

## 2 Corinthians 8:16-24

### Leading Gracefully

Money is such a sensitive subject, especially in our individuality driven, capitalistic society. Many people avoid talking about money altogether because of the negative connotations that come along with it. Did you know less than 100 years ago, it was common place for churches to know who was giving and who was not giving? Records were kept at Baptist business meetings and members were put under discipline for not giving towards the work of the gospel. Today, because of wide corruption and mishandling, many think that money is too touchy of a subject. But the gospel of Jesus Christ tells a different story. The gospel of Jesus, the good news of Jesus coming to save sin wrecked humanity by the blood of His Cross, is not afraid to look into our wallets, to look into our bank statements, to see our gift receipts and spending receipts and speak truth. The gospel of Jesus Christ touches every area of our lives, even money.

Whenever money is involved, hearts are involved. Money is closely tied to life and is a good indicator of the position of your heart. Remember the words of our Lord, where your treasure (money) is there your heart will be also. Be wise when it comes to your money. Don't just give it away or spend it frivolously, constantly seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness. Listen closely, every heart is involved when it comes to money; the one giving and also the one receiving.

So this AM from 2 Corinthians 8, the Scripture speaks to leaders, as well as those who are under leaders, when it comes to asking for money. I want us to see 5 characteristics of a leader who is leading with grace. But first, we must read the text:

#### READ TEXT

5 characteristics this morning of a leader leading gracefully.

#### **1. Has a Deep Understand of Grace (16-17)**

- This Corinthian Church is so blessed to be ministered to by both Titus and Paul (as well as so many others)
- God was generous to give the Corinthians these men. Do you understand your ministers in this way, as God's gift to you? Do the ministers themselves, do I, see myself as God's gift to you? Now that does not mean that I think that I am God's gift in some boastful connotation, but the burden of being a gift that God would dispense is tremendous. Think about a gift. The gift doesn't know how he will be received, and really his reception doesn't matter. A gift is something that is given to be used and so ministers are God's gifts to be used by Him to accomplish what He desires in His people. We ministers are entrusted with the hearts of men and will give an account as to the way that we lead your hearts to Jesus. This leaves little room for boasting and plenty of room for humility.
- Look at the language of verse 16
- The ministers actions cause the people of God to praise Him. Why? Because they are engaged in activity that has been directed by God and is accomplishing the purpose of

God. What is the purpose of God? To receive wholehearted, joyful worship from the people He has redeemed to Himself

- Through Jesus' pouring himself out for others, now ministers of His gospel in the power of His Spirit have the opportunity to have our hearts fashioned by Him. It only makes sense that we who understand grace would seek to live our lives in the light of grace. How do we live in the light of grace? By casting his shadow, by our actions causing men to remember the one who took our sins and our sorrows and made them his very own, this one who became sin so that we could become the righteousness of God.
- We cast the shadow of the cross in the light of grace by pouring our lives out on behalf of others. As I remember my own Daddy teaching me, "Others Lord, others, let this my motto be; let me live for others so that I may live like thee." Or even better, as Scripture teaches
- *Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. (Philippians 2:5-8 ESV)*
- Only a life that is being shaped by grace can live this way; because their lives are under the supernatural constraint of the Holy Spirit who puts the desire for His ministry into their hearts.
- When the one asking for gifts is not only giving but giving of himself, giving is made easier.
- Oh that God would raise up an army of ministers whose heart beats for the churches that they serve, even to the point of suffering
- 2 Cor 11:21ff
- This is the mark to see if a leader is leading gracefully: Does he live in the light of God's grace and does his actions cast a shadow of the Cross? In other words, do you see a man being shaped by grace, does such a leader remind you of Jesus and cause you to love Jesus more?

Grace is flowing, and it keeps getting thicker and sweeter as we learn our next point from verse 18.

## **2. Not Keen on Credit (18)**

- How ironic that this brother famous for his preaching is unknown to us! Such is the mark of the great servants of God. They are willing to live a life of decreasing all so that He may increase.
- Nikolaus von Zinzendorf, leader of the Moravian Missions Movement, said, "Preach the gospel, die and be forgotten.
- It may be that some of God's most famous servant are those unknowns, those who tirelessly labor, who escape the applause and accolades of even the noblest of men, but they are known by their Master. These are the ones who will surely hear Him say, "Well done good and faithful servant; you have been faithful in little, come and rule much."
- All (most) have a desire for greatness, most are ambitious, and there is nothing wrong with ambition, we should be ambitious, but what is the ambition of your heart? God knows why you do what you do, God knows the secret desires of your heart, do you?

- We all want to be the hero who saves the day, but may we never, especially those entrusted with the souls of men, selfishly seek advancement at the expense of others.
- Instead let us be great for Jesus! Let our labor be as those two blind men that saw the Son of David and cried have mercy. After they had experienced Jesus, after their faith was met with grace, they went away and spread His fame throughout all the district.
- May God fill our world with famous preachers, preachers who are famous for preaching the gospel - for spreading the fame of His name!

The only way for the world to be filled with such leaders are for them to constantly guard their hearts. How can they guard themselves to ensure that they are seeking God and His kingdom first? Number 3:

### **3. Strives to be Above Reproach (19-21)**

- Money is a sensitive topic and is to be handled with care. But remember, God is not so concerned with money as He is having all of your heart! You can't pay God off, there is no magic number that you can write from your checkbook to earn the favor of God. The favor of God is an account of Grace, and grace means unmerited and underserved favor.
- So God wants our giving to flow from grace, not giving to earn grace. Look at the language of verse 19
- *An act of grace, ministered by us for the glory of the Lord Himself*
- How is this for the glory of the Lord Himself? Because this heart act of giving is an overflow of grace.
- Wouldn't you say that we who have received the greatest gift of God's grace have been given much? Remember what Christ our Lord said, *"Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required, and from him to whom they entrusted much, they will demand the more."* (Luke 12:48)
- You see how challenging such a position is? It would be easy if someone could just say give this amount. God doesn't deal with us in those terms. Grace demands our life, our all! There is never an opportunity for us to say we have given enough, done enough.
- Perhaps this is why money is controversial. Money is a strong indicator of where your heart is. But even more controversial and outrageous than money is Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown - the whole idea of Grace. That God would bestow upon us His favor in that while we were still sinners, Christ would die for us. There is nothing more outrageous in the worlds eyes than the true narrative of God loving, living, dying, saving.
- Paul grounds giving in grace because apart from grace we are nothing. But with grace, the door of heaven has been opened unto us.
- Once we have seen the splendors of heaven, our hearts are fixed, our longings are satisfied, and once we have received, we are certain that it is more blessed to give than it is to receive because we know there is none greater than the one who has given us life.
- Now, if Paul is encouraging the Corinthians to give out of grace, it only ensures that he is doing so himself as an overflow of grace.
- The demands of the gospel (like generosity for example) may make us uncomfortable, but grace must be the motivation. If you are uncomfortable because of guilt then that is not of God, if you are uncomfortable on account of grace then good! Grace isn't so much to make us comfortable as it is to give us life.

- A person may not like the thought of wearing glasses, but without the corrective lenses the person will go through life unable to see
- And we want to see, as well as we want others to see because what others see in us, especially the leaders matter.
- So, Paul quotes Proverbs 3:4 in verse 21 to remind these Corinthians that He is accountable to God.
- This does not excuse Paul. On the contrary, this motivates Paul to have his character scrutinized by all men, to make sure that he is living in accordance with the grace of God.
- Some perceptions of his actions may be off, but he seeks to live above reproach.
- You can't control the perceptions of people but you can control your pursuits. You can control the ambition of your heart. If people stumble may it be on account of the Cross and not the scandals of the church and its ministers.

One sure way to test the heart of a leader is to see how he treats other people, especially those who are laboring beside him. Often when I consider my staff, I wonder if it is a burden or a delight to work with me. Do I treat them well, am I pastoring them well? I wonder the same for you as well, we who are laboring together. Number 4, a ministers leading gracefully will:

#### **4. Satisfied in His Position (23)**

- Paul is on a very short list of people, a list of people that the resurrected Jesus came to and commissioned specifically to serve. He is an apostle.
- But notice the way he treats Titus his assistant. He does not use language that suggest that he is commanding Titus. Instead, he is urging Titus, leading Titus. But look at verse 23:
- Paul sees Titus not as secondary, but as fulfilling the same mission. The mission is greater than all of us
- I have the privilege of meeting often with one of the Vice Presidents of the North American Missions Board. This man is an awesome man that fills in for Johnny Hunt and right now is the interim pastor of Roswell Street Baptist Church. Accolades in SBC life, he has them! But I remember something that he told me when we were meeting together: Brother, there is no such thing as the top. This is true for the believer, for the follower of Jesus. We are to be constantly living our lives not seeking others to see us but to have them see Him.
- The greatest cause in your life is the mission that God has called you to fulfill. No matter how, when, where, or what. Whatever we do is to be done for the glory of King Jesus!
- Leading with Grace will mean that you are satisfied in your position, giving your all wherever you are, not seeking for what you don't have but making the most with what you do have, knowing that God causes the growth!

Now there is just one more characteristic that we must see, and this last point is one of the greatest characteristics of a leader that is leading with grace:

#### **5. Always Encouraging the Best from People (22-24)**

- The gospel places heavy demands on us. The call to follow Jesus is not without cost. What is the cost? Everything. Serving Jesus takes everything that you and I have - Everything. There is no Jr. Varsity with Jesus. No second string or team two. There is no first battalion, second battalion. You are a follower of Jesus. Paul knows this and

has high expectations for the Corinthians. Look at this language: • *Because of his great confidence in you* (v.22)

- v.24
- Expectations are powerful things and Jesus expects your absolute best.
- His expectations are met with His power. He does not place the expectation and say good luck. No. Through His Spirit, He empowers us to perform His purpose - which only heightens the expectation for us. We are left without excuse to accomplish His purpose.
- Paul understand this and, as a leader, he is encouraging this church to realize this.
- In spite of all the blemishes, Christ sees a beautiful bride. He knows that one day she will be presented to Him without blemishes. Some of you can't get past the blemishes, and so you flounder through the life. But, we are to live not focusing on our blemishes but focusing on how he sees us. How does he see us? *By grace you have been saved through faith* and then what is the rest of the verse? *We are His workmanship....* Grace determines our work.
- Let me prove this to you:
- There are few churches to compare with the Corinthian Church.
- Divisions, infighting, disruptive worship, people eating food sacrificed to idols, getting drunk and being gluttonous at the Lord's Supper, a man sleeping with his stepmother and no one speaking up about it, questions about sex, divorce, singleness, the resurrection
- BUT
- When addresses the Corinthians this is how he speaks:
- 1 Cor 1:1-9
- *Paul, called by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus, and our brother Sosthenes,*
- *To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours:*
- *Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*
- *I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus, that in every way you were enriched in him in all speech and all knowledge—even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you —so that you are not lacking in any gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.*
- He says here to this same church, this is your chance, an opportunity to display the glory of Christ and to give proof before the other churches of there love
- One commentator says, "The glory of God is that which makes the invisible God visible." (N. Watson, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 95, 1993.
- The things a minister says from a pulpit may seem harsh and may be hard, and that is okay as long as he is leading from grace. Why? Because the ministers job is to remind all men that the greatest thing that could ever happen to those who have believe on the Lord Jesus has already happened to us - we have been saved, and are being saved.

- The best you can do is surrender your life to live up to the high demands that His call places on you. In other words - to do your absolute best and not rest until you have done your best.
- A leader who is not encouraging your best is not leading with grace. Make sure that your leader is pursuing the best and encouraging you to pursue the best.

Oh that God would allow me to lead Oxford gracefully. That God would use us to display before our community and the world that the grace of God has reached us!

Have you ever seen a really good ballroom dancer? How do you tell the difference between a really good one and a not so good one? The way they move, they make it look so easy, it looks natural. The really good ones are graceful, the others, not so graceful. May it be that Oxford has leaders who are leading gracefully. Leading out of an overflow of grace, not keen on credit, striving to be above reproach, satisfied with where they are, and always encouraging and expecting the best from the Saints called Oxford Baptist Church. And may these leaders be met with a people ready to be led towards seeking Christ first. May it be true of me, and may it be true of you.