money is spent for the building that the Church meets in or the expensive overhead costs associated with maintaining it, including the salary for the pastor. Oftentimes the financial needs of the congregation come last yet the Bible teaches that everyone's needs should be taken care of. Is it wrong to spend money on the Church building or to pay the pastor a salary? No, but if it's at the expense of totally neglecting the financial needs of poor brethren it can be very wrong. Paul taught reciprocal giving and equality for the whole body of Christ in his letters. We find that he also taught this to the Corinthians:

“At this time you have plenty. What you have can help others who are in need. Then later, when they have plenty, they can help you when you are in need, and all will be equal.” (II Corinthians 8:14 NCV, emphasis mine)

The Church of today looks and operates much differently than the Church of the first century. Although offerings were given to help support the ministry, they were also used to make sure all brethren were provided for and that no one did without. There was no public welfare system then. Pouring money into buildings was virtually non-existent because the believers met in homes. It is a wonderful thing that some Churches do have programs for those that are needy within their congregations but unfortunately there are some that do not even inquire as to the needs of others. True godly love will reach out to others in concern for their overall welfare. We should have reciprocal giving to make sure that everyone's needs can be met so that all believers can prosper equally.

Giving For the Right Reasons

In II Corinthians 9:7 we find Paul again reiterating the freedom that believers have in Christ to give as they purpose in their hearts or according to *grace*. Following this statement, Paul goes on to speak to the Corinthians about the condition of their hearts when they give:

“You should not be sad when you give, and you should not give because you feel forced to give. God loves the person who gives happily.” (II Corinthians 9:7 NCV)

The NIV translation reads:

“Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion for God loves a cheerful giver.”

Unfortunately, there are some ministers today that use forceful or deceptive tactics to take up tithes and offerings and in so doing, place brethren in an awkward and compromising position. Some may feel forced to give regardless of their financial circumstances. Some may not feel right about the methods being imposed upon them to obtain an offering. Those who are sitting under legalism will often feel condemned if they do not give according to the rules and regulations set down by the leadership. When ungodly tactics are used, this will spoil the *consciences* of believers and cause them to give for the wrong reasons.

God gave us consciences so that we would be able to distinguish between what is right and wrong. The Holy Spirit will often work through our consciences in situations like these to lead us in the right course of action. We should obey God rather than cave in to the pressures of men. God wants us to give for the right reasons instead of the wrong ones. He does not want us to give if we have reservations, are grieved in our hearts or because someone has applied pressure or force upon us to do so. This would not be an offering that God could wholeheartedly accept knowing that you did not give it with all your heart. A pleasing and acceptable sacrifice unto God however is one that has been given in love, joy, peace and a clear conscience.

More to Giving Than Meets the Eye

According to God's Word, our giving accomplishes more than we think. Paul greatly encouraged the brethren to give by telling them of many wonderful things that their giving would actually accomplish.

We are proving that our love towards God and others is genuine. (II Corinthians. 8:8)

Our giving will help others and supply their needs. (II Corinthians 8:14)

Our giving can encourage and motivate others to give as well. (I Corinthians. 9:1-2)

We will reap a harvest of blessings for our giving.

Those overflowing blessings will help us to give to others more freely.

Our giving will cause many to give thanks to God. (*II Corinthians 9:10-11*)

Our giving is proof of our faith in Christ and our obedience to Him.

Our giving will bring glory to God and cause many to praise Him.

Our giving will cause others' hearts to go out to us in prayer. (*II Corinthians. 9:12-14*)

Our giving is proof of God's grace upon our lives. (*II Corinthians 8:1*)

These are the right reasons that we should be giving. Like Paul, ministers today should also positively encourage believers to give according to New Testament standards. This creates an atmosphere for right giving where there will be no regrets!

Safeguarding the Offerings

Not only should ministers today teach New Testament giving, they also have a responsibility to see that all offerings received are safeguarded and used honestly in the sight of God and man. Paul also set a wonderful example in this regard. He highly revered God and respected the Church and let the Corinthians know that their offering was a precious gift that would be administered properly. Paul was extremely careful in the handling of offerings in order to avoid any criticism. He held himself accountable before God and man and went out of his way to avoid all appearance of evil when it came to money. (*II Corinthians 8:16-23, I Corinthians 9:15-18*)

Today, there are a lot of ministries that are under scrutiny by many Church members and even the world because of their questionable motives in the area of money. The wealth amassed by some highly visible ministries has caused others to wonder if the contributions that are taken in by these ministries are being used for the purpose for which they were given and intended. Although there are many trustworthy ministries out there whose sole purpose is to serve God and man, there are some whose only goal is to become wealthy and they are using the Church to gain that goal. The Apostle Peter warned of such people:

“Those false teachers only want your money, so they will use you by telling you lies.” (*II Peter 2:3 NCV*)

There are some that teach and prophecy lies in order to get people to give money to their ministries. We must be on guard against ministries like these. Some who had previously given to such ministries may later come to the realization that they have been “burned” and may draw back from giving or may quit giving altogether. We should not allow someone else's deceit and greed to prevent us from giving however. The Lord will judge all false prophets and teachers. We need to make sure that *we stay faithful* to the Lord by continuing on in this grace of giving. We can always rely on God to protect us, teach us and give us discernment from the Holy Spirit in matters of giving. He can show us where to sow and show us which ministries and Churches are “good ground”. For those who are faithful in little, God will reward much!

Grace Giving

Everything we have comes from God. We should gladly share what we have with others. What if you don't have much to give? That's ok; God's got that covered too.

“And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. As it is written: “He has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor; his righteousness endures forever.” 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. You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion...” (*II Corinthians 9:8-11*)

God is able to make all grace abound to us in all things, including giving. No matter what our financial circumstances may be in life, we can trust in Him to supply us with seed to sow when we ask and then expect Him to bless us with an abundant harvest. He can continually bless us so that we can be a blessing to others!

Giving is a grace. What is grace? It is something that we don't deserve but something that is given to us as a free gift from God anyway. Why? It's because we could never earn the blessings of God, only Jesus could do that for us. Many have fallen for the lie that God will not bless us at all if we don't give but that's not altogether true. Yes, God will bless us for giving, but He will also bless us even when we don't have anything to give.

That's grace. Within God's grace for us is an unconditional love that never ends. Many of God's people are the most generous people on the planet but there may be some that are not. For those who don't start out as givers however, they will surely wind up as givers as they conform to the image of Christ. God lives on the inside of us and He gives us the time and grace to grow up to become just like His Son, Jesus and He is certainly the greatest Giver of all; just look at what He has given us.

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