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THE GRACE OF GIVING

MONEY AND THE GOSPEL

————— INCLUDES —————

THE GIFT OF ACCOUNTABILITY

JOHN STOTT & CHRIS WRIGHT

FOREWORD BY FEMI B ADELEYE

Foreword

This is an unusual little volume. Two writers look at the same passages from the Apostle Paul, and draw out complementary principles on handling money. John Stott focuses on Paul's teaching on giving, Chris Wright on accountability. I can testify to the personal integrity of both authors; and to their deep desire not only to live by these principles, but to share them in a relevant way with God's people around the world.

We need to see our giving as a response to God's own generosity. There is a pastoral feel to John Stott's writing—sometimes, as he says, it may be right to reduce our giving. We should always give thoughtfully, and keep our giving under review.

Churches tend to associate Paul's teaching here only with a call to give. I hope this short book will help to change that, for these scriptures teach much more. The six principles of accountability that Chris Wright highlights are non-negotiable. A safety-net of accountability is

critical for those in positions of responsibility, to whom money has been entrusted.

Many will be surprised by Chris's assertion that, on the plain level of number of verses, the Apostle Paul 'gives more text space to writing about issues relating to financial affairs of churches than he does to writing about justification by faith.' The spiritual nature of this subject is clear, and the Apostle's theology of money, as God-centred and mission-centred, deserves keen attention.

We shall all be shaped by either the values society imposes on us, or by the biblical principles clearly articulated here. So we need to consider Paul's teaching closely. I commend the words of John Stott and Chris Wright as they challenge us to be more deliberate in engaging with this subject, as part of a God-focused, Christ-centred and spirit-led life.

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Introduction

When we become Christians, our giving has a new impetus. We are called to give generously, and with joy, as a fruit of the Spirit's life within us. The following pages take us through the Apostle Paul's teaching on Christian giving, and draw out principles which we can apply to our own situation. I trust you will find it a helpful and provocative study, as I have found it to be myself.

In 2 Corinthians 8 & 9, Paul is explaining arrangements for an offering from the Greek churches of Achaia and Macedonia for the impoverished churches of Judea. We also read about it in Romans 15 and 1 Corinthians 16. Paul did not see giving as a mundane matter, nor as something on the periphery of church life. On the contrary, he saw the grace of giving as a core part of what it means for us to be members of Christ's Church.

He shows how our regular giving is rooted in three central themes in the gospel: the grace of God, the cross of Christ, and the unity of the Spirit. It is very moving to grasp this combination

of profound Trinitarian theology and practical common sense, as we shall see.

Here are Paul's ten principles. We start at the beginning of 2 Corinthians 8.

1

Christian giving is an expression of the grace of God (2 Corinthians 8:1–6)

And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches.² Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity.³ For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own,⁴ they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints.⁵ And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will.⁶ So we urged Titus, since he had earlier made a beginning, to bring also to completion this act of grace on your part.

Paul does not begin by referring to the generosity of the churches of Macedonia in northern Greece. He starts instead with 'the grace which God has given to the Macedonian churches' (v1). Grace is another word for generosity. In other

words, behind the generosity of Macedonia, Paul saw the generosity of God. Our gracious God is a generous God, and he is at work in his people to make them generous too.

Three tributaries come together in the river of Macedonian generosity, namely their severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty (v2). In consequence, the Macedonians gave even beyond their ability (v3), and they pleaded for the privilege of doing so (v4). How easily our comfortable western culture can deaden our sensitivity to others' needs. The Macedonians had no such comfort, and no such lure of personal satisfaction. Their values were entirely different. They gave themselves first to the Lord, and then to Paul and his fellow workers (v5). What a model for the Corinthians, and for us.

We read next how Paul had urged Titus to complete what he had begun in Corinth, the capital of Achaia, some time before (v6). What had Titus begun? He had been exhorting the Corinthians to give in the same way as the Macedonians.

This then is where Paul begins—with the grace of God in the Macedonian churches of northern Greece and with the same grace of God in the Achaian churches of southern Greece. Their Christian generosity is an outflow of the generosity of God.