

God is Able to Make All Grace Abound (The Meaning of Offering II)

2 Corinthians 8:16-9:15

Key Verse: 9:8

“And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.”

In the previous passage we learned the meaning of offering as it relates to the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. In this passage we learn the meaning of offering as it relates to God's character. First of all, we learn what kind of attitude we must have in offering to God and in administering the offering properly. We also learn that God makes us rich in every way and why he does so. Above all, we learn God's character. God is generous in pouring out abundant blessing on his people. Today, let's learn of our God, who is able to make all grace abound to us.

I. Administration of Offering: Trustworthy Offering Servants (8:16-9:5)

In this part Paul teaches us the importance of administering the offering properly, and especially about what kinds of persons should be entrusted with the task.

First, the zeal that comes from God's heart (16-17). Look at verses 16-17. "I thank God, who put into the heart of Titus the same concern I have for you. For Titus not only welcomed our appeal, but he is coming to you with much enthusiasm and on his own initiative." In these verses, "our appeal" means that Paul appealed to Titus to go to the Corinthians to collect money. As we know, collecting money is one of the worst jobs that a person can have. No one wants to be a tax collector. However, when Paul appealed to Titus to do this, he said, "Yes." He was willing to go voluntarily and with much enthusiasm. It was because he had the same concern for the Corinthians that Paul had for them, that is, he shared God's heart toward them. Here we learn an important qualification of an offering servant: it is the zeal that comes from God's heart. In theory, most people are willing to offer joyfully and generously. But practically it can be difficult to give. One may think in his mind, "The Lord needs it," yet his heart says, "No, I need it." So collecting money is hard. No one likes the job. However, God himself anoints his servants for this task. Maria Peace is a good example, who was famous for the words, "Show me the money." She had zeal for collecting money for God's purpose. This zeal comes from God's heart. Knowing God's heart, Titus realized the deep spiritual meaning of the offering: It was to build unity between the Jerusalem Church and the Gentile churches. This made him bold and clear in

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serving God's purpose. It is essential for an offering servant to have zeal that comes from God's heart.

Second, offering servants should be trustworthy (18-19a). Look at verse 18. "And we are sending along with him the brother who is praised by all the churches for his service to the gospel." This brother is anonymous to us, but he was praised by all the churches for his sacrifice for the gospel. He was trustworthy, a man of godly integrity. Look at verse 19. He was chosen by the churches. Paul did not choose him, but he was chosen by the churches. Though the offering was initiated by Paul out of his deep prayer and world mission vision, he did not try to administer it by himself. Several trustworthy men, representing the churches, worked together. There was mutual respect, collective accountability, and transparency. God has blessed UBF over the years with trustworthy offering servants: Maria Ahn, Jenny Cook and Birgit Pierce. They are precious in the sight of God. We must thank God for them and pray for them to be trustworthy to the end.

Third, the purpose of good offering administration (19b-21). Look at verse 19b. "...which we administer in order to honor the Lord himself and to show our eagerness to help." This offering was given sacrificially as a worship offering by Gentile believers throughout Macedonia and Achaia. It was God's money, dedicated for relief of the Jerusalem Church. It was essential that the money be used for its intended purpose. This would honor the Lord. Paul wanted to avoid any criticism in the way the offering was administered. Not one penny should be lost, stolen, or misdirected--even by accident. So Paul dealt with this offering wisely and prayerfully. Let's read verse 21. "For we are taking pains to do what is right, not only in the eyes of the Lord but also in the eyes of men." It is great to be right in the sight of God. But that is not enough in dealing with offering money. We must also be right in the eyes of men. This requires taking pains to do what is right. For the last four years, UBF was involved in an IRS audit which began when groundless charges were made by some disgruntled former UBF members. We had to take many pains to answer the false charges. After a thorough investigation, the IRS exonerated UBF and reaffirmed our status as a church in good standing. Verse 21 is the key verse of the ECFA (Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability), of which UBF is a member. To attain and keep this membership, UBF must meet high standards of accountability and financial integrity. Thus far, UBF has proven trustworthy as a steward of God's money. May God keep us so to the end.

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Fourth, Paul's example of diligence (8:22-9:5). Paul thought that Titus and this one brother were not enough to manage the offering properly. So he sent another brother, and other brothers (22-23). They became a band of brothers who worked together to administer the offering. They had the same qualities as Titus (23). The Corinthians should not treat them like pesky tax collectors, but welcome them with hospitality and love (24).

Look at 9:1. "There is no need for me to write to you about this service to the saints." Paul was confident that the Corinthians were eager to give (2). Still, he wrote this letter to ensure that their offering would be ready. God had used their enthusiasm to stir Macedonian churches to action. However, if Paul and the Macedonians came to Corinth and the offering was not ready, many would be ashamed (3-4). So Paul sent the brothers in advance to help finish collecting the offering. Paul made sure that it would be ready as a generous gift, not as one grudgingly given. Then everyone could be happy and encouraged, and God would be pleased (5).

II. God will make you rich and a blessing (9:6-15)

In 9:6-15 Paul explained the Biblical basis for generous offering. Paul taught the principle of sowing (6-7), that God blesses those who give (8-11a), and the impact of a generous offering (11b-14). Finally, Paul shared his own thanksgiving topic in terms of offering (15).

First, the principle of sowing (6-7). Look at verse 6. "Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously." Some people sow sparingly but hope to reap generously. There is one person who never sent a Christmas card to others. But he hoped to receive many Christmas cards. None came. If we want to receive Christmas cards, we must send Christmas cards. However, they should not be mere form letters, or mass e-mails, but personal, loving, graceful and cheerful. Some people think that if they offer money to God generously, it will just vanish, and they will have nothing left. So they become stingy. Paul teaches that offering to God is like planting a seed which grows and produces a harvest. God remembers our offerings and blesses us accordingly. Proverbs 11:24-25 say, "One man gives freely, yet gains even more; another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty. A generous man will prosper; he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed." There was a Roman centurion named Cornelius. He was generous to those in need and offered money and prayers to God regularly. God accepted his offering and blessed him to receive the best gift, the gospel of salvation (Ac 10:2,4,44). Galatians 6:7-8 say, "Do not be

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deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life."

Look at verse 7. "Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." In offering money, it is not the amount that matters but our heart attitude. Our giving should come from personal faith in God who loves us and blesses us. We should make a personal, prayerful decision before God and then keep that decision, no matter what others are doing. God wants us to give willingly and cheerfully. God loves a cheerful giver.

Second, God blesses those who give (8-11a). Look at verse 8. "And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work." Here we learn something about who God is. God is able to make all grace abound. God is the God of abundance. God is the Creator of all things and he is generous. Notice the repetition in verse 8: "all" things, at "all" times, "all" that you need. God is willing to share all that he has freely. Nothing is impossible with God. Once, while Moses and the Israelites were in the wilderness, they were hungry for meat because they had eaten only wafer-like manna. They began to wail for meat. God told Moses that he would give them enough meat to last for a month. Moses said, "Here I am among six hundred thousand men on foot, and you say, 'I will give them meat to eat for a whole month!'" The Lord answered, "Is the LORD'S arm too short?" (Nu 11:23) Then the Lord sent a wind and drove quail in from the sea. Quail rained down on the camp until they were stacked three feet deep for a day's walk in every direction. If the Israelites had tried to hunt that many quail with a gun, it would have been impossible. But by the blessing of the Lord they had abundant quail. The water of Lake Michigan is abundant. To drink this water, all we have to do is turn on the faucet and an endless supply flows out. Likewise, to receive God's blessing, all we have to do is pray, which is like opening a fountain of blessing. George Mueller of England (1805-1898) was known as a man of prayer. He experienced God's answer 50,000 times and recorded them in his diary. He supported over 10,000 orphans simply by depending on God's abundance in prayer.

God wants to bless us abundantly. Yet sometimes we calculate, thinking, "Really?" We consider withholding our offering from God. God knows us well. He said in Malachi 3:10, "Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the Lord Almighty, 'and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have

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room enough for it." Under the good influence of his God-fearing mother, John D. Rockefeller began tithing as a boy, offering \$0.15 out of his \$1.50 weekly salary. He tithed all his lifetime, and finally offered more than \$500 million to the Lord. Sometimes people criticized him. He would answer, "God is my silent partner." Jesus encouraged his disciples, "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well" (Mt 6:33). Look at verse 11a. "You will be made rich in every way...." God makes us rich in every way, both spiritually and materially.

What is the purpose of God's blessing? Look at verses 8b-9. "...so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. As it is written: 'He has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor; his righteousness endures forever.'" God blesses us generously so that we may abound in good work. God wants us to be generous like him. God blessed our father of faith Abraham to make him a blessing to the world.

At the time of becoming rich, we should remember the purpose for which God blessed us. Otherwise, we can become like the rich fool in Luke 12. When he was blessed by God, he began to take life easy, eating and drinking and being merry. He never thought about God or others. One night God visited him suddenly and said, "You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?" Jesus said, "This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God" (Lk 12:21). One man made a lot of money, storing it up for himself. Then he got sick and had to spend it all on hospital bills. Many people know how to earn money. But not many know how to use money properly. When God blesses us, we must use it to please God and bless others. Otherwise, we will be corrupted.

These days we face a serious economic crisis. It is not because we cannot make money. It is because we have not used money properly. Some business leaders, corrupted by greed, made bad decisions and fostered an environment of easy credit. Many simple people used money irresponsibly and accumulated terrible debts. Our credit system collapsed and fear began to grip people's hearts. Then money stopped circulating. The root problem is that people do not trust each other, nor do they fear God. On our money, there is the phrase, "In God we trust." When we trusted in God, we were generous and recognized as a nation of good works. However, since we have drifted away from God, greed and fear are occupying us. What can we do? We must come to God and repent of our greed and fear. We must not be arrogant or put our hope in riches which are so uncertain. We must put our hope in God who richly provides us with everything we need and more. Also, we

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must do good and be rich in good deeds and be generous and willing to share. In this way we can lay up treasure for ourselves as a firm foundation for the coming age (1 Ti 6:17-19). When we trust God we can overcome ourselves and our situation and be generous to others and do good work around the world. Let's pray that our nation may come to God.

Third, the impact of generous offering (11b-15). When God's people offer generously, it moves those who receive it to give thanks to God. When the Jerusalem believers received a much needed relief offering through the Corinthians, they lifted their heads toward heaven and thanked God. Then they prayed wholeheartedly for the Corinthian believers. Paul sensed that the world was changing through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ who died on the cross for sinners. Paul began by thanking God (8:16), and Paul ends by thanking God: "Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!" (15)

In today's passage the word "generous" or "generosity" is repeated seven times. God is generous. As God's children, we too should be generous in everything. Then God will bless us all the more so that we may abound in every good work.