

# (Missionary Messages) 8. THE GRACE OF GIVING

by A.B. Simpson

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## Transcript

"For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes, He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich" (2 Cor. 8:9). The overflow of our blessing is always the doubling of it. After we have been receiving the fullness of the Spirit, our hearts are always glad for the opportunity of giving expression to our love to God and our fellowmen, and we hear the Master saying, "freely ye have received, freely give." Some one has said that the export trade of a country must properly balance its import trade, and the reason for the extraordinary prosperity of this land is because it sends out more than it takes in, and so in Christian life there must be a balance of trade. There must be a proper equilibrium between ourselves and our service and ministry, and the reason many are stalled and dead is because they have become stagnant pools. The missionary side of our work has been unspeakably blessed, and it has done more for us than we have done for the heathen, and I think it very important that we should, from time to time, take our Bibles and see what God has told us about the principles, and motives, and the true methods of giving. The hearts of the people are so full that they will scarcely give for anything else.

There are seven ways of giving, somebody has said. The first is the careless way, giving something to everything that comes along, giving to get rid of the nuisance of the appeal. The second way is the impulsive way of giving, giving when you feel like it, when your emotions are stirred. Then there is the lazy way of giving. Get somebody to get up a fair, or festival, or an ice cream social, or a broomdrill. That is the lazy way of giving, and it is the most expensive in the end. Then there is the selfish way of giving, giving for your organ, for your Sunday school, for your preacher, for something that you are to receive from it. There are churches in this land that spend more in a single year on frescoes than in a hundred years for missions. Then there is the systematic way, setting aside a certain per cent of our means, and I am glad to say that this is growing among intelligent Christians. Then there is what we might call the fair way of giving, giving as much for the Lord as we use upon ourselves. And finally, there is the heroic way, the selfsacrificing way, giving more than you can, giving until it hurts, and then giving until it does not hurt. God, however, has given us clear teaching on the subject of Christian beneficence. I cannot begin to touch the whole field today. These Corinthian Epistles are the Church Epistles. They were written to regulate the doctrine, the discipline and government of the Christian Church. They are the manuals of the Church of Jesus Christ throughout the Christian age, and you will find almost everything you need to know regarding the direction of the work of God in the first and second Epistles to the Corinthians.

First, we are taught in this chapter that giving is a grace. It is not a work. It is not something you have to do, but it is something God will do if you will let Him, so we read in the sixth and seventh verses of this chapter about it as a grace. "I would have you know the grace of God bestowed in the churches of Macedonia." What is grace? Why, grace is something given us, not something we give, but something we get. God does not require you to give as a hard exercise. He wants to give you the spirit of giving; something you must do in the power of the Holy Ghost, something you must take as a divine gift, a grace of the Holy Ghost. Therefore it belongs to the essential qualities of holiness and right living, and without it you cannot call yourself a truly sanctified child of God. Now then, if giving is a grace it is in the power of everybody.

The second point that we are to learn here is that giving is a privilege of the poor. The very poorest may give, and God will enable them to give. It is not for the wealthy and for the millionaire, but for the humble and the poor, those of the smallest resources and the humblest means. So we read in this eighth chapter and the second verse, "How that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality." God requires the poor to give because it is a grace. It is God's doing, not man's, therefore God chooses the weakest of the people to do it. So you find that when He wanted to honor a servant of His in the Old Testament, He laid upon the poor widow the support of the prophet Elijah. He sent His servant down to this poor widow, who had but a handful of meal and a drop of oil, and He required of her that she undertake the support of God's messenger, just because she was poor. God required her to give simply because it was His grace that enabled her to give. Then we find Him commending the poor widow, who cast in her two mites, above all the rest. Because there was more love in it, more motive in it, more of God in it, it was the larger. It outweighed all the wealth that was poured into the treasury. On the other hand, it was the man that was poorest that took refuge in his poverty, because he could do so little. I heard of a minister who said to a very humble congregation of saints, that he did not believe that there was a person in it, so poor, man, woman, or child, but could give something to the Lord. One poor woman went home and had a good cry over it. "I am so poor I cannot give anything." After she had cried a little while, the Lord began to talk to her, and He said, "You cannot give like other people, but you can give like a child. You can begin and put aside a penny," and do you know, that when that year ended that poor woman had \$21 to give. It was the largest gift in that entire congregation. It was a congregation of working people and she was the poorest woman in it. I remember taking up a collection once in Boston, in starting our mission there on Tremont Street, one afternoon some years ago. The largest gift was twenty-five dollars. I asked who the twenty-five dollar man was, and was introduced to him at the close of the meeting. He was a poor shoemaker and had a little shop. When I spoke to him about his gift he said, "If you only knew what the Lord has given me you would not wonder at all." I have come to know him better since. Every time I go to Boston there he is shouting his hallelujahs. He was converted many years ago, but could not get any joy. He was hungry for something better and tried to find the deeper life, but the members of the church said to him that it was all nonsense. "You must be contented to sin like the rest of us." And he went back into the world and for several years he kept a saloon in Boston and went on in sin, but hungry all the time, longing for the better way, and one Thursday he stumbled into our Alliance meeting in Boston, and heard them telling about the riches of Christ's grace, and before the afternoon was over he had received the Holy Ghost. He went home and pitched his whiskey into the sea. He did not sell it to somebody else, but closed his saloon, and went back to his little shop where he makes shoes for a living, and where he preaches the Gospel all the day long to the customers. That was the man who gave the twenty-five dollars. It was the gift that God enabled and that God impelled, by the fullness of the Spirit, and the overflow of His grace.

In the next place, we can give beyond our power. If giving is a grace it is always beyond our power. Now, we do not understand this naturally. We go about holiness supernaturally, but we go about giving as a matter of business. God wants you to go about your giving as you do about your blessing, in faith. "For I bear them record that to their power, yea, and beyond their power, they were willing of themselves." They gave more than they were able to give just because it was a grace. Grace means what God can do, not what you can do. Give, believing that He can supply even more than you can see of resources and ability. Believe that He can save for you, and enable you to do in this as in other things more than you could in yourself, even beyond your power.

Again, their giving was voluntary, it was willing giving. They did not have to be pressed, but they had to be held back, for he says, "Praying us with much entreaty that we would receive the gift." They begged us to take it. They were like the children of Israel when the tabernacle was built. Moses had to stop the offerings. That is God's standard of giving. The secret of it is given in the next point.

Personal consecration to God. "This they did, first they gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God." First they gave themselves, then it was easy to give anything, to give everything. All true giving begins with consecration. I might talk to ten thousand ordinary people and not get ten dollars from them for missions. And I would not attempt it unless their hearts were prepared. We have seen the spectacle of a great missionary meeting, and the offering of these thousands, representing millions of capital, just a few paltry dollars, and we have seen a poor, humble congregation give thousands of dollars. People came to me often when our missionary offerings came to be talked about in the sensational press, and agents of great societies came to me to ask me the secret of it, and to explain how it was, what sort of hypnotism it was, or what sort of new auctioneering style I had discovered. They would scarcely believe me when I told them that we had no magnetism, that we used no arts, but that the secret of it was that these people were so filled with the Holy Spirit and joy of the Lord that they could not keep anything back from Christ. When we give ourselves to the Lord then everything is given. Your clothes, your food, the support of your family, all of these are consecrated for the Lord. Holiness unto the Lord is written upon everything you do. It is not merely what you put in the plate. When the cords of self are cut, then it is a joy to give everything to Him.

Let me call your attention to another point that is often overlooked. They not only gave themselves to the Lord first, but they then gave themselves to the cause, to the special cause, the great missionary campaign that Paul and his associate workers represented. He says, "But ye gave yourselves to the Lord and then to us by the will of God. David's men of old were of one heart to make him king, men that knew their place and "kept rank," men that were true to their fellow soldiers. And the Lord Jesus has not only called us to be true to Him, but in Him to be true to our fellow workers so that we can be people that can be depended upon, and have not lost the human heart, even though we have received the Holy Ghost. God wants this true touch of loyal service in every great movement to bring back the King and hasten on the cause of our Lord and Master Jesus Christ. So it happens that we are bound together in a fellowship that reaches around the world, and that we have grown together in a sort of mutual relationship, and that we stand heart-to-heart, and shoulder-to-shoulder, and hand-to-hand in the great and solemn trust which God has committed to you as much as He has to me. God has called us into it and He expects us to be true to our trust as well as to our God. As we are true and loyal to Him, God can make us terrible as an army with banners in carrying out the great commission for the evangelization of the world. Now, God is always raising up, in His providence, special spiritual movements. Such a movement was the Reformation, and it was because they stood shoulder to shoulder, Luther and the Elector of Saxony, and

the reformers in Switzerland, and in Scotland and England, that they gave us the Bible and the Gospel. So again God was pleased to raise up the men of the 17th and 18th centuries, leaders of those deep spiritual movements, men like the Whitfields, and Wesleys, and Doddridge, and through their union they became a force and they witnessed for the things that have come to us as heritages of blessing today, to gather around them a body of spiritual men and women who have become our leaders and missionaries in many a field of Christian testimony. And when God called me to know Him in His fullness, He was coming to you at the same time with the same blessing in your bodies, the same hope of His coming, the same longing to give the whole Gospel to the whole world. Man was not marshalling this army. It was the living God. That is the cause. It is not my cause, it is His cause. It is a special movement that has arisen out of special conditions. I will lose my blessing if I grow careless or lukewarm or faithless to this trust. I shall lose what God has given to me. He holds me true to the truth that has blessed me, true to the world that needs me, and he holds you too. Let us remember this double consecration. First, to give yourself to Him and then to give yourself in fellowship with your brethren to the great cause of witnessing for Jesus in His fullness and of giving the Gospel in the present generation to the uttermost parts of the earth. There are many people that are spoiled for the old worldly methods of Christian work, and we do thank God for the loyalty and the fellowship and the unity, not by the bonds of human, but by the bonds of divine love. He has held this work together so long, and through influences that would have wrecked anything that was not supernatural and divine, and so I plead today, in His name, for loyal fidelity to the great trust committed to our hands, to the great trust of standing true for full salvation and for the evangelization of the world. There are millions of Christians that will do the other things, but God has only you to do this thing. There are millions of people that will work for social reform, but He has only you to depend upon for this great cause, so God does not allow me to spend any time in the lesser lines of usefulness, in the reform movements, in the educational movements, in the political movements of the age, all right in their place all right for those that are called to them, but if God has given you something better, He gave it to you that you might pass it on to others, and He holds you true to that sacred trust with your brethren in the Lord. And so the hundreds of brethren that have gone to the heathen world, that are standing in perilous places and in the darkness today, they belong to you, there they are and men and God expect us to stand true to them. They have gone down beneath the waves and we must hold the ropes while they go down, and I believe God wants a spirit of magnificent loyalty to possess us in these days. Yonder in Peking are your gentle sisters looking a fate in the face far worse than a thousand deaths, standing bravely there through these hot Summer days, and days of danger, and God will hold us responsible to stand up to them. They all belong to us, by love and by prayer and by sacrifice and by everything in our power, and if we get careless and let any little trifle chill our faithfulness and zeal, their blood will some day rest upon our heads,

But, again, we have some light here on pledging for missionary offerings. I am very glad to find this thing. It has been a help to some questioning minds. Have we Scriptural warrant for making an estimate of what we will give in the coming year for the cause of missions? Or must it be just to give as we can and make no pledge? Is this pledging system Scriptural? And I am glad to tell you that I find it right here in my Bible, in the tenth verse of this chapter. Paul says: "For this is expedient for you, who have begun before, not only to do, but also to be forward a year ago. Now then, by the help of God, honestly and honorably meet it. Again in the ninth chapter of 2 Cor. and the second verse we read: "For I know the forwardness of your mind, for which I boasted of you to them of Macedonia that Achaia was ready a year ago; and your zeal hath provoked very many." You made your pledges in advance. You did it in meekness and gentleness of spirit, and it went abroad through the churches. It reached Macedonia, and it inspired them to do likewise. It provoked very many of them, and it was a blessing even before a single cent was paid. The pledging was a blessing, and it was undoubtedly acceptable to God. God was pleased with your planning; God is

still pleased when you come to give at such a time as this, and reviewing our mercies and blessings, looking out upon the world, desiring to form plans, we sit down together, and say, God helping us we will endeavor to do so much for the spread of the Gospel this year, We do not pledge it as a promissory note. These pledges will never be called for by the treasurer. They will never be asked for by a dun. They are simply endeavors. They are just like what the Corinthians were forward in doing, and dear friends, when we enter upon this undertaking, it gives us something to live for. It sends us home to take Christ into partnership in our business; it sends us home to sacrifice and save. There is an object to live up to, and it has an uplifting, inspiring influence, which makes our business sacred; it takes it out of the plane of mere secular business, and makes it a partnership with the world and for the Lord. I have heard of a little fellow who was selling papers on the street who had a lame brother. A gentleman said to him, you would be more comfortable if you did not have your little brother to help." And he looked up as if he had been hit, and said, "What's the use of saving if you haven't any-body to share it with. I tell you I've got Jim to live for and it helps a lot." It is that which nerves the hand of toil in every circle, and when we go home to live for Jesus, and the lost world, every stroke of work reaches to the uttermost corners of the world, and it even has a sacredness about it, and a sweetness about it, that mere selfish labor could never give. Come, then, friends, and go forth into every place of toil and take the Master with you and into every plan of business for the year to come, and you will find, like Jim, that it is something to lay up for and it will be a blessing to you.

Again, we find the performance as well as the pledging pointed out here. Here we much need the keeping power of the Holy Ghost, the watchfulness of the Spirit upon our little indulgences. How much danger there is that, like the little boy who got two pennies, and who was to give one of them to the missionary cause, and who lost one of them. His mother said to him, "You have lost one of your pennies. You will have to do without your candy." "Oh," he says, "Mamma, it was the missionary penny I lost." How often it is the Lord's end that suffers. A colored man rented a farm on the principle of giving one-third of what he raised to the owner and keeping two-thirds for himself. The season passed and the owner received nothing. He spoke to the man about it. He said to him, "How is this, you were to give one-third of what you raised to me and keep two-thirds for yourself." The colored man said, "That is so, but there were only two-thirds. When I came to gather up the harvest I allowed there would be three loads and there were only two." How often we get money for the special journey, or for the emergency that comes up unexpectedly. How much better, systematically, on principle, to count the Lord's part first, and to take the Lord to enable us to meet it and be honest and faithful to His service.

But once again, we find here great comfort for us if we are not able to meet our pledge. There was a poor old Chinese Christian once who would not be baptized, though she was converted and she went to the missionary to talk about it. He said, "Why don't you get baptized." "Why," she said, "I feel that I am not worthy to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. I love Him and trust Him, but He tells me in His Book, that His disciples must go into all the world and preach the Gospel. Now," she said, "I can go to my family, and to two or three villages near me, and I have gone to them, but I never can go to all the world." And the missionary said, "Dear child, you do not need to do more than you can do. He takes the larger will for the lesser deed." That is the principle laid down here. "If there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to what a man hath, and not according to what he hath not." God wants your will and sets it down as if it were accomplished. Now, if God has withheld the power to make it good, after every honest, earnest and faithful effort on your part, it is not your responsibility. God will take the will for the deed. And you are accepted even if you are not able to meet all your pledge. Do not let it hang on you as a millstone. Leave it behind and start again, and God will take your will for the deed just as He did David's when he wanted

to build the temple. Take that old missionary motto, "Attempt great things for God, and expect great things from God," and then go forth and trust Him, and in His strength do your best.

Finally then note the spirit of true giving.

First, it should be in faith. This is the thought in the apostle's mind when he says: "God is able to make all grace abound toward you so that ye, always having all-sufficiency in all things, may abound unto every good work."

Next, it should be joyful, "For God loveth a cheerful giver."

And it should be inspired by love. "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for our sakes He became poor, that ye, through His poverty might be rich."

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