

The Blessedness of Giving, Part 2

2 Corinthians 9:11–15

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Introduction

Well we come this morning to our eighth and final sermon in 2 Corinthians chapters 8 and 9, this two-chapter subsection in which he is taken up with the matter of Christian giving. And we've been studying these two chapters on Christian giving in these past few months, not because of any hobby horse that I'm on; not because your leaders discern any deficiency in your giving and so want to burden your consciences with your duty in Christ; not because there are particular needs that we need to fund-raise for, and so we're out beating the trees to try to guilt you into funding our pet projects. No, we've devoted our time and attention to the matter of Christian giving in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 simply because we have been working our way through 2 Corinthians as a whole, and in the Lord's providence we came to these two chapters at this time.

And though it is perhaps perceived by some as a somewhat sensitive topic—a topic that is too personal to address from the pulpit—the matter of Christian giving, stewardship, and generosity is a necessary topic of instruction for God's people. As personal as it may be, it is always appropriate to address this matter of the Christian life, because, among other reasons, Scripture is clear that the way we think about and behave with respect to money and possessions is one of the most accurate indicators of our true spiritual condition—one of the most revealing commentaries on the state of our souls before God as it concerns salvation.

Now you say, “Wait a minute, Mike. I've heard you preach long enough to know that *you* know *and* believe that the Bible teaches that sinners are declared righteous before God by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone—apart from any of our works! How can you say that the way we regard and handle money has a bearing on our salvation?” Well, the Lord Jesus Christ understood the doctrine of justification by faith alone better than any of us. He taught, in Luke 18, that the man who trusts in his tithing for righteousness does not go to his house justified, and that the sinner, broken over his sin, with nothing in his hands, trusting nothing in himself and looking only to God for mercy—he is the one who goes to his house justified. Jesus understood and taught the doctrine of *sola fide*!

And yet He also said in Matthew 6:24, “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.” If you serve money, God is not your Master! You cannot shape and order your life around the accumulation of money—and the benefits, comforts, and satisfaction it brings—while at the same time shaping and ordering your life around laying hold of God in Christ, and the

benefits, comforts, and satisfaction *He* brings. “You cannot serve God and wealth.” Your heart is not big enough for the both of them. One or the other will have your highest devotion, allegiance, and worship. If money and possessions have your heart, you’re an idolater. But if you have been born again by the Spirit of God, if you’ve turned from your sins and put your trust in Christ alone for righteousness, then the Lord God has your heart. And if God has your heart, you are going to think about, regard, and behave with respect to money and possessions in such a way that it is plain that money is not your master.

And so this series on the character and motivations of Christian giving is of utmost importance to every one of us who cares to discern the true state of our soul before God. It answers the question: Is there evidence of the saving grace of God at work in my heart by virtue of how I regard and handle my money? Do these marks of genuine generosity characterize my own heart? Do these principles for God-glorifying giving shape and guide the way I steward the resources God has entrusted to me? What *is* genuine Christian giving, and has the grace of God reached to my wallet, and my purse strings, and my checkbook, and my bank account so as to produce genuine Christian giving in my life? These are the questions that are answered by a study of 2 Corinthians 8 and 9.

Why? Because, as Paul issues directives concerning a financial collection among the Gentile churches on behalf of the poor saints in Jerusalem, he provides for us the closest approximation to a systematic theology of Christian giving found anywhere in Scripture—timeless principles for giving that is produced by grace, that is shaped by the Gospel, and that is glorifying to God. Principles such as the voluntariness, proportionality, and mutuality of giving; such as the truth that giving has its source and motivation in the grace of God; and the truth that generosity has primarily to do not with the amount given but with the disposition of the heart.

Last week, we came to the final section of these two chapters, which runs from chapter 9 verse 6 through to verse 15, where Paul discourses on *the manifold blessedness of Christian giving*. In a final effort to motivate the Corinthians to the kind of joyful generosity that is produced by grace, shaped by the Gospel, and glorifying to God, Paul speaks in these verses of the results, or ramifications, or consequences of generous giving. In verses 6 to 11a—our text last week—Paul reflects on how generous Christian giving brings manifold blessings *to those who give*. And I presented those blessings to you as **four motives** for joyful generosity—four enticements or incentives to give generously, freely, joyfully, and from the heart. And I want to review those just briefly.

Review I: The Proportion of God (v. 6)

First, there was what I called the **proportion of God** in verse 6. Paul says, “Now this I say, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap

bountifully.” This agricultural principle of **proportionate** returns beautifully illustrates one of the most important principles about Christian generosity and giving—namely, that to give to the work of the Lord and to the needs of the saints is not to part with your money forever, but to *sow seed* which produces a harvest in return! And so when you’re confronted with an opportunity to meet the need of a brother or sister, or when an opportunity to invest in Gospel ministry is put before you, and you’re considering how much you should give, you need to consider **the proportion of God**. You need to ask yourself: “What kind of harvest do I want to reap?” Do I want a sparing harvest? A scant harvest? A meager harvest? Or do I want a bountiful harvest? A plentiful harvest? An abundant harvest? If you want a bountiful harvest, you must sow bountifully! You are to set your heart on the blessing that God promises to those who sow bountifully, and then order your hands in obedience to lay hold of that blessing.

Review II: The Pleasure of God (v. 7)

The **second motive** for joyful, generous giving we found in verse 7. And that was **the pleasure of God**. Paul writes, “Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.” And we gleaned several principles for giving from this verse. Giving is an individual responsibility: “*Each one* must do just as he has purposed in his heart.” Once again, the voluntariness of genuine generosity is emphasized: “Each one must do *just as he has purposed in his heart*.” And yet giving is also to be purposeful: “Each one must do just as he has *purposed* in his heart.” Giving is not to be impulsive or casual, but the fruit of thoughtful deliberation and prayerful consideration. Further, the giving with which God is pleased is never done “grudgingly or under compulsion.” You’re not to give out of internal sorrow or external pressure. Not grudgingly or guiltily, but gladly, because “God loves a cheerful giver.” We are to be driven to meet the needs of our brothers and sisters in Christ by an indomitable, grace-produced joy in Jesus, that severs our hearts’ attachment to money and the things money can buy, and therefore frees us to be sacrificially generous.

And **motive** for all of that is **the pleasure of God**. “For God *loves* a cheerful giver.” God has a peculiar delight in—a special affection for—those of His people who, in obedience to His Word, are cheerful givers. And God loves a cheerful giver because He Himself is a cheerful giver, and He delights to see the image of His own grace and goodness reflected back to Him in the obedience of His people! So we give individually, voluntarily, purposefully, and cheerfully because we want to experience that peculiar delight and affection of our God—to be so conformed into the image of the Lord Jesus Christ, that when the Father looks at us He sees so much of Himself worked in us by His own grace, that He looks upon us with a special love and **pleasure**.

Review III: The Power of God (vv. 8–9)

Then we saw a **third motive** for joyful generosity in verses 8 and 9, namely, the **power of God**. He says in verse 8: “And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed.” It’s as if he hears the objections of our hearts: “Oh Paul, there’s a part of me that longs to become the kind of bountiful, generous giver that you call us to be in these chapters! But I look into my heart and I recognize myself still so self-centered! So indifferent to the needs of my brothers and sisters! So preoccupied with my own comfort, ease, and security! How can I hope to be the giver that I ought to be?” And Paul says: God is able by the power of divine grace to open your narrow heart and cause it to flower with an abundance of generosity! God is able to provide all the resources you need in order to continue to be radically generous! He did it for the Macedonians, who were sorely pressed by afflictions and mired in deep poverty, and yet God perfected His **power** in their weakness! He did it for so many, verse 9, that Psalm 112 memorializes the generous as those whose righteousness will endure forever.

The power of God is such that if you sow bountifully, and give cheerfully, rather than becoming destitute and having no means to provide for your own needs, “God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance.” Pastor John always says, “You can’t outgive God!” And when you sow bountifully, you will reap bountifully. When you give, Luke 6:38, it will be given to you: a good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over. And so Calvin says, “Paul arms us with a choice promise—that whatever we give away will turn out to our advantage. . . . Those who do good to the poor do no less provide for their own interests than if they were watering their lands” (310).

Now, you say, “But isn’t that fleshly, health-wealth-and-prosperity theology? that you give to the church and God will make you rich?” No, prosperity theology teaches that “God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance” to buy your McMansion and your BMW and your fancy clothes and jewelry! But *Paul* says, “God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance *for every good deed!*” Prosperity theology says, verse 10, “He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed” for *hoarding!* For piling up into large bank accounts so you can feel secure! So you can say, “Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years to come; take your ease, eat, drink and be merry” (Luke 12:19) And God replies, “You fool! This very night your soul is required of you.” *That’s* prosperity theology! But *Paul* says in verse 10: “He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed *for sowing.*” Seed is for sowing, not for hoarding! Verse 10 again: He’ll “increase the harvest *of your righteousness.*” Verse 11: “You will be enriched in everything *for all liberality.*” The principle is not that God turns givers into fat cats! It’s that “He will continuously provide the generous giver with the means of further expressing that generosity” (MacArthur, 316)—not only by providentially ordering our

circumstances so that we have enough resources to *be* generous, but also by sovereignly working the grace of generosity into our hearts, so that we will be *disposed* to be generous.

And so, friends, when you sow bountifully, and when God in His grace grants that you reap bountifully, recognize that that's not some divine sign that you're to become like the rich fool of Luke 12, who takes the proceeds from his abundant crop and builds bigger barns! The multiplication of material blessings in your life is not an indication from God to increase your standard of *living*. No, it's providential indication that you're to increase your standard of *giving*. God multiplies your seed *for sowing*. He enriches you *for all liberality*.

Review IV: The Promise of God (vv. 10–11a)

And we've already pushed forward into verses 10 and 11, where we find our **fourth motive** for joyful generosity. But that's OK, because while the third motive is the power of God to provide for the needs of the generous, the **fourth motive** is the **promise of God** to do so. In verse 8, we're told that God is *able* to make all grace abound to unto an abundance. In verse 10, we're told that "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; you *will be* enriched in everything for all liberality." God's measureless ability to give grace wouldn't mean anything unless He was willing to exert that ability to bless His people. Well here we are assured that He is both able and willing! It falls to us, then, like Abraham, to believe that what God has **promised**, He is able also to perform. We are to trust Him, friends. We are to step out in faith unto joyful generosity, motivated by His proportion, His pleasure, His power, and His promise.

But that's not all. 2 Corinthians 9 doesn't conclude in verse 11. Paul goes on reflecting on the manifold blessings of generous giving. And while verses 6 through 11 were focused on the results of giving with respect to those who give, in the following verses he focuses on the result of giving with respect to *the recipients of the gift*. And in these verses, Paul presents **two more motives** for joyful generosity. In addition to the proportion of God, the pleasure of God, the power of God, and the promise of God, in these verses Paul adds that we ought to be motivated by the **praise** of God and the **people** of God. Understanding these consequences of generous giving in the lives of the recipients will provide further **motivation** for us to engage in grace-produced, Gospel-shaped, God-glorifying giving.

V. The Praise of God (vv. 11b–13)

And the **fifth motive**, as I mentioned, is **the praise of God**. And we see that in the second half of verses 11, through to verse 13. Paul writes, "You will be enriched in everything for all liberality, which through us is producing thanksgiving to God. For the ministry of this service is not only fully supplying the needs of the saints, but is also overflowing through many thanksgivings to

God. Because of the proof given by this ministry, they will glorify God for your obedience to your confession of the gospel of Christ and for the liberality of your contribution to them and to all.”

He begins by once again referring to this collection for the saints in Jerusalem, “The ministry of this service,” which only reminds us that giving to meet the legitimate needs of your brothers and sisters in Christ is ministry. Paul uses this term *diakonia*—from which we get the term *deacon* to refer to an office of service within the church—he uses the term in chapter 8 verse 4 and in chapter 9 verse 1. And in doing so, he teaches us that just as much as teaching, preaching, praying, counseling, bringing meals, helping around the house: giving is ministry.

But then he adds to the word *diakonia* the word *leitourgia*, from which we get the English word “liturgy” and “liturgical”—which was a technical term for the priestly temple service of the Old Testament, where the priests and Levites of Israel offered sacrifices in the presence of Yahweh. In Philippians 4:18, Paul calls the Philippians’ financial gift to him “a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God,” using that same language of Old Testament temple worship and sacrifice. And so he uses this peculiar language here to speak of the Gentiles’ gift to the Jerusalem church as a spiritual sacrifice. It was as if their needs were an altar, and the Corinthians’ generous gifts were the sacrifice laid upon that altar. And because this giving is produced by God’s grace and is shaped by the Gospel of Christ, God regards it as a fragrant aroma, a sweet-smelling spiritual sacrifice that pleases Him.

And Paul says, “As much as the ministry of this service is fully supplying the needs of the saints—as much as your ministry to the brethren in Jerusalem is the genuine relief of real want—the highest good and ultimate effect of your offering is that it is overflowing through many thanksgivings to God! When the brothers and sisters in Jerusalem receive your gifts, they’re not only going to rejoice that their needs have been met—that they can put food on their table and clothes on their back. They’re not only going to thank the Apostle Paul for his labors in administrating this collection, and the Gentile churches for giving generously. They’re going to recognize that God Himself is the source that is behind every aspect of this collection! They’re going to recognize that “every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow” (Jas 1:17). They’re going to recognize that God is the one who orchestrates the circumstances of providence so that their brothers and sisters in Christ—even those whom they’ve never met—have been blessed with an abundance, so that they might share with those who have need. They’re going to recognize that God is the one who pours forth His grace into the hearts of men, so as to create in them this holy disposition for generosity, so that ultimately, God is the one responsible for meeting their needs through this offering. And they’re going to **praise** Him and give thanks to Him.

It's interesting the way the original language works in a bit of wordplay, here. The Greek word for "thanksgiving" is *eucharistia*, which is where we get the term *eucharist* from. And at the heart of this word for thanksgiving is the word *charis*: it's *eu-charis-tia*. And the word *charis* is the Greek word for "grace," which, as we've said several times in our study of these two chapters, absolutely dominates 2 Corinthians 8 and 9. And so when the saints in Jerusalem offer many thanksgivings to God, they're really bringing the entire process of grace-produced giving full circle! In chapter 8 verse 1, it is "the grace of God" (*charis*) that has been given to the Macedonians that issues in their radical generosity. In chapter 8 verses 6 and 7, the gifts given by the Macedonians—and, Paul trusts, the Corinthians, in whom the grace of God is also operative—those gifts are called "this grace," *charis* once again. And then when the Jerusalem church receives this grace-inspired gift of grace, they in turn overflow in thanksgiving—*eucharistia*—to God! He is the first and the last! The Alpha and Omega of Christian giving! In this matter of Christian giving, no less than in all other matters, we may sing the song of praise of Romans 11:36: "For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen!"

There's a glorious text that illustrates this same principle that's found at the end of the book of 1 Chronicles. Turn with me to 1 Chronicles chapter 29. The construction of the temple of Yahweh has just been completed, and so David takes an offering from Israel so that the temple could be decorated with gold and precious stones. And just like Israel did for the tabernacle in Exodus 35, they provide an astoundingly generous offering. And David responds by offering many thanksgivings to God. 1 Chronicles 29:11: "Yours, O Yahweh, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, indeed everything that is in the heavens and the earth; Yours is the dominion, O Yahweh, and You exalt Yourself as head over all. Both riches and honor come from You, and You rule over all, and in Your hand is power and might; and it lies in Your hand to make great and to strengthen everyone. Now therefore, our God, we thank You, and praise Your glorious name. But who am I and who are my people that we should be able to offer as generously as this? For all things come from You, *and from Your own hand we have given You*. For we are sojourners before You, and tenants, as all our fathers were; our days on the earth are like a shadow, and there is no hope. O Yahweh our God, all this abundance that we have provided to build You a house for Your holy name, it is from Your hand, and all is Yours." So beautiful! The key phrase is in verse 14: "From Your own hand we have given to You!" God is so gracious to us that He grants what He requires of us! Such is the nature of God's grace! He grants what He requires! "From Him and through Him and to Him are all things! To Him be the glory forever!"

And therefore, it is right for the saints in Jerusalem, who are recipients of the offerings of the Gentile churches, to thank God for the provision they've received, because it is God whose grace is the source of all. He is the one who provides the generous with an abundance to share, and He is the one who works in the heart the joy-filled, eager disposition to be generous to those in need.

And so this offering that the Corinthians are contributing to is overflowing with many thanksgivings to God!

But Paul goes on. In verse 13 he says, “Because of the proof given by this ministry, *they will glorify God* for your obedience to your confession of the gospel of Christ and for the liberality of your contribution to them and to all.” And this is a fascinating verse when you remember the background of these events. These are Gentile churches—Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Corinth—these are pagans, emptying their own pockets for Jewish believers! This would have been nothing short of astounding in the ancient world, because of how thick that dividing wall of hostility was between Jew and Gentile. The Gentiles looked down upon the Jews as slaves, and the Jews disdained the Gentiles as unclean dogs. And in fact, one of the great challenges of the early church was for the Jewish believers to recognize that God’s salvation plan included the Gentiles. For thousands of years the Jews had been taught that they were the people of God—the only nation that God chose from among all the nations. And that was true!

But now with the coming of Christ, that middle wall of partition had been broken down, and God created the one new man, the Church, where Jew and Gentile would dwell together as the people of God—no longer defined by national and ethnic boundaries, but a spiritual kingdom defined only by their relationship to the one Lord, Jesus Christ. But they didn’t get that right away! You remember in Acts chapter 10, God has to give Peter a vision about not calling unclean what God has cleansed. And so he goes to Cornelius’s house and he preaches the Gospel. And as he’s preaching the Holy Spirit falls upon the Gentiles. And he says in Acts 11:17, “Therefore if God gave to them the same gift as He gave to us also after believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God’s way?” It was as if the Jewish believers were asking him, “Peter, why’d you let the Gentiles in?” And he says, “God gave them the Spirit! What else should I have done?” And it says in the next verse, “When they heard this, they quieted down and glorified God, saying, ‘Well then, God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life.’” But that was a thought they had to get used to.

You have something similar at the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15. The Judaizers come down and say you can’t be saved unless you keep the Law of Moses. And Peter gets up and says, “No! God is saving the Gentiles *as Gentiles!* They don’t *need* to become Jewish proselytes any longer! God has given them the Holy Spirit just as He’s given us, and, Acts 15:9, “He made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith.” Verse 11: “We are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they also are!”

Well, here we are, just a few years after that Jerusalem council, and the Jewish believers are still getting used to the idea of Gentile believers in Messiah. And in comes the Apostle Paul and his team, carrying sacks of money. And the poor saints there say, “Paul, where did all this *come* from?!” And he says, “Dear brothers and sisters, this came from the churches in Philippi, and in

Thessalonica, and in Berea, and in Corinth!” And they say, “All this came from *pagans*?! From the wicked cities of Macedonia and Achaia?!” “Yes!” And Paul says here in 2 Corinthians 9:13, when they hear that—that the grace of God has so worked in the hearts of Gentile pagans, so as to overwhelm them with the grace of Christ’s Gospel, so as to open their own hearts and purse strings for Jews that they had never met before in their lives—they’re going to break out in **praise** to God! Just as they glorified God, Acts 11:18, when they heard that the Gentiles had received the Holy Spirit, they hear that the Holy Spirit had so worked in these Gentiles unto such sacrificial generosity, and they’re going to conclude that these Gentiles’ confession of faith in Christ’s Gospel is genuine, and they’re going to glorify the name of Almighty God, who saves rank pagans, and causes them to walk in obedience to Christ!

You see, giving in this way that the Apostle Paul calls the Corinthians to—the way that he calls *us* to—is proof and validation of the genuineness of our profession of faith in the Gospel. James, the leader of the Jerusalem church, taught that faith without works is dead, and that genuine, living faith comes to the aid of your brother or sister who is without clothing or in need of daily food. Well, when he sees the faith of these Gentiles vindicated by their works of love, he’s going to conclude, “They’re real! Praise God, they’re real!” And God’s name is going to be glorified for how He saves and sanctifies sinners! Grace-produced, Gospel-shaped, joyful generosity brings thanksgiving and glory to God. It brings **praise** to God. God’s *name* is lifted up and exalted as a mighty Savior, who transforms hearts of stone into hearts pulsing and throbbing with spiritual life! His glory is going to be magnified as that which is so satisfying, that a glimpse of His glory is compelling enough to subdue sin, and to fuel sacrificial—even self-improverishing—obedience! People are going to say, “How beautiful, and lovely, and satisfying, and glorious, and worthy their God must be for these people to consider obedience to Him to be more valuable than their own money and comfort!”

And dear GraceLife, if you’re a Christian—if you have the divine life of God flowing through your spiritual veins at all—you *love* that! You love to hear about God’s name being magnified! His glory being exalted! Him being made to look big, and worthy, and supreme, and valuable, and satisfying! That is what it means to be saved! To be freed from the bondage of seeking satisfaction and fulfillment in your sin and in yourself, and to find all your satisfaction in the magnification of the glory of God! To be a Christian is to love more than anything when God’s glory is treasured and worshiped by others in a way that He is worthy of! And if grace-produced, Gospel-shaped giving causes overflowing thanksgiving to God—if the recipients of your joyful generosity see your obedience to the Gospel and glorify God for it—dear people, you will be generous! You will be **motivated** by **the praise of God** to put the sanctifying glory of God on display, by seeking to give in a way that is consistent with your confession of faith in a Gospel accomplished by the self-imposed poverty of Christ!

Dear GraceLife, do you love the glory of your God? Do you want to see God **praised** as He is worthy of? Then give—joyfully, generously, sacrificially, and bountifully—to meet the needs of your brothers and sisters. To think that we can multiply the praise and glory of and honor of God for so little a cost as the shekels in our pockets! When that truth gets a hold of your heart, you can't wait to give! Philip Hughes writes this: “Thus the Apostle enthusiastically but tenderly leads the Corinthians on until, with him, they have risen to that spiritual height from which they are able to see Christian giving in the splendid sweep of its true perspective—not as a burden which cramps life and engenders regret, but as a privilege of grace that enlarges and enriches the soul of the giver, relieves the wants of others, and in its outworking causes many to return praise to God” (338). Dear people, be motivated to joyful generosity, by **the praise of God!**

VI. The People of God (v. 14)

There's a **sixth motive** that Paul gives for joyful generosity in this text. We are to be motivated not only by the proportion of God, the pleasure of God, the power of God, the promise of God, and the praise of God, but also, **number six**, by what-I'm-calling **the people of God**. And by speaking of **the people of God** as a motivation for joyful generosity, I'm speaking of the reality that when we are joyfully generous to our brothers and sisters in Christ, that joyful generosity deepens our spiritual communion and fellowship as fellow members of the body of Christ. And we see that in verse 14. “While they also, by”—or perhaps better translated—“*with* prayer on your behalf, yearn for you because of the surpassing grace of God in you.”

Paul makes explicit what we referred to in our comments on verses 12 and 13. The Jerusalem saints will glorify God for the obedience of the Corinthians—they will overflow with many thanksgivings to God—because they will be able to discern in the Corinthians' generosity “the surpassing grace of God” at work in them. And once again, this mention of the grace of God—along with the related term “thanksgiving” in verses 11 and 12—serves to bring the theme of the grace of God full circle. He began this tract on giving with the grace of God at work in the Macedonians, and here he ends it with the surpassing grace of God at work in the Corinthians.

When the saints of Jerusalem receive the Corinthians' gifts, they won't only receive them as that which meets their needs. They'll receive them as an expression and overture of the surpassing grace of God which works mightily and dynamically to sanctify God's people. And as the Jerusalem saints perceive the grace of God at work in the Corinthians, the grace of God that is in *them* will answer to the grace of God that has been at work in their brothers! And the bond of divine grace will produce two effects that deepen communion between brothers and sisters in Christ.

First, the apprehension of the grace of God in the Corinthians answering to the grace of God in the hearts of the Jewish believers will create in them a *holy affection* for the Corinthians. Paul

says, “They *yearn* for you.” This is that word *epipothéo*, which speaks of intense longing or yearning, of sincere affection. Paul uses this word when he speaks of his desire to be reunited with the Philippians. As he sits in his Roman prison, and as he receives a letter and a financial gift from the Philippian church upon the arrival of Epaphroditus, he says in Philippians 1:8, “For God is my witness, how I *long for* you all with the affection of Christ Jesus.” Earlier in 2 Corinthians—chapter 5 verse 2—he uses this word to speak of how believers groan under the weight of sin and infirmity in this decaying body, and *long* to be clothed with our glorified resurrection bodies in the day of Christ. Paul says, when the saints at Jerusalem receive your gift, the grace of God in them is going to answer to the grace of God in you as manifested by your generosity, and their hearts are going to be so knit to yours in Christian love and affection, that they’re going to long for you!

And we recognize the truth of this, don’t we? When someone has, in kind generosity, met a physical or financial need of yours, your heart is only further bound toward them in cords of love. When you have the privilege of ministering to a brother or sister in their need, you have a keener sense of your connection to one another as fellow members of the body of Christ. And if providence has separated you from one another for a time, the grace of God in you answers to the grace of God in them, and you long to see one another! To embrace one another! To sit under the teaching of the Word of God together! To praise the Lord in song together! To pray together!

And that brings us to the second effect that the perception of such grace produces. When it happens that the circumstances of life cannot close the geographical gap between you and those you long for, prayer is what closes that gap. Affectionate longing gives birth to supplication and petition. Paul says, “While they also, *with prayer on your behalf*, yearn for you.” Because they can’t be with you, they pour out their hearts at the throne of grace, and they pray down God’s richest blessings upon your life, for the rich blessing that you brought to them! As one preacher said, “The throne of grace transcends the miles that separate you!” And your communion and fellowship is deepened and refined at the throne of grace!

Dear people, does that sound like something you want? Is that not the kind of fellowship that you long for in the body of Christ? The kinds of relationships where genuine needs are met in loving service, and when they can’t be repaid in kind are repaid by earnest and faithful prayer on your behalf? I want those kinds of friends! I want that depth of communion and fellowship with my brothers and sisters in Christ! And I know you do too. The way to get them is to lay hold of the grace of God—to press on into this grace of joyful generosity—and to open our hearts and open our hands to meet the practical needs of our brothers and sisters in Christ. Be **motivated**, GraceLife, to joyful generosity, by the prospect of deepened communion with **the people of God**.

Conclusion (v. 15)

And then, after enumerating all these manifold blessings of grace-produced, Gospel-shaped, God-glorifying giving—that such giving results in the proportionate provision of God, the pleasure of God, the promised blessing of God, the praise of God, and deeper communion with the people of God—after all of this, Paul bursts out in exclamation and praise to God in verse 15: “Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!” All this talk about the blessedness of giving—the grace of God delightfully compelling sinners to give gifts of grace, which then lead only to the return of thanks to God—that leads Paul’s own heart to burst forth in thanksgiving to God for the supreme fountainhead of all grace! for the gift that inspires all other gifts: the Father’s indescribable gift of His only begotten Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, to guilty sinners in need of a Savior! Paul’s mind cannot too long be occupied with giving from man to man before he must trace the stream of all giving back to the flowing fountain of God’s own heart displayed in the gift of His Son to sinners!

“For unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is *given*” (Isa 9:6). “For God so loved the world that He *gave* His only begotten Son” (John 3:16). “He who did not spare His own Son, but *delivered Him over* for us all, how will He not also with Him freely *give* us all things?” (Rom 8:32). “By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 4:9–10). “The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to *give* His life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). And once again: “For you know the *grace* of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich”—though in His pre-existent, eternal glory and deity He was in possession of spiritual riches whose wealth words are unable to describe—“yet for your sake He became poor,”—He nevertheless voluntarily and sacrificially renounced His riches, and embraced the poverty of life and death as a human being—“so that you through His poverty might become rich”—so that we who were destitute of God’s favor and blessing could be enriched with the very righteousness of God Himself!

Paul says, “That gift is indescribable! Human language is not able to capture the glory and the beauty of eternal God, the Second Person of the Trinity, taking on the nature and infirmity of man, so that eternity is in time! so that infinity is joined to the finite! so that omnipresence is joined to limitation! so that omniscience is joined to ignorance! so that omnipotence is joined to fatigue! so that immutability is joined to change and growth! so that infinite fullness is hungry! so that infinite beauty is despised! so that infinite blessedness is cursed! so that the Author of Life dies! All because we needed a Savior from sin who was both God and man! Fully and truly man, so as to be able to stand in man’s place—to pay man’s penalty and accomplish man’s righteousness. Fully and truly God, so as to be able to bear the wrath of God without being utterly destroyed, and to be possessed of an infinite merit to bestow on innumerable sinners who come to Him in repentance and faith. That gift is indescribable! And when words fail, wonder

takes over. When explanation won't do, exclamation is our language of choice (cf. Storms). As David said, "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; It is too high, I cannot attain to it!" "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!" "Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!"

Dear people, this is where the heart of the Apostle Paul takes him, after extended reflections on *giving*! Is this where your heart takes you? To the praise and adoration of the Giver of all gifts, to the Giver of the greatest gift, to the gift that inspires every other gift? Oh, I pray it is so!

And if you're here this morning, and you have not been made a recipient of this indescribable gift of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, crucified for sinners, raised for our justification—if you have not feasted at the banquet table of Gospel grace, if you have not drunk from the sweet fountains of Gospel grace—if you have not been united to Christ by faith alone, and remain dead in your sins, clinging to your own sinful pleasure, trusting in your own goodness to take you to heaven, I call you to turn from your sins and from the filthy rags of your own righteousness, and trust in Christ alone for the forgiveness of your sins! For a right standing before God!

He stands ready to receive you! With arms outstretched He calls you: "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will *give* you rest!" Dear sinner, don't die in your sins! Receive God's *indescribable gift*, the Lord Jesus Christ, through faith alone this morning!

And dear brothers and sisters—recipients of God's indescribable gift—beneficiaries of a Gospel accomplished by self-imposed poverty—behold the beauty of the grace of God displayed in the gift of our Savior, and by that grace: open your heart and open your hands to your brothers and sisters in need. Bend that Gospel grace that you've received out to your fellow members in the body of Christ in joyful generosity.