

2 Cor 9.1-15 - Grace in action – Giving – part 2

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Main point – Trusting God to provide, give generously & cheerfully, to God's glory.

A mother was preparing pancakes for her sons, (SLIDE) 5yo Kevin and 3yo Ryan. The boys began to argue over who would get the first pancake.

Their mother saw an opportunity for a teaching moment.

'If Jesus was sitting here, He would say, "Let my brother have the first pancake, I can wait".'

Kevin turned to his brother and said, 'Ryan, you be Jesus!' 😊

It comes easy and naturally, to think of ourselves first; and not be generous.

For kids and adults.

But if we follow Jesus, why be generous?-----

That's what we're continuing to think about today.

We're still in this section of 2 Cor where Paul **speaks about giving**.

If you've just joined us, we're going through a series through the letter 2Cor, and I assure you, we don't speak about money and giving every week.

Andy started the 2-part section on giving last week, and we finish it with ch 9 today.

Remember the **background** is that there's been a famine for 10 years, and Jerusalem Jewish believers-in-Jesus in have been suffering in poverty (Acts 11.28).

And Paul has been arranging a big collection (SLIDE), as **1Cor 16** tells us (v1-4).

Last week in **2Cor 8.10** we learnt that the Corinthians a year earlier had said that they would give generously to help those Christians in poverty.

Paul had sent Titus and two unnamed brothers to collect what they'd promised.----

God said to them, and to us, in ch8 that we should give according to our means (v12).

And give so that there may be equality among believers (v14).

But we can often be like Kevin and Ryan wanting the first pancake.

We think of ourselves first, and of giving as an obligation, and to our loss.-----

Yet Paul presents the **Macedonian** Christians as a model of generosity. (SLIDE)

They were not well off, but had given beyond their means (8.2-3).

They begged for the privilege of participating in God's grace to needy believers they'd never met. And they gave joyfully.-----

No doubt because God's grace had been shown to them, as to us, in Jesus.

8v9 (SLIDE) – Jesus gave up the glorious riches of heaven, to become poor for our sakes, that we might become rich, spiritually and eternally.-----

So it's the generosity of Jesus to us, that motivates us to be generous.-----

With that background we come my **first of 3 points today, Integrity.** (SLIDE)-----

In ch8 v16-21 we saw Paul speak about the integrity of the collection, as it was administered rightly and handled by a trustworthy team.

And in 8v11 Paul said to the Corinthians, don't just promise, finish the task.

And that's the idea Paul returns to here in ch9.-----

If you're a person of integrity, you are honest, and you are a wholly consistent and trustworthy person.

Your word can always be trusted.

And that's what Paul says the Corinthians are in v1 – so it's 'unnecessary' for him to write to them. But he's just making sure 😊

Paul told the Macedonians a year ago, that the Corinthians in Achaia were eager and wanting to give, v2.

And v5, they'd promised to give generously.

Now Paul is saying, I trust you to keep your word.-----

But for Paul, it's also a matter of his integrity.

He'd boasted to others about the Corinthians.

And he doesn't want his boasting to be in vain.

Like **ch8 v24**, 'show them proof' of 'your love and of our boasting about you'.

In other words, 'Show them the money!!'-----

Paul also doesn't want his word to be unreliable.

He doesn't want to be put to shame, **v4**.

And in an honour-shame culture, being humiliated, ashamed, embarrassed before others, was not a good thing.

Paul says, I'll be ashamed if you don't keep your promise.

But what's implied, is that the Corinthians would be ashamed too.-----

This is not manipulation or motivation by guilt.

Paul is asking these Christians to keep their word and be people of integrity.

And praise God, **Romans 15** tells us(**SLIDE**), the Corinthians in Achaia kept their word.-----

Are you a person of your word? Do you do what you say?

Can people trust you to keep your promises?-----

Are you a person of integrity, even at school or work?-----

Followers of Jesus should be.

Maybe you need to make a change? Or stay faithful even when it's costly.

Next point is Generosity,(SLIDE)

In **v5**, Paul arranged for trustworthy brothers to go ahead of him and collect the generous gift promised.

Reminding them, it is a gift and not an extortion.

He's not forcing, pressuring or making them give begrudgingly.

But they said they'd give generously, as all followers of Jesus are called to.-----

Generosity flows from Gospel priorities and a commitment to the Lord Jesus, who has first given to us.-----

A few years ago all our growth groups did a course called **The Generosity Project,(SLIDE)** and we thought about how we find it hard to be generous, because of the inward curve of our hearts.

Our sinful hearts curve in, selfishly.-----

But the Gospel by the work of the Spirit changes us – to be generous like Jesus.-----

V6, 'The point is this: The person who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the person who sows generously will also reap generously / bountifully.'

Prov 11.24(SLIDE) and Jesus words in **Lk 6.38** may be the background.-----

It's true for the farmer, if you don't sow much seed you won't get much of a harvest.

So too with our money, if you give generously, you will be generously provided for.

The point is, God will provide and bless.

As in **v8**, God is able to make every grace overflow to you (lavish his grace on you), so always having everything you need you may excel in every good work.

That was the point of **Psalms 112** too, quoted in **v9**.

The person who is right with God through Christ and living rightly, will give freely to the poor, and experience enduring righteousness.-----

The generous Christian embodies Psalm 112.-----

2 Cor 9 v10 then talks about how God provides materially and financially for people, and He will provide for those who give generously.-----

Now these verses have been used by many-a **prosperity gospel** preacher,(**SLIDE**) to justify promising that if you give generously, you'll become rich.

That false teaching has been preached in Australia and across the globe, and sadly amongst the world's poorest.

2 Cor 9 is not saying give generously and God will make you rich, or God will bring it back 10-fold for you.

The prosperity gospel is a false gospel.-----

Two points.

In **v8**, God says, when you give sacrificially and generously, **God will always provide for your needs**. You will have sufficient; enough.

It's a promise that even when you give abundantly, like the Macedonians, God will provide so you have enough.-----

Maybe you're going without at the moment, and things are difficult financially.

I encourage you to trust in the promise of God to provide.

Trust in the power and promises and providence of God to meet your need.-----

God often provides through the generosity of his people, as Jesus speaks about in **Mark 10(v28-30,SLIDE)**.-----

Maybe you can be that brother or sister, and help provide for someone in need, like some of our Persian brothers and sisters.-----

But for many of us who have enough, or more than enough, I think we're not in danger of believing the prosperity Gospel.

We're not expecting too much from God. Maybe we expect too little?-----

Maybe we keep and save and don't give, because we don't really trust God to provide for us.

Or provide if we give.-----

We need to give, trusting God to provide.-----

Our Father will provide for us.(Matt 6.30-33)

But **secondly**, God will increase your harvest, and you will be enriched in every way, **v11**, yet for what purpose?-----

'for all generosity'.

God gives **so you can give more away**.

The generous giver who trusts God, will then have more to give.

V8, so you can excel in every good work.

v10, to produce a harvest of righteousness, in you spiritually, and through you, as you do more good.-----

So often we think generosity and giving money away will diminish our joy.

So, we get a new job, a raise or greater income, and don't give more.

And maybe that's because of the jealousy we feel, or the new purchases and upgrades we dwell on.

Maybe because we're trying to find our joy in wealth.-----

But our passage wants us to find joy elsewhere – in giving.-----

v7, 'Each person should do as he has decided in his heart—not reluctantly or out of compulsion, since God loves a **cheerful giver**.'(SLIDE)

God doesn't want us to give reluctantly or begrudgingly, feeling we have-to – God loves a cheerful giver.-----

Generosity is a readiness to give beyond what's expected or deserved.

And it's really a delight in bringing delight to others.

How are you going at giving cheerfully?-----

It's not about giving a certain amount, or percentage.

So don't give X dollars to meet the church budget, or because you think "I shouldn't be selfish". Give for the good of others.-----

God says to us here, make up your mind what you will give, are happy to give, then give it.

But another big reason to give is in **my final point, for God's glory.(SLIDE)**

V11 says that when God provides riches and resources to us, enabling us to be generous to others, it produces 'thanksgiving to God'.

And when the needs of poor Christians in poverty in Jerusalem receive this generous gift from brothers and sisters afar, it would certainly result in 'many expressions of thanks to God'.

They'd thank God for his provision through his people.

And look at **v14**, the Jerusalem Christians in need will have deep affection for you because of the surpassing grace of God in you, at work in and through you.

See how generosity builds relationship with God and with others.

It strengthens our relationships with God and with others.

It leads to closeness and thankfulness.

Just like when I did **my 2-year ministry traineeship** before college, and people gave to and partnered with me, it made me so thankful to God.

It brought Kirsti and I closer to them, them to us, and us to God, as we relied on God more fully.

Relationships were built through giving and partnership, and overflowed in thankfulness.-----

Just like my stipend at Bundy, my living allowance and manse allowance provides for me and my family, and I am truly thankful to God.

I thank God for all of you who give to support the staff, the Gospel ministry at church, and through us, other Gospel workers, and the needy.

v13 says, the people who are blessed by the generous gifts of others, 'will glorify God', and I do.-----

God gets the thanks and praise and glory when his needy people are provided for.

So honestly, the biggest reason for us to be generous in our giving, is to see God get the glory.----- The glory for being so gracious.-----

Ch8 v1 started by speaking about 'the **grace of God**'.

Most of all God's grace has been shown in Jesus.

And the grace of our Lord Jesus is not a wage that God pays to those who have earned it. It flows from him with rich and free generosity to all who trust him.

We are blessed in abundance in Christ, aren't we?-----

Yet God's grace was also at work in his peoples' hearts, spiritually, and then shown in action, materially.

God's grace in his peoples' financial giving to others is the focus.

And now Paul closes this section of his letter, in **9.14** by again speaking of 'the surpassing grace of God'.

God's grace is like bookends, an intro & conclusion, to the section.-----

And God has **provided materially for us** by his grace, and for others as his people share it.

And so whenever you and I have jobs and income, interest earnings, savings, or investments, it's all by God's grace. His undeserved gift.

Do you believe that?

Do you remind yourself of that, each pay day?

All we have, has been given by God.-----

And he doesn't give it to us to keep all for ourselves, but to provide for others.

You see, God's grace to us reproduces graciousness in us.-----

I want us to return again to what Andy briefly mentioned last week in terms of **who God asks us to give to, for his glory.(SLIDE)**

Thinking firstly about **giving to family.(1Tim5.8)**

It means we should provide for our family when they are in need, including older parents.

But don't let that be an excuse for greed and for pouring out our wealth, say on our kids, so we have little for others.

Still, being generous to those we love is good.

Dorcas Denness, who served overseas for many years writes this as a grandparent,

I find giving gifts to grandkids a big challenge.(**SLIDE**) My husband and I have a wonderful assortment of 18 grandchildren varying in ages from 15 to one. None of them live close by so we miss out on knowing them well enough to give the 'just right gift'. But we do want to show each one that we love them and they are special.

Our grandkids are fortunate to have great parents who already provide them with things that encourage creativity, build skills and give hours of pleasure. When we ask the parents for ideas on what to give, they often say, 'They don't need anything'. Like so many Aussie kids, our grandchildren bask in an abundance of food and material possessions.

The dilemma for us is wanting to give—but not wanting to feed into **materialism**.

As grandparents who've acquired some wisdom, we know the emptiness and disappointment that things ultimately give: 'When you get what you want, you don't want

what you get'. We've also discovered the treasure of knowing Christ and the abundant life he gives, which comes when we decisively turn from self-centredness to follow him. I consider giving gifts to grandkids both a delightful privilege and a responsibility. Looking back on that wonderful holiday, I've realised that the best gift we gave our grandchildren was the one we thought about least. It came as a vintage package—complete with wrinkles and grey hair—it was us.

What we gave our grandkids was our love, time and interest; our listening ears and encouraging words. We hope this helps them to see the richness of life that comes from turning from self-centredness and the love of things, to pursuing love for God and others. Over the holiday we'd all eaten the sweet fruit of joy that comes from following the Lord. We pray that each of our grandchildren will embrace the gift of real life [in Jesus]...

Giving to grandkids is a part of love. It need not be expensive or entail giving more things that will perish with time. As Christian grandparents ... We can model a life of service to God, who lovingly leads us through many troubles to reflect his glory. Through our words as well as our actions, we can introduce our grandkids to our Father God, the ultimate gift-giver.

That's relevant for anyone we want to give to; it need not be financial.-----

As well as family, Scripture also asks us to give **to those who teach us the Gospel.(SLIDE.1 Tim5.17f)**

As I said earlier, I'm thankful for all who give and generously give to the Gospel ministry at Bundy.

I'm grateful the denomination sets my stipend, so I'm not needing to live on nothing, but also not tempted to become a super-salaried pastor.

For me and all of us, our giving to the church ought to be willing and cheerful.-----

Still, sometimes we can give for selfish reasons that we might need to repent of.---

Please don't give to the church primarily for your own benefit.

It's not about paying the preachers so I can benefit and grow.

I expect quality ministry, or top class preaching.

It should not be about, "I pay for you so I expect, a, b, c, for me, or my kids".

We give to sustain those who proclaim the Gospel.-----

And God's word asks us to give **to those who take the Gospel to others.(SLIDE)**

A helpful book on this is **Gospel Patrons**, which shares the idea of investing and partnering closely with a few rather than a lot, giving not just financial support but also prayer and fellowship, like by writing back to our missionaries emails.-----

And as was the case in 2 Cor 9, giving **to those in need**, especially fellow believers.

I suggest it's good if all these are a regular budgeted commitment.

Or maybe we can plan for spontaneity, with some margin to give to needs that cross our paths.

Or maybe for your next birthday, you could ask for donations to go to a Christian organization, or leave money to one in your will.-----

Do you need to sit down and reassess your giving?

Do you need to consider your budget?

I personally find giving 10% a good starting guide, in terms of giving to church, Gospel workers and the poor.

It is a social taboo to ask someone how much they earn, or how much they give. But the false love of money and career will lead people away from God.

And our hearts can often be deceived. So maybe you could be open with someone; even ask someone to help keep you accountable with your finances.-----

Do you need to plan for action, and **make a change?-----**

Feel free to take a free copy of the Generosity Project book(**SLIDE**) on the foyer table. It's helpful.-----

But before making changes towards generosity, we need to reflect on our heart and motivations?

Are we giving because God has first given to us?

Are we giving as we have means?

Are we giving cheerfully?-----

But notice where Paul finishes in **v15**.

'Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift.'

That indescribable, and most precious and greatest gift, is God's grace in his Son.

God so loved the world that he gave us his one and only Son.

That's **why we give**, because God has first given so generously to us. **(SLIDE)**

We learn how to give from the God who gives. He gives sacrificially. He gives freely and not from compulsion. And he gives cheerfully.

Jesus did the same. We do the same.-----

So you see, generosity comes from your heart, not your bank balance.-----

Let the generosity of God to you in the Gospel, fill your heart and overflow.-----

If you cannot give more, that's ok. But if you are sad about parting with your hard-earned dollars, you are missing out.

Missing out on joy, and on the opportunity to glorify the God who has shown you abounding grace.-----

So trusting God to provide, and being thankful for grace, give cheerfully, to God's glory.-----

Let's pray.