

2 Corinthians 8:8-15

We continue this morning our series from 2 Corinthians as part of our Giving in Grace programme. Last week we began looking at what I described as a tale of two churches, the churches in Corinth and the churches in Macedonia.

We looked last week at the Macedonian churches and their giving. We saw how they gave generously, how they begged to be allowed to give and how they gave out of poverty and the trials they were going through. As we did that we asked what was their motivation, and saw that it was the grace of God that motivated them. They were living in the grace of God and aware of God's generosity to them they overflowed with generosity themselves.

Today we turn our attention to the other churches, the churches in Corinth to whom Paul was writing and for whom Paul held up the Macedonian Christians as an example to be followed.

1. The church in Corinth.

As Paul writes to this church we see something of the nature of the church in Corinth.

a. It was a thriving church and Paul describes them in v7 as excelling in everything, in faith speech, knowledge and so on. It was a church that had a lot going on and going for it. This church was going places.

b. It was a rich church as we see in v14 where Paul speaks of "your plenty".

c. It may not have been the most loving of churches. In v8 Paul says he wanted to test their love and we are all familiar with 1 Corinthians 13 where Paul wrote to them about love and that having no love makes one a "resounding gong or clanging cymbal" (1 Cor 13:1) because that was what he felt they were.

2. Paul's appeal to them

This was why he felt the need to write to them. They had so much going for them and yet while they had been the first to start getting money together to give to the church in Jerusalem they hadn't finished the task and so Paul had to write to them to get on and finish. He had to write to them about giving.

In his words here Paul appealed

a. To their morality – he spoke about giving so that there might be equality, v13. It isn't fair if they have so much while other Christians have so little. He spoke about finishing the task of giving. It was not good to have started something and said they were going to do something and then not doing it. He appealed

b. to their love. As we saw last week he held up the Macedonian church as an example so that v8 these Christians in Corinth could compare themselves with the Christians there. Now this is dangerous because it is rarely good to compare ourselves with other Christians. I am well aware that

for some of us this whole matter of giving produces a measure of guilt. We think of what others are giving and what we can give and feel bad about it. Please I am not wanting that and so when we read of Paul wanting the Corinthians to compare themselves with the Macedonians I am not encouraging us to compare our giving with others in the congregation. Guilt is not a good motivation for giving and it is not a healthy emotion for us in terms of giving. However, Paul knew this church in Corinth. He knew that they felt they were the best, that they had everything and yet he knew their flaws especially in terms of love and concern for others and so he held up the poor church in Macedonia and said to them this is what they have done in and by the grace of God now compare yourselves to them and see if your love is as great as theirs.

c. to their faith. Both of the other reasons stem out of their faith. Why worry about equality – because of our faith. Why focus on love – because of faith in the love of God in Jesus Christ. As we saw last week this is the root of our giving and Paul summed it up wonderfully for them in v8&9 in which, if I may summarise, he says your giving is a test of your love, because you know the grace of Jesus. He was rich in the glory of heaven but became poor by coming to earth and dying so that you who in God were poor might be made rich as children of God and heirs of God. He appealed, as we saw last week to the grace of God. They knew that grace and he appealed to them out of their love for God and for people to continue and complete their giving towards the followers of Jesus in Jerusalem.

3. Paul's message

The message that Paul was sending to these Christians is very clear. He wanted them to finish the collection they had started to support the Christians in Jerusalem and while there were many reasons he could give for them doing that the real reason was simply because of the grace of God. As they follow a saviour who gave everything for them will they not respond in the same way to him. Many of us this week will have been to the 24/7 prayer room. It has been an excellent resource. In one corner you can sit and reflect upon God's grace and what you might give back to him and you can even write on little hearts to stick onto a big heart on a board what you want to give to God. Grace out of grace.

I have to say as we think about our giving this would be the appeal I would make to us. I want to suggest a number of things about our giving. And can I at this point say that I recognise that I am only speaking about giving money. I recognise that money is just one of the responses we can make to God's grace. I realise that we give in terms of time and energy, talents and skills and in many other ways, indeed a couple of years back we had a sermon series on this wider stewardship of God's gifts to us. However what we as a church are focussing upon at this time is financial giving. In nearly six years here this is only the second time I have preached on financial giving and the first was

last week. So bear with me on this, especially if you find yourself struggling financially at the moment and pray for us as a church because in the same way that our homes and families need money to function so do we here in Christ Church. It is money which enables ministry.

4. Our giving

Out of what Paul has been saying in these verses I want say three things about our financial giving.

a. we give out of love

Paul said he wanted to “test the sincerity of your love” v8 and called on these Christians in Corinth to “show these men the proof of your love” (v24). It was love for God and their fellow Christians that Paul saw as their reason to give. Their giving he saw as a sign and a proof that their love for God was real. In other words it was a measure of their discipleship. In v11 he spoke of their “eager willingness” to give. That kind of willingness of desire to give can only come out of love. It is love for God that will move us to give to God rather than try and tip God.

I remember hearing the story of a little boy who went to church with his parents one day. On the way home he listened as they moaned about the service – they didn’t like the hymns, the sermon was too long, they couldn’t hear the person doing the reading. After a while the boy piped up, “but what do you expect for 50p?”

Now please don’t get me wrong here I recognise that for some even a small amount given is a sacrifice but for many of us that is not how it is and what I am trying to help us see was that God as it were dug deep into his resources to give us everything in Jesus and we are being encouraged in response to be willing to give to God and his work.

Friends as you open the letter that will be given to you at the end of the service and think and pray about it, my prayer is that God by his Holy Spirit will move us to give out of love in response to all God has done for us. As you pray and think about God’s work here at Christ Church and what you should give, can I encourage you not to give because you ought, or in comparison with others but to think about how God has blessed you to meditate on the verse 9, “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich” – you might even want to try and learn it. Then in the light of that ask God what you can offer back to him in love for all he has given you.

We give out of love.

b. we give proportionately

In v11 Paul spoke about them giving “according to your means” and in v12 “according to what one has not according to what he does not have”. The point is clear he was not asking them to be like the Macedonian Christians who gave beyond what they had, but simply to recognise what they had, what God had given them, and to give proportionately from that. Now I know that for some when I

speak of giving proportionately the idea of tithing will come to mind, the giving of one tenth of income as we see in the Old Testament. However, Paul does not mention that and, while for some that may be a good rule of thumb, I do want to remind us that we are under grace not law and that for some the tithe can get us into legalism and trying to work out is it a tithe of net or gross income and so on. Friends let me encourage us as we ask God what we should give to simply to look to give proportionately to what God has given to us and not just in terms of regular income but if God has blessed you in some special way recently then perhaps that is cause for a special response to God. Ask God to help you see what proportion of all that he has given to you he would have you give to him.

c. we give together

this as we have been seeing is the tale of two churches. He was calling on these Christians in Corinth to act together. Together we can achieve great things for God as the very buildings we are meeting in this morning testify. My gift no matter how small or great added to yours grows until by the grace of God we have sufficient to do what God is calling us to do here in Christ Church and beyond. We need each other in this as in so many areas because we can encourage each other as we give together.

I'm looking forward to June 12th when we have our thanksgiving Sunday as a conclusion to this Giving in Grace programme and when we let people know how God has directed us in our giving for the future because then together we can celebrate God's goodness and together we can rejoice in what God has done and will do. But we do it together. So please whether you are able to give small amounts or large let me encourage you in love to give what God directs you because when it all comes together this is what God will use to do his work here.

In his book *The Royal Route to Heaven* Alan Redpath quotes this story: 'A certain Christian once said to a friend, "Our church costs too much. They are always asking for money." Her friend replied in this fashion: "Some time ago a little boy was born in our home. He cost us a lot of money from the very beginning: he had a big appetite, he needed clothes, medicine, toys and even a puppy. Then he went to school, and that cost a lot more; later he went on to college, then he began dating, and that cost a small fortune! But in his last year at college he died, and since the funeral he hasn't cost a penny. Now which situation do you think we would rather have?" After a significant pause the friend continued, "As long as this church lives it will cost. When it dies, it won't cost us anything. A living church has the most vital message for all the world today, therefore I am going to give and pray with everything I have to help to keep our church a living church." '

I hope together we will give and pray and serve and use our talents that this church will be a living church where people come to faith and grow in faith. May God richly bless us in this grace of giving!