

"IT IS BLESSED TO RECEIVE, TOO"

1 Corinthians 1: 5-9; Acts 20:22-38

My granddad was one of those larger than life characters to me. He believed that young boys needed every opportunity to grow up being boys and having whatever was necessary to grow up being men! He had an office in Atlanta and loved for me to visit, be introduced to his staff as "Scrub," and collect a quarter from everybody. He bought me my first car when I was a Junior in High School, and a large picture still hangs in my Dad's office to remind us all of Granddad's cheerful and generous spirit!

He had expressions we loved to repeat to each other, such as, "The Henderson's always go first class!" It didn't seem to matter to him that none of his kids had the resources to fulfill that boast! Somehow he gave us all the spirit that we could do anything we wanted if we wanted it badly enough and would work hard enough for it! He was larger than life to me, and sometimes it is good for me to remember him and renew my sense of who he said I could be, at least in his eyes.

I think of the Apostle Paul in this way in my spiritual life as well. He took being a Christian very seriously, and you remember he is the one who proclaimed, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me!" He was a formidable force for the gospel of Jesus Christ. He was profoundly changed and began the spreading of the gospel to Asia and became the first Missionary!

He wrote the Christian Manifesto, the book of Romans, and his pastoral letters to young churches became ...% of our Christian Scriptures. He got the job done, as we say, but he experienced hardships and suffering doing so. As he

did, he experienced the greatest Christian BLESSINGS ever!

When I read about him, I ask myself, what amount of Christian blessings do I want to receive? Chuck Swindoll told the story of a father and son who going out the door of church spoke with great compliments to the pastor. The father said, "Great sermon today, preacher!" to which the boy remarked, "Wow, that was really something for just \$1.00!" Swindoll's reflection was that most people today really only want about \$1's worth of God. That's why that's about all they contribute to the cause!

Paul thought being a Christian was serious business and gave it all he had! He was ready to follow Christ anywhere. His driving commitment was to tell everyone, everywhere about the love of God. He treasured the flock of God, and He believed a Christian must always help the weak. Now you could make a rule of life out of that!

But don't we all start out pretty close to that? What happens to us and our commitment along the way? The years, the culture, the ups and downs all change us, don't they! I want to tell you a secret. The key to staying fresh and on top of all this sense of receiving the best blessings of life is..... ***Christian giving***. If I had said anything using the word money, we could start a quick exodus. But I am talking about something bigger than that, called a life of sharing. Paul said that Jesus had said it, *"that is always more rewarding to give than to receive!"* He should know, he broke through the boundaries of death!

Looking closely, you may see that Jesus spoke of 2 **blessings, giving and receiving**. Though He said that one is the better one, still there are 2. It is still a blessing to receive, too. We are meant to be blessed, that is the life of the follower of Jesus. Let's take a look.

1. ***It is blessed to receive GRACE; it is a GIFT,*** freely given. As Christians we know we are dearly loved, cherished, treasured by God. We learned to trust that from Jesus. We are never ignored or forgotten, never. Christ identified this as the key that unlocks every person's heart and unlocks the heart of God.

This grace is the key to self esteem. It is the key to all the skills of living. All our relationships, our bodily health, psychological health, our emotions, our family life, our abilities, all depend on GRACE, and God gives to all of us generously without holding back. It is *"in Christ"* we have life and *"have it more abundantly!"*

We have all received grace, a huge gift, and receive it daily, continually. We aren't speaking of principles or values, but a personal God who simply, truly loves us with all of His heart. And here is the key, we all receive GRACE before anything is expected, demanded, or required. It is free! It is BLESSED to receive it!

2. **We all received the SPIRIT OF GOD, and we became GOD'S CHURCH.** The church is a fellowship of the Spirit. At church we hear God speak. God speaks about the power to change, about justice and fairness, about things that make life work out for us. God speaks about promises, His and ours. He keeps His promises and reminds us about ours and how a person is only as good as their word. This is the fellowship of the Spirit of God, and this fellowship heals. We are His body.

Sometimes we don't listen. Sometimes we do all the talking until we forget how to listen or even what God has said. Churches may get sick because we do not listen. But we have received the same Spirit who never forsakes us, and will always guide us in the way of life when we ask and really listen.

With the Spirit of God we build a House of Prayer for all people. It is a place of Promises, of Baptisms, and of Burials. Nowhere else can you do that and be sure of the Spirit of God, because He is given into the hearts of believers. Nobody else teaches the eternal way but by the Spirit of God. It is blessed to receive the Spirit.

3. Furthermore, **by receiving we are helped to become Givers**, the new creation in the name of the one who give the ultimate gift, Jesus our Lord. Now it becomes a sensitive subject. By now, ours, like every pulpit committee, has been told not to get a preacher who talks about money. But Jesus talked about it with serious conviction; it was his subject, 4x more than the far second subject, sin.

Why do you imagine he did that? I believe it tells us that Jesus felt that our use of our money and possessions was a true indicator of how much of God we thought was enough for us, or how much we loved God, and how much we were willing to risk on God being true. He was trying to reach us for the greatest blessings, as he said, *"Your Heavenly Father is not willing for one sparrow to fall..."*

We can certainly say this: how we deal with the blessing of giving is an indicator of whether we agree that we have been blessed by receiving. A father was telling his son that he was a self-made man. His son turned and asked, *"Dad, are you bragging or complaining?"* Someone close-by said, *"Neither. He is lying!"* Some say there are 2 kinds of Christians, givers and getters. Everyone knows that it is more blessed to give than to receive. The person who doesn't give, doesn't really live. The Christian mission is one of the most extensive projects ever undertaken for the relief of human need. Yet it would never have happened if we hadn't learned to give!

Jeff Foxworthy is a friend of mine, from Georgia, you know. He might say it like this: "There are **God-made** churches and **Self-made** churches!"

And you might be a **Self-made church** if.....

1. If you worry more about what's in the plate than what's in your heart...
2. If you argue about spending money but never discuss the Will of God for your church.....
3. If you love to discuss the budget but have never held a conference about a future vision...
4. If you think giving is about paying the church vs. showing your thanks to God....
5. And finally, you might be a self-made church.....
If you don't like sermons specifically about money, but you don't mind a sermon about "doing what's right"...

Jeff Foxworthy has taught us a lot about being a redneck and could teach us a thing or two about looking silly at church. How much of God do we want, anyway? Paul made it simple...give it your best if you want to receive God's best! **Giving is at the heart of our Christian faith.** If we want to learn to receive God's best, we will want to give, not till it hurts, but until it feels good.

You may know that we as a church have fallen behind in our giving, only slightly, but behind. When we don't attend church we don't give. Yet our ministries do not take a vacation.

Right now, Tryon First Baptist has been given 3 or 4 unprecedented opportunities to minister to needs. The Rock House across the street waits to be renovated for our teens' Sunday School classes. 2. Our Deacons have just approved

the calling of a summer youth intern for our youth program. 3. Our youth are committed to a summer mission to teach and reach youth in Charleston, SC. 4. There are 2 vacancies in our church staff leadership, one is for Christian Education. 5. 3 young families have recently mentioned that they are eager to see a greater effort at teaching and growing up our children in faith and in their church.

We have all received GRACE, and the SPIRIT of GOD, and are ready to take God at His word and respond, that these opportunities given to us will be easily and joyfully taken on, underwritten, and the joy of giving be ours as well.

There are 2 blessings for Christians. One is **receiving**; the other is **giving**. After receiving, the best one may come: it is learning to give generously! Can you imagine anything being better than receiving Christ Jesus as Savior and Lord of your life!? We must not be lulled into settling for only one kind of blessing, and it being the least! We must not be fooled into the world's standard: that the *more you hold, the more you are worth*. Everything may start with receiving, but that is the training ground only. Those who have taken Jesus as Savior have found the great joy in life. Those who learn to follow Him in giving have, as he said, the greatest blessing of all.

I challenge each one of you to experience this call of the Apostle, and this word of Jesus about giving and sharing your life. I challenge you to give something away this week, secretly, that you might experience the greater blessing that Jesus speaks of. Paul said, "*Take care of the weak,*" because there are 2 blessings, giving and receiving. The greatest blessing awaits those who seek the greatest joy, the deepest satisfaction in life, who will express the greatest trust in Christ and strive to be like Him. It will

belong to those who want to please God the most.

It is the blessing of giving. END