WEEK 04 · CHURCH'S RESPONSE TO MERCY

Grasping the true value of Christ's mercy and lordship should lead the church body to respond with prompt generosity to help the needy, as exemplified in the early church.

Preface

Last week, we were encouraged to imitate Jesus in preaching the good news to the lost and least by approaching it holistically, always accompanied by acts of justice and mercy. At its heart, the purpose is to restore the kingdom's order and bring its blessedness, reflecting the command to love God and others in all areas of life and in both words and deeds.

This week, we will explore the early church's response to the good news of Jesus Christ with lavish generosity. They sold their property and possessions to give to anyone who had need (Acts 2:45). The worth of knowing Christ, the urgency of His return, and His command to share one another's burdens transformed their view of wealth. This led to a countercultural communal lifestyle where they joyfully shared their wealth instead of accumulating it.

Warm-up question: If you had to give away one of your favorite things to someone in your small group, what would it be and why?

Study

In his book, Tim Keller argues that a major effect of **receiving the gospel of grace** is a response of **spontaneous generosity**. As he examines the life of the early church and both modern and historical proponents of simple living, he calls all Christians to **give sacrificially** until their lifestyle is lowered. At the same time, he cautions that their giving **must be evaluated** in alignment with their **calling and ministry opportunities**, and they must steward their possessions wisely so as **not to become a burden** or liability to others.

Read 2 Corinthians 8:1-15 to answer the following questions.

In 2 Corinthians 8-9, Paul highlights the broad significance of "grace" (Greek: *charis*) by repeating the word ten times, linking it to God's empowerment, the honor of giving, and communal support within the Christian faith. In 2 Corinthians 8, Paul expresses pride in the generosity of the Macedonian churches and encourages the Corinthians to follow their example, emphasizing that their giving reflects God's grace.

1. What did Paul applaud the Macedonian church for regarding their giving? (2 Cor 8:2-5)

> Key ideas: (1) Their overflowing joy and rich generosity amid a very severe trial and extreme poverty. (2) They gave beyond their ability, on their own initiative, and considered it a privilege to share in this service to the Lord's people. (3) They gave as part of their larger personal dedication to the Lord.

2. Paul encouraged the Corinthian church to also excel in the grace of giving (2 Cor 8:7). Based on 2 Corinthians 8:8-9, what was Paul's basis for urging them to give?

3. What is the standard by which someone should give? (2 Cor 8:10-12)

4. What is the goal of practicing acts of generosity and communal giving? (2 Cor 8:13-15)

Notes: The word "**equality**" originates from the Greek word "***isotēs***", which means likeness (in condition or proportion). In modern terms, this implies **equity**, recognizing that everyone may not start from the same point and may face differing challenges. An ***isotēs*** outcome means **fairness in results is expected**, which is better captured by the modern term **equity**.

Read Acts 2:42-47 and Acts 4:32-36 to answer the following questions.

5. Based on Acts 2:42-47, what does the gathering of the fellowship of believers look like?

6. Based on Acts 4:32-36, how did the believers demonstrate their unity in heart and mind? What were the outcomes of their actions and generosity?

7. Why is a countercultural and radical lifestyle of sharing possessions and burdens within a Christian community important for preaching the gospel? *[open discussion]*

Application

1. Do you think we are still expected to extend generosity as described in Scripture? Why or why not? Do you think it is still possible today?

2. Have you ever experienced having your needs met or meeting others' needs in a specific way? How was that experience, and how has it encouraged your faith in God?

3. What has been hindering you from practicing generosity toward others in need? What practical actions can you take this week to meet others' needs in a new way?

4. What are some non-profit organizations that you regularly support financially, and why? If you do not have any, what are some social causes that you would consider supporting?

Optional Follow-up Exercise: Meeting the Needs of Others

The early church exemplified how believers bear one another's burdens, especially toward the poor and needy within its own body. While this command implies that those within the community should be prioritized, it should also extend to outsiders. This is certainly not a new command; it is even a covenantal blessing since Moses first received the Law in the Old Testament. In his book, Tim Keller argues that if the Israelites had obeyed all of God's social legislation for helping the poor, there would be no permanent poverty.

This week, we will practice sharing one another's needs in our community and practicing generosity toward other social causes you identify in your environment.

- **For your own community:** Create a "need" board where each member can write their tangible needs. Have one another fulfill the needs that are placed on the board.
- **For a social cause:** Find a social cause and non-profit organization(s) that work toward that cause, which your group can consider supporting. Look into their vision and mission, and if possible, conduct some form of due diligence to understand how responsibly they manage their resources. As Christians, we should be wise in handling our resources. Have all members vote for one cause, gather funds, and donate to that organization.