

2 Corinthians Chapter 8

While (verses 8:1 - 9:15), specifically deal with Paul's instruction to the Corinthians about a particular collection for the saints in Jerusalem, it also provides the richest, most detailed model of Christian giving in the New Testament.

2 Corinthians 8:1 "Moreover, brethren, we do you to wit of the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia;"

Paul in this, is bringing to the attention of the church at Corinth the progress made at the Macedonian churches.

Macedonia was the northern Roman province of Greece. The generosity of the churches at Macedonia was motivated by God's grace. Paul did not merely commend those churches for a noble human work, but instead gave the credit to God for what He did through them.

Paul's reference was to the churches at Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea. This was basically an impoverished province that had been ravaged by many wars and even then, was being plundered by Roman authority and commerce.

God had shown great favor to these churches.

Paul tells one church of the good workings of another church to get them to do the same things. Many of us do better after we see an example.

2 Corinthians 8:2 "How that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality."

It seemed as if the people attending the Macedonian churches, were not as well off financially as the church here at Corinth. These churches (even though they were financially poor), had been very generous in their giving to the poor in Jerusalem. The affliction it seems, was to see just how much Christian faith they really had. We know that the church in Philippi started in Lydia's home.

"Abundance of their joy" means "surplus". Despite their difficult circumstances, the churches' joy rose above their pain because of their devotion to the Lord and the causes of His kingdom.

"Riches of their liberality": The Greek word for "liberality" can be translated "generosity", or "sincerity." It is the opposite of duplicity or being double minded. The Macedonian believers were rich in their single minded, selfless generosity to God and to others.

2 Corinthians 8:3 "For to [their] power, I bear record, yea, and beyond [their] power [they were] willing of themselves;"

The power spoken of here, is the Holy Ghost power to minister. They not only ministered in the gifts the Holy Ghost had bestowed upon them, but of their material wealth (as little as it was).

Paul highlighted 3 elements of the Macedonian's giving which summed up the concept of freewill giving:

1. "According to their ability": Giving is proportionate; God sets no fixed amount or percentage and expects His people to give based on what they have.
2. "Beyond their ability": Giving is sacrificial. God's people are to give according to what they have, yet it must be in proportions that are sacrificial.
3. "Freely willing" Literally, one who chooses his own course of action. Giving is voluntary; God's people are not to give out of compulsion, manipulation, or intimidation. Freewill giving has always been God's plan.

Freewill giving is not to be confused with tithing, which related to the national taxation system of Israel and is paralleled in the New Testament and the present by paying taxes.

2 Corinthians 8:4 "Praying us with much entreaty that we would receive the gift, and [take upon us] the fellowship of the ministering to the saints."

It seemed they had insisted on Paul allowing them to give to the saints in Jerusalem. It seemed they wanted Paul to oversee the gift, and to take it to where it was needed.

The Macedonian Christians implored Paul for the special grace of being able to have fellowship and be partners in supporting the poor saints in Jerusalem. They viewed giving as a privilege, not an obligation.

2 Corinthians 8:5 "And [this they did], not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God."

It seemed they were very poor, and Paul had not expected them to give anything, but they insisted of giving of themselves and their funds as well. They gave like the widow with the mites, unselfishly. They gave of their need and not of their abundance.

The Macedonian response was far more than Paul had expected.

"First" didn't refer to time but to priority. The priority of the Macedonians was to give their selves as sacrifices to God. Then generous giving follows personal dedication.

2 Corinthians 8:6 "Insomuch that we desired Titus, that as he had begun, so he would also finish in you the same grace also."

Paul is encouraging these people in Corinth to give with such unselfishness, as they had in Macedonia. Titus was the acting evangelist at the time in Corinth, so it would be his lot to receive from the people at Corinth.

Titus had initially encouraged the Corinthians to begin the collection at least one year earlier. When he returned to Corinth with the severe letter, Paul encouraged him to help the believers finish the collection of the money for the support of the poor saints in Jerusalem.

2 Corinthians 8:7 "Therefore, as ye abound in every [thing, in] faith, and utterance, and knowledge, and [in] all diligence, and [in] your love to us, [see] that ye abound in this grace also."

Paul is saying, you have done well in your faith, and all of the other things of God. Give just as well as you have done the other things. Giving is a gift of God, as well as knowledge and utterance.

“That you abound”: The giving of the Corinthians was too be in harmony with other Christian virtues that Paul already recognized in them?

1. Faith: sanctifying trust in the Lord;
2. Speech: sound doctrine;
3. Knowledge: the application of doctrine;
4. Diligence: eagerness and spiritual passion;
5. Love: the love of choice, inspired by their leaders.

2 Corinthians 8:8 "I speak not by commandment, but by occasion of the forwardness of others, and to prove the sincerity of your love."

Paul is not commanding the church at Corinth to do this, but is just encouraging them to do this. Sincere love is associated with giving to others who cannot help themselves. This type of love and giving asks nothing in return.

Freewill giving is never according to obligation or command.

2 Corinthians 8:9 "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich."

Really, the earth and everything and everyone in it belonged to Jesus. He was Creator. His entire creation belonged to Him. When you speak of being rich, this is the richest of all. Jesus did not use this to win people to the Lord. He did not use this to spare Himself the cross either. It was His, but He lived as if nothing belonged to Him.

Once, He caused the coin to be in the fish's mouth to pay the tax collector. His mother Mary gave the offering at the temple as someone who was poor. Possibly the gold that was brought to Him at His birth was enough to keep Him, and Mary, and Joseph in Egypt. We know that when there was a need of others, Jesus took care of that need. He was rich in good deeds toward men. He had no need for money.

“He became poor” is a reference to Christ’s incarnation. He laid aside the independent exercise of all His divine prerogatives, left His place with God, took on human form and died on a cross like a common criminal.

He did this so believers could become rich. Believers become spiritually rich through the sacrifice and impoverishment of Christ. They become rich in salvation, forgiveness, joy, peace, glory, honor and majesty. They become joint heirs with Christ.

2 Corinthians 8:10 "And herein I give [my] advice: for this is expedient for you, who have begun before, not only to do, but also to be forward a year ago."

This offering that they were to give was to be of their own free will, not of necessity. Notice, this is not a command from Paul, but a suggestion.

It was his opinion that it was to their advantage to give generously so they might receive abundantly more from God in either material blessings, spiritual blessings, or eternal reward.

2 Corinthians 8:11 "Now therefore perform the doing [of it]; that as [there was] a readiness to will, so [there may be] a performance also out of that which ye have."

This is saying, not to promise, and then not do it. What you have promised, do. They had agreed this would be good to do, now carry that promise out.

They needed to finish the collection. They needed this reminder since they likely stopped the process due to the influence of the false teachers, who probably accused Paul of being a huckster who would keep the money for himself.

2 Corinthians 8:12 "For if there be first a willing mind, [it is] accepted according to that a man hath, [and] not according to that he hath not."

God counts the gift, not so much in how much you gave, but in how much you gave in the face of your ability to give. The widow's mites were a great gift, because she gave of her need, not of her abundance. This is true here as well. God appreciates a sacrificial gift more than he does a gift out of your excess.

God is most concerned with the heart attitude of the giver, not the amount he gives. Whatever one has is the resource out of which he should give. That is why there are no set amounts or percentages for giving anywhere stated in the New Testament. The implication is that if one has much, he can give much; if he has little, he can give only little.

“According to that he hath not”: Believers do not need to go into debt to give, nor lower themselves to a poverty level. God never asks believers to impoverish themselves. The Macedonians received a special blessing of grace from God to give the way they did.

2 Corinthians 8:13 "For [I mean] not that other men be eased, and ye burdened:"

Paul is saying, he does not want them to be lacking and give to others who do not need it any more than they do themselves. Paul is saying, if ye can give, do it.

2 Corinthians 8:14 "But by an equality, [that] now at this time your abundance [may be a supply] for their want, that their abundance also may be [a supply] for your want: that there may be equality:"

Paul is saying, that this time the Corinthians are giving to help others who have greater need. The next time the situation may be turned around, and others might have to give to the necessity of the Corinthians.

The idea is that in the body of Christ some believers who have more than they need should help those who have far less than they need. This is not a scheme of Paul's to redistribute wealth within the church, but rather to meet basic needs.

2 Corinthians 8:15 "As it is written, He that [had gathered] much had nothing over; and he that [had gathered] little had no lack."

Paul is trying to teach them a principal in giving here. We can all use all that we make, but many of us could do with a great deal less, if necessity arose. In the end, it all equals out.

The manna in the desert was an appropriate illustration of sharing of resources. Some were able to gather more than others, and apparently shared it so that no one lacked what they needed.

2 Corinthians 8:16 "But thanks [be] to God, which put the same earnest care into the heart of Titus for you."

Paul is thanking God that Titus loved the Corinthians like he did. He knows that Titus will tell them as he has, what is the best thing to do.

2 Corinthians 8:17 "For indeed he accepted the exhortation; but being more forward, of his own accord he went unto you."

Paul had given the message to Titus, and Titus volunteered to take the message for Paul. It seemed that Titus was more forward with the message than even Paul would have been.

Titus had initially encouraged the Corinthians to begin the collection for Jerusalem at least one year earlier.

2 Corinthians 8:18 "And we have sent with him the brother, whose praise [is] in the gospel throughout all the churches;"

We have discussed before the importance of them going out by twos. Jesus had sent them out by twos to minister. One thing was the prayer of agreement. Some believe the other brother that was sent was Luke. It could have been any of them such as Barnabus, or Silas. We would be guessing to say. Whoever he was, he was highly thought of by the Christians.

The man was probably unnamed as he was so known, prominent and unimpeachable. Obviously, he added credibility to the taking of the collection to Jerusalem.

2 Corinthians 8:19 "And not [that] only, but who was also chosen of the churches to travel with us with this grace, which is administered by us to the glory of the same Lord, and [declaration of] your ready mind:"

We have mentioned before, that there was usually a large party who traveled with Paul. Luke was nearly always with Paul. Whoever this was that Paul sent, would rejoin Paul and the larger group after they had made this necessary trip to Corinth.

To protect Paul and Titus from false accusations regarding the mishandling of the money, the churches picked the unbiased brother as their representative to lend accountability to the enterprise.

Paul wanted careful scrutiny as protection against bringing dishonor to Christ for any misappropriation of the money. He wanted to avoid any offenses worthy of justifiable criticisms or accusations.

2 Corinthians 8:20 "Avoiding this, that no man should blame us in this abundance which is administered by us:"

Paul really did not want to handle the money, because he did not want anyone thinking that was why he was ministering. Paul had a great deal of authority, and he did not want anyone accusing him of misusing this authority.

2 Corinthians 8:21 "Providing for honest things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men."

Paul knew that the Lord knew what he was doing and there was no problem there. The people were looking for things that they might accuse Paul of. He would give them no room to accuse him in this matter.

Paul cared greatly about what people thought of his actions, especially considering how large the gift was.

2 Corinthians 8:22 "And we have sent with them our brother, whom we have oftentimes proved diligent in many things, but now much more diligent, upon the great confidence which [I have] in you."

Paul has sent a third party, someone he trusts to bring the offering. He is also, showing great trust in the people of Corinth. He knows they will come through with an offering to help their less fortunate brothers.

2 Corinthians 8:23 "Whether [any do inquire] of Titus, [he is] my partner and fellow helper concerning you: or our brethren [be inquired of, they are] the messengers of the churches, [and] the glory of Christ."

Paul is just telling them here, that they can trust Titus, and the brother Paul sent with Titus, with their offering to be sent to Jerusalem. Paul says, they need no more recommendation than the fact that I sent them, and that they too, are messengers of the churches.

The two men who went with Titus were apostles in the sense of being commissioned and sent by the churches. They were not apostles of Christ, because they were not eye witnesses of the resurrected Lord or commissioned directly by Him.

“Glory of Christ”: The greatest of all commendations is to be characterized as bringing glory to Christ. Such was the case of the two messengers.

2 Corinthians 8:24 "Wherefore shew ye to them, and before the churches, the proof of your love, and of our boasting on your behalf."

It seems that Paul had been bragging about the church at Corinth and their generosity. Paul is saying, prove to all of them that it was not boasting, but the statement of fact.

2 Corinthians Chapter 8 Questions

1. What is Paul bringing to their attention in verse 1?
2. What are the two Macedonian churches the author is familiar with?
3. What was the financial condition of the people of the Macedonian churches?
4. What was Paul bragging on them about?
5. Where was the church in Philippi started?
6. Where were these donations going to be used?
7. The power in verse 3, is what power?
8. Who had they wanted to be in charge of the gift?
9. The giving at the churches in Macedonia could be compared to who?
10. Who had Paul sent to Corinth to receive the offering?
11. Name the various things we see in verse 7, they abound in.

12. Was Paul commanding the church to give? Explain.
13. What belongs to Jesus?
14. When was one instance the Lord Jesus used His power to pay a bill?
15. How much were they to give?
16. He that gathered much had _____ left over.
17. Was Titus forced to go to Corinth?
18. Why was it important for the ministers to go by twos?
19. Why had Paul not handled this offering personally?
20. Who did Paul have great trust in?
21. What recommendation did Titus have?
22. Who had Paul been bragging about to the Macedonians?