

The Stewardship of Grace Pt. #1: 2 Corinthians 8:1-14

Preached @ Harambee Church by Pastor Michael Gunn on September 13th, 2009

Intro

As we celebrate Harambee's 7th year of existence and enter into a new year; albeit a year of change and maybe some uncertainty, we enter in hope, because of the gospel of grace. This year we will be in the book of Acts (Starting November 2009), but we are going to look at stewardship for these next few weeks. Stewardship (Or giving) is a tough subject since it is so connected to our circumstances and idols. Some churches certainly talk too much about giving, while other, such as Harambee do not talk enough about it. It is my apology that we have not preached the full counsel of God's word. Stewardship is spoken about quite often in the bible, and it is a subject that can bring out many emotions, because we are so controlled by our time and our money. We don't think that the gospel ought to make any demands on our life; certainly not in the area of what we do with our money. I could take the tactic of causing you guilt so as to raise our giving, but that would be quite un-gospellike. If we have yielded our lives to God, then we have yielded that which is most important to us; our time, talent and treasure. Discipleship is connected to giving and the proper stewarding of the many gifts that God has graced us with. We are called to die to ourselves and empty ourselves and it is there (In Christ) that we find our joy and abundance.

One thing is for sure giving is a heart issue, related to grace, and not related to our procuring a new identity and standing with the Lord. *Grace giving is a natural by-product of the gospel working on our lives. It is a sign of grace residing in us.* Let's take a look at **2 Corinthians 8** for the words of Paul on this subject.

From the Head...

First of all, we note that Paul is discussing the giving of the Macedonian church to the Jerusalem church as a way of relief. However the principles of giving here (**2 Corinthians 8-9**) are good guidelines to stewardship of all kinds. Paul is commending the Macedonian church (These are churches that Paul founded near Greece) to the Corinthians as a way of teaching them in regards to giving. Paul took no money from them (See **2 Corinthians 11:7-9**). Paul was a tent maker, and he raised his own support. I too can say the same thing, as I now raise all of my support outside of Harambee, so I am freed up to do what God has called me to do. Paul can talk about giving freely knowing that he has no ulterior motive. So many of the TV preachers preach about giving as a way to blessing, so that they can be the one being blessed.

Giving is not the path to the blessing, it is the result of the blessing (2 Corinthians 8:1-3)

Generosity is an affect, not a cause. Giving sacrificially is a result of the reality of the joy of Christ in our lives. Giving isn't a pathway, or a work to be done because we ought, but a result of the gospel working in our lives. It is a showing of God's grace. Joy is connected to contentment, which leads to the ability to live with any means since we are filled in Christ (See **Philippians 4:11-13**). When we are joyless, we need to create that joy through circumstances and new toys. Paul so clearly indicates this point in **verse 9** when he uses the prime example of God's grace in our life; Jesus' death in our behalf. He was made "Poor" just like the Macedonian church was, so that we could be made "Rich." It is when we are content and joy filled in Christ that we can be givers of ourselves and our stuff as an act of "Re-Gracing" to others.

Giving is motivated by a restructuring of our understanding of our possessions (2 Corinthians 8:4-5)

They weren't motivated by guilt and human expectations, but the desire to participate in what God was doing. This wasn't done as an expectation of Paul and his people; it was done because they "*Gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God, to us (2 Corinthians 8:5)*". The will of God in this instance was ascertained by the fact that they had given themselves and their stuff to the Lord. This is a key to stewardship; that we see all of who we are and the things we have as the Lord's and not our own (See **Psalms 24:1**). It is easier to depart with things that aren't our own. We live in a culture that emphasizes material possessions as a symbol of our success and significance. This makes giving things up in accordance with God's will harder for us to obey. The Macedonian church saw their possessions as first the Lord, then they recognized that God was working through the ministry of Paul and his men, so they were happy to participate in the work of the Lord in this circumstance.

Giving is an act of grace and love (2 Corinthians 8:6-8)

While giving is a consequence of grace in our lives, it is also an act of grace and love demonstrating God's grace and love in our lives. When we withhold giving, we are missing out in the grace opportunities we are given to bless others with a symbol of the grace we are blessed with. Paul is urging Titus and his team to complete what their intentions were, and to demonstrate the grace of God to others through their gift.

Giving is the result of restructured desires (2 Corinthians 8:10-11)

This last point is crucial to biblical stewardship. It was their desire that motivated them to give. Desire is ultimately what motivates us to do anything. We do what we desire. We can try to do something else, but it is the desires of our heart that we ultimately follow. It is a restructuring in this area that happens to us through the preaching of the gospel. If our desires are truly self-centered then giving is not going to be a part of who we are. It is our desires that bring glory to God or ourselves. Anyone can give money and actually have a desire to help others, but if their desires are not motivated by God and His glory, the work is not pleasing to the Lord, because their motives of their heart are self-centered. This is why two people can do the same act, yet one is doing for completely different reasons than the other.

...to the Heart

Anyone can be a giver, and as a matter of fact, many non-believers are more hospitable and gracious in their giving than non-believers. This does not negate the gospel in our lives. Biblical giving to help others is not based on nationalism, moralism, self interest, or guilt; it is based on the grace that God has shown us in Jesus Christ, which restructures our desire and understanding of our possessions, so that we are free to give of ourselves for the glory of God in this world. As believers, we have more reason to be givers than anyone else. There is no greater motivation to care for the world's poor than the grace of God when we truly understand what that means.