

2 Corinthians 8

8:1 And now, brothers and sisters, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. 2 In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity.

In verse 1, Paul changes gears. He shares a situation that is occurring in the churches of Macedonia. The churches of Macedonia were in cities such as Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea. These are the churches that are in the northern part of Greece. Athens and Corinth are in the southern part of Greece called Achaia.

In verse 1, Paul gives credit to the grace of God for what has occurred in Macedonia. Paul is giving God the glory for both the opportunity and the willingness to give a gift. The NLT says, “*what God in his kindness has done through the churches in Macedonia.*”

In verse 2, Paul tells us that the conditions in the Macedonian churches are less than optimum for giving. He says that they are in the midst of a severe trial and they are in extreme poverty. Even under these conditions they can give assistance to others with overflowing joy and rich generosity.

In verse 7 of chapter 9, Paul defines what sacrificial giving is. “*Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.*” The giving should be a response to what is in your heart and not what is in your mind.

When giving is from the heart, then it is between you and God to work out. Both you and God know what your finances are like and what is truly in your heart.

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 Lord’s people. 5 And they exceeded our expectations: They gave themselves first of all to the Lord, and then by the will of God also to us.

Paul has lived in the midst of these Christians and understood their financial situations. Their giving fit into sacrificial giving because:

- a. They gave as much as they could.
- b. They gave even beyond their ability.
- c. They gave entirely on their own.

Before we go any further, we need to understand to whom the Macedonian Christians were sending money. Back in 1 Corinthians 16:1-4, we read that Paul had asked the church at Corinth

to set aside money for the extremely poor believers in Jerusalem. He had asked the Galatian church to do the same.

Not only did they want to give to the poor Christians in Jerusalem but Paul says they urgently pleaded for the opportunity to give.

How well did these believers do, they exceeded Paul's expectations. They gave themselves to God first and then they followed God's lead and gave to the mission that Paul had set forth for them.

"In giving, the real issue isn't giving money. It is giving ourselves to the Lord. If we really give ourselves to the Lord, then the right kind of material giving will naturally follow." (Guzik)

This kind of giving can be a greater blessing to the giver than the one that receives it. Proverbs 19:17 says "*Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the Lord, and he will reward them for what they have done.*" I am not saying give so you will get a blessing from God. Give because that is what God wants you to do whether or not you receive a blessing.

6 So we urged Titus, just as he had earlier made a beginning, to bring also to completion this act of grace on your part. 7 But since you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in the love we have kindled in you—see that you also excel in this grace of giving.

In the previous chapter, we read that Titus had arrived with good news from Corinth. Evidently part of the news from Corinth was that Titus had encouraged the Corinthian Christians to give to the poor in Jerusalem.

According to verse 6, Paul and his missionary team were sending Titus back to Corinth so that he can complete his mission to encourage the Corinthians to give more to the poor.

Considering that Paul doesn't pull any punches in his letters to the churches, verse 7 must be the truth for the church in Corinth. His encouraging description of the Corinthian church sounds significantly different than what we had studied in his first letter. By saying that they excel or abound in the attributes of Christians almost sounds like he is pouring it on pretty heavy. According to verse 7, the Corinthians excel or abound in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in love. He wants them to also excel in giving.

8 I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others. 9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.

Paul says that he will not command them to give. Earlier we talked about sacrificial giving and said that it comes from the heart. If your giving comes from the heart then you don't need to be commanded to give.

How do we determine how serious someone is about what they are doing? We compare their actions to the action of others. In verse 8, Paul says that he will see how serious they are about their giving by comparing it to other churches but not in a competitive way.

Owens Corning would encourage their employees to give to the United Way through raffles. One year, one of my co-workers won a brand new Ford Mustang. It would have been interesting to see how much would have been given without the incentives. Then we could have seen the seriousness of the OC employees at giving to the United Way.

In verse 9, Paul brings Jesus into the giving equation. Jesus left the riches of Heaven to come to Earth as servant leader. During His ministry, He would have been considered poor.

“Why would Jesus need to become poor for your sakes? How does His poverty benefit us?

- Because it shows us the giving heart of God.
- Because it shows us the relative importance of material things.
- Because it makes Jesus open and accessible to all.
- Because it rebukes the pride that might refuse to come to a poor Savior.
- Because it gave others the privilege of giving to Jesus.
- Because it fulfilled the heart and will and plan of God, making our salvation possible.”

(Guzik)

10 And here is my judgment about what is best for you in this matter. Last year you were the first not only to give but also to have the desire to do so. 11 Now finish the work, so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it, according to your means. 12 For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what one does not have.

In these verses, Paul gives his final thoughts on giving. When Paul was in Corinth (about 1 year ago), they were ready and eager (ESV). He says that they were the first who wanted to give to the poor in Jerusalem.

God looks for the ready and eager. Consider Isaiah. Read Isaiah 6:8. What did he say to God when needed someone to share His messages? Here am I, Send me.

The Bible is full of people who were not ready and eager. Consider Jonah or even Moses.

In verse 11, Paul says that since you were ready and eager in the beginning then you should complete your works. Keep up the momentum all the way through this mission. Let the eagerness that you had in the beginning carry through until the end.

Sometimes in the excitement that we have at the beginning of a project fades over the life of a project. Paul is saying keep up the excitement throughout the project.

He also says when you give according to what you have. He could have said give a tithe which would have fulfilled his requirement. He wanted to allow room for their hearts to influence their giving. Remember true sacrificial giving comes from the heart and not the mind.

“Again, God does not expect us to give what we do not have. True Christian giving cannot be measured by the amount. One might give a million dollars and yet not give enough; another may give one dollar and give with tremendous sacrifice and generosity. True giving is measured by obedience, proportion, and need, not by amount.” (Guzik)

13 Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality. 14 At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. The goal is equality, 15 as it is written: “The one who gathered much did not have too much, and the one who gathered little did not have too little.”

In verse 13, Paul tells them and us that he didn't expect them to give to the point that they were in worse financial shape than the poor in Jerusalem. The purpose of giving is more of a balancing of money. The early Christians shared all they had. Acts 4:32 says, “*All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had.*” This was not the equality in giving that Paul had in mind. He wanted them to give because they could.

In verse 14, Paul says that this type of balancing of possessions could lead to the Corinthians receiving assistance from those that you have given to when you go through bad time. He was aware that financial situations change. Consider that Joseph's brothers (Jacob's sons) went to Egypt because of a great famine.

In verse 15, Paul quoted Exodus 16:18 which was written about the Hebrew nation's exodus from Egypt. Since no one had anything to eat, God sent manna from Heaven. You can bet there were people that collected more than they needed, it is the human way. The thing about manna was that it had a short expiration date. If you collected too much, it spoiled.

We don't like to think of our savings and possessions as manna but the same thing can happen. One saying about earthly riches is “You can't take it with you.” So Paul is saying, “if you can't take it with you then give a reasonable portion of it to those in need.”

6 Thanks be to God, who put into the heart of Titus the same concern I have for you. 17 For Titus not only welcomed our appeal, but he is coming to you with much enthusiasm and on his own initiative.

In the previous chapter, Paul was pleased to find out that Titus and the Corinthian Christians had developed a good relationship. In verse 6 of this chapter, Paul said that they were sending Titus back to Corinth to continue his work in receiving an offering to take to Jerusalem. In these verses, he is saying that because of this relationship, Paul is sending Titus to pick up the offering for the poor in Jerusalem. They know him then they will trust him.

Paul also wanted the Corinthian church to know that Titus was eager to come back to Corinth.

18 And we are sending along with him the brother who is praised by all the churches for his service to the gospel. 19 What is more, he was chosen by the churches to accompany us as we carry the offering, which we administer in order to honor the Lord himself and to show our eagerness to help. 20 We want to avoid any criticism of the way we administer this liberal gift. 21 For we are taking pains to do what is right, not only in the eyes of the Lord but also in the eyes of man.

In the verse 18, Paul tells them that Titus would not be alone. Another man would be accompanying Titus. Paul doesn't give his name. Instead Paul says that this man is praised for his knowledge of the Gospel. Many of Paul's traveling companions come to mind, such as Silas, Timothy, Luke, Barnabas, or even Apollos.

We can only speculate because Paul didn't give his name. Whoever this man is, verse 19 tells us that he was chosen by the other churches to join in the mission of collecting the money for the poor in Jerusalem. This rules out my list.

This man must also be trustworthy because he was chosen by the other churches. Paul believes that he helps make others trust that the money will get to Jerusalem and be distributed in a fair manner so that no one can discredit their mission.

Paul wants to make sure that their mission for the poor in Jerusalem cannot be questioned by God or man. God knows what is in the hearts of man, so they can trust that God will approve. Saying that they are pleasing God is one thing but pleasing man can be more difficult. God is unchanging but men can be fickle.

“Also in the sight of men is a reminder that all things financial in the church should be conducted above board and properly. Paul took whatever steps were necessary so no one could blame him

with financial impropriety. Paul could write like a poet and think like a theologian; but he could also act with the meticulous accuracy and integrity of the best accountant.” (Guzik)

22 In addition, we are sending with them our brother who has often proved to us in many ways that he is zealous, and now even more so because of his great confidence in you. 23 As for Titus, he is my partner and co-worker among you; as for our brothers, they are representatives of the churches and an honor to Christ. 24 Therefore show these men the proof of your love and the reason for our pride in you, so that the churches can see it.

In verse 22, we learn that Paul is sending another man with Titus. He says that this man has been tested and found to be diligent (NASB) or zealous (NIV).

He says that Titus is his representative or co-worker and the other two unnamed men are representatives of the churches. In the final verse of this chapter Paul reminds the Corinthian Christians to treat them with the love that he has been boasting about. He is saying, “Treat them like they were me.”