
Duty & Delight in the Church¹

2 Corinthians 8:1-8; 9:6-15

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Introduction

I was asked by the Elders to come to you this evening with the next message in our series on some of the church's contemporary issues and challenges. Pastor Chad came to us two weeks ago to help us think about why doctrine in the church is crucial. He demonstrated through 1John 1 that doctrine that keeps the church together and keeps the enemies out is none other than Jesus Christ. All sound doctrine eventually traces the contours of the glory and grace of our Sovereign Savior Jesus Christ. To know doctrine is to know Christ.

Last week Pastor Dale made clear why and how discipline in the church is crucial and is carried out. He highlighted this topic because we all are prone to wander. And God in his "search and rescue mission" leaves the 99 and comes looking for the one who drifted out into danger. Through church discipline redemptive, not punitive goals are achieved. We are loved by God as we are loved by his people who care enough to be a part of reconciliation.

Great messages by both men!

The message tonight is titled *Duty & Delight in the Church*. Its purpose is to make clear how attitudes and actions are tied together. The Christian duty to love cannot be void of the Christian delight that motivates Christian duty.

Not only do I desire to make plain this truth, I yearn to motivate each of us to this duty; the grace-producing, joy-generating, misery-alleviating, God-glorifying duty we see in our text tonight.

Let's begin tonight by thinking together over a natural phenomenon.

It's just natural.

It is my observation that *when misery increases ministry decreases*. It's just natural. During periods of tension in our family we tend to pull back from other relationships until home is in harmony. When we are sick we focus on getting well. When our job is threatened generosity is calculated. When conflict needs resolution we play it safe with others lest additional conflict start. When interactions go sour at work interactions go

¹ A great illustration of tonight's topic is given at the end of this manuscript. Dr. Carnell made me laugh (and cry).

silent at home (and church). I think our general movement when hardships come is inward until the storms of trouble blow by. You know, **it's just natural**.

The flip side seems to be generally true too. *When suffering goes down serving goes up*. When the stock market is up generosity is up. When the meal is tasty and the MRI is clear, we like to serve. When primary relationships are warm and engaged we give of our time. You know, **it's just natural**.

Now someone might say at this point, "What's wrong with this? You seem to be building up to introduce a problem. What you've talked about is simply a normal thing. It's just natural. Where are you going with this observation?"

The point is this: If the trend I just described is even marginally accurate can you see the most basic problem we face in relation to duty in the Church? Are we able to detect what fundamentally hinders the duty to love? The arch enemy of duty is not outside us. It is not hardships and sickness and income loss. It is not busy lives and pressing responsibilities. It is this: **Thinking that Christian duty is just natural**. God is watching. People are wanting. And I take inventory of my resources to see whether or not I can help. If I can I will. If I can't I won't.

The book of the Bible from which we get tonight's text starts in an amazing way. 2Corinthians 1:3-11 tell us that suffering is meant by and used by God to wean us off of self-reliance and to fix us upon God who raises the dead. (quote v.9). That all of the Christian life starts by and is sustained by and is stopped by God is clearly demonstrated throughout the Bible (cf. Rom.11:36; Acts 17:25). What is this message mostly about tonight? Why do we need both Duty and Delight to carry out genuine love? Why is it imperative to remember that Christianity is supernatural or it is nothing at all?

To help answer these questions we will think together over a pattern of Duty and Delight in the church and then we will end with 5 principles of Duty and Delight.

The Duty and Delight in the Church

A Pattern of

8:1-7

A model of genuine love is made plain in 8:1-7. This example or pattern of genuine love has in it both duty and delight. That is why we calling it tonight "The Duty and Delight in the Church". Paul has just taken a collection in Macedonia on his way to Corinth. The churches in Macedonia were unbelievably generous. He desires to use these churches and their generosity as a measure and motivator of genuine love.

God's Grace coming down

v.1

Verse one is written to make the point that all Christian duty starts with and is sustained by God's grace. Paul says, *We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia*. In much praise for these churches, right from the start Paul wants to make something quite clear. God gets due credit in all church acts of mercy and kindness. When we talk about the duty of Christian love we must start with the giving of God's grace.

The first thing we can see regarding the pattern of Duty and Delight in the Church is that **CHRISTIAN DUTY STARTS WITH GOD'S GRACE.**

The Church's Delight rising up

v.2

Following Paul's thinking we come to verse 2. Here he describes what grace causes in a church. He says, for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in the wealth of generosity. The way God's grace caused Christian duty of love through these churches was not to make life easy for them. He did not give them bonuses at their jobs. He did not make them rich with money. He did not shelter them from pain. He did not make right every wrong. He made them joyful! Here is where I get the idea of the Church's Delight. These first century believers lived in harsh times. They were persecuted. It was hard for them to make a living. And yet, they were "cheerful givers". God's grace coming down caused joy to rise up in their harassed lives.

Clearly we notice that when grace-produced delight is present not even poverty or persecution can stop the duty to love.

The second thing we can see regarding the pattern of Duty and Delight in the Church is that **CHRISTIAN DUTY IS ENABLED & EMPOWERED BY GRACE-CAUSED DELIGHT**

The Church's Duty moving out

Vv.3-8

What we've seen thus far concerning the pattern of tonight's topic is that it starts with God's grace. Christian duty is not generated by self-reliant, self-determined, stoic-like willpower. It is a gift from God. It starts with his grace.

Next we saw what this grace produces. In the context of little money and lack of safety we see joy. Grace-produced delight becomes the fuel for the Christian duty to love.

The Church's duty moving out staggers me in this text. We have impoverished and persecuted believers. They could assert their right to have Paul collect money for them. They could be clamoring for justice and state how they were being forgotten. They could have declared their "need" for the attention of apostles and other believers. But instead, we see them begging to supply the needs of their brothers and sisters in Jerusalem. This unusual response came from an extraordinary joy / delight that made something of them. This grace-produced delight made them into beggars – not for attention or money. They begged to help alleviate the misery of others.

Recap

To put this pattern together concerning The Duty and Delight in the Church we could say there are three pieces to this puzzle.

- ❖ Grace coming down
- ❖ Delight rising up
- ❖ Duty moving out

With that as our pattern to guide our thinking let's proceed into principles to guide our living.

Five Principles of Duty and Delight in the Church (9:6-15)

To see these principles, please step over to chapter 9:6-15. We start with the foundational principles.

Principle #1 (v.6)

Duty is not subtraction; it is multiplication. Listen to how Paul put it. "The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully".

The important lesson which Paul is urging upon the Corinthians at this point is that to give is to sow. What is given is not lost but like the seed sown by the farmer, contrary to all appearances, it possesses the power of life and increase. Giving is not decreasing but rather increasing ones resources. Generosity does not take away but rather multiplies the storehouse of the giver. It does not decrease but rather develops supply. **Giving IS sowing!**

Principle #2 (v.7)

Duty is to be carried out...collectively (each one)...purposefully (as he has made up his mind)...cheerfully (cheerful giver)...worshipfully (for God loves).

As we grow in grace the idea of "duty" will become more and more an act of worship. We will long to do it for God. When God sees His grace effectually changing us into cheerful, purposeful, steady, sacrificial givers He sees His Son in the midst of His church. He sees the very center of His joy; the likeness of Jesus. God Almighty loves to see and smell (cf. Eph.5:1,2) the fragrant aroma of such duty. Duty done this way is all about God. It is to rejoice the heart of God!

Principle #3 (v.8-9)

God gives the inward and outward ability to carry out duty. Grace does not nullify duty - it just makes us able to do the duty and to do it delightfully. The sense of verse 8 seems to be that if we are willing to give, God will always make it possible for us to give. If the arch enemy to generosity is self-reliance as we asserted at the beginning of this message what is the chief friend of generosity? If we are not to look to ourselves for sufficiency to whom shall we look? GOD IS ABLE should be written over all our hesitancy. Is there anything in view here that we are not enabled to do?

And notice what Paul does in verse nine. Paul quotes Psalm 112:9 as a means of actually communicating the enabling grace of verse 8. Psalm 112 teaches us not to be afraid of bad circumstances when thinking about carrying out the Christian duty of love. He is reminding us to take our gaze off of ourselves and situations and place it upon the all-sufficient, all-happy, all-gracious, all-powerful, all-generous God.

Principle #4

(v.10-11)

God supplies us with all we need for duty.

To this point we've seen that giving increases; not decreases our resources. Giving is sowing. We saw that duty must be done by all of us, done cheerfully, done purposefully and finally done worshipfully. Christian duty of love is all about God.

Next we pointed out that the capacity to carry out duty is not found in us. Self-reliance is deadly. Rather we look to God who supplies us with all we need. The money, time, and talents to serve and the heart to give it come from God.

Principle #5

(v.12-15)

What will happen if we take these principles to heart tonight? The 5th and final principle we can glean from this passage on the duty and delight in the Church is found in vv.12-15. To put it succinctly...

Duty and Delight in the Church results in meeting needs (v.12a), thanking God (v.12b) glorifying God (v.13), and increased prayer to God (vv.14-15)

[E.J. Carnell in his good work Christian Commitment describes wonderfully the topic for tonight when he said, "Suppose a husband asks his wife if he must kiss her good night. Her answer is, "You must, but not that kind of a must." What she means is this: "Unless a spontaneous affection for my person motivates you your overtures are stripped of all moral value" (E.J. Carnell, Christian Commitment (New York" Macmillan, 1967), 160-1.)]