

XI. Christian Economics

February 17/18/19, 2015

2 Corinthians 8:1-24

Aim: To express our Christian faith through joyous, generous, sacrificial giving of ourselves and our resources by the grace of God.

Chapters 8-9 relate to what Paul elsewhere calls ‘the collection for God’s people’ (1 Cor. 16:1), or, more elaborately, a ‘contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem’ (Rom. 15:26). This ‘contribution,’ finalized c. 57 AD, had its beginnings a decade earlier in Jerusalem when Paul and Barnabas made a missionary compact with the Jerusalem church ‘pillars,’ James, Peter, and John. It was then agreed that James, Peter, and John would evangelize Jews while Paul and Barnabas would go to the Gentiles. The one condition attaching to this missionary agreement was that Paul and Barnabas should ‘remember the poor,’ that is, make provision from the Gentile churches for the poor among the Christians in Jerusalem (Gal. 2:9-10).

Implicit in the collection was Paul’s desire to create a sense of unity and brotherhood between the two branches of Christianity, Jewish and Gentile, between whom there had been a measure of tension. Hence it was appropriate that, near the end of his Aegean ministry, Paul should arrange for this collection (1 Cor. 16:5-6; Acts 19:21; 24:17). In bringing this gift from the churches of Galatia, Asia, Macedonia, and Achaia to the church in Jerusalem, Paul fulfilled the undertaking made to James, Peter, and John ten years earlier. It was a fitting end to this chapter in Paul’s missionary career.

A year before the writing of 2 Corinthians, the Corinthian Christians had begun to put money aside, though it seemed they had now become slack and irregular (8:10-11). So that the matter can be finalized by the time of his own coming to Corinth, Paul is dispatching Titus along with two unnamed colleagues (8:16-22). Chapters 8-9, therefore, form a self-contained unit within the letter in which he seeks to encourage the readers to complete the collection arrangements. Was Paul successful? In his letter to the Romans, written some months later, he notes that ‘Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. They were pleased to do it...’ (Rom. 15:26-27). We conclude, therefore, that the Corinthians did eventually fulfill their undertakings.

A. Encouragement in Giving (2 Corinthians 8:1-15)

At Paul’s encouragement, the Corinthians had begun a collection of an offering for the poor in Jerusalem (1 Cor. 16:1-4). But that had been thwarted by the Corinthians’ falling out with Paul. However, now, with the return of Titus and his good news of the Corinthians’ repentance, Paul reasserts the call to give, to contribute generously to the poverty-stricken church in Jerusalem.

We can see from 1 Corinthians 16:1-2 that the Corinthians had asked for advice about the collection for the Jerusalem church, so he had obviously already asked them to contribute to it. We cannot read the next two chapters of this Second Epistle without realizing something had gone wrong and that Paul felt concerned. It seems most likely that his critics at Corinth had expressed disapproval of his financial plans. Perhaps some of them even misrepresented his motives. We should not, however, exaggerate or misunderstand the situation, for, as these chapters show, Paul assumes that the will to give was still there and simply needed to be stimulated by his letter. Obviously there was still much compassionate goodwill in the Corinthian church.

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Paul's purpose is theological. First, for the Corinthians, their renewed giving was an evidence of their real faith and a means by which they would grow in grace. Second, for the church, it was a demonstration of fellowship that would express the unity between Christian Jews and Gentiles. It is also important that we understand that this section of Scripture is not about tithing or even regular giving to the local church. It is about a one-time special gift to another church. It is about God's grace as it relates to giving. It is about the motivation behind giving. And it is intentionally motivational regarding giving.

1. Example of the Macedonians (8:1-5)

In writing to one church, the Corinthians, Paul rather pointedly refers to the actions of other Christians, the Macedonians. They were so poor (v. 2) that Paul did not expect them to share in the collection arrangements. Paul's main message to the Corinthians is painfully clear. The Corinthians, who were (relatively speaking) rich, had agreed to contribute, but they had now ceased. The Macedonians, who were extremely poor, actually asked to contribute, and had begun to do so. Paul is attempting to shame the Corinthians into proper action.

a) *Gracious Giving (8:1)*

¹*We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia...*

The Roman province of Macedonia, the ancient kingdom of Alexander the Great, was located in the northern part of modern Greece. The three churches of Macedonia Paul had in mind were Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea. Macedonia was an abysmally poor region, ravaged by wars and plundered by the Romans. But despite its deep poverty, the Macedonian believers were amazingly generous. Their giving was not motivated primarily by philanthropy or human kindness, but by the 'grace of God' at work in their hearts. One of the effects of saving, transforming, sanctifying grace is a longing to give generously and sacrificially to those in need, especially other believers.

The 'grace of God' Paul was referring to was, as the context makes so clear, *the grace of giving* (the gracious inclination to give) that had fallen upon the Macedonian churches. The riches of God's grace had been poured out on them, and then they in turn poured out what they had on others.

The grace of giving is what this section is all about. The word *charis* ('grace') appears eight times in chapters 8-9. Paul's teaching on giving is a sermon on grace from beginning to end.

The word 'grace' occurs no less than ten times in chapters 8-9. It is variously rendered in the NIV, simply as 'grace' in 8:1, 9; 9:8, 14; as 'act of grace' in 8:6; as 'grace of giving' in 8:7; as 'offering' in 8:19; as 'privilege' in 8:4; and as 'thank' in 8:16 and 'thanks' in 9:15. This first reference is fundamental to our understanding of it throughout these chapters, for Paul here indicates its source is God. This he sees to be the explanation of the generosity of the Macedonian churches.

The word *charis* appears here in verse one translated as 'grace' and again in verse 4 ('privilege' or 'favor'). Just as God shows grace or unearned love towards sinful and unworthy people, so the Macedonians show grace or unconditioned kindness to the faraway Christians in Judea. Let the Corinthians imitate the Macedonians in showing grace towards others, and it will be able to be said of them that the grace of God is also at work within them.

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The *charis* or grace of God towards them and also dynamically at work in them, will create *charismata*, gifts, within them, including the gift of giving (Rom. 12:8). Certainly it will come as a great surprise to man to discover that generous giving to support others is a ‘gift.’ Have we heard of believers praying to receive this gift? (!) Yet a ‘gift’ it most assuredly is, and, like other gifts as listed in the New Testament, one that is to be used in love for the good of others.

b) *Generous Giving* (8:2)

²...for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part.

The Macedonian churches (namely, the churches of Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea) were ‘in a severe test of affliction.’ The literal idea is that they were being crushed by life. The surrounding culture kept squeezing harder and harder because of the Macedonians’ devotion to Christ. Immense pressure!

Polus (‘great’ or ‘severe’) means ‘much’ or ‘many’ and indicates the extreme nature of their ordeal. *Dokimē* (‘ordeal’) refers to a test or a trial (cp. 2:9 and the use of the related verb *dokimazō* in 1 Cor. 3:13; 1 Pe. 1:7). *Thlipsis* (‘affliction’) literally refers to pressure, as in crushing grapes. Figuratively, it describes the spiritual pressure the Macedonians endured from their poverty and persecution. But the Macedonian rose above their trying circumstances. They did not allow their situation to have a negative effect on their giving. In the midst of their trials, they put the needs of others, whom they had never met, ahead of their own. Though their poverty may have limited the amount they could give, it did not diminish their love.

The Macedonian churches excelled in expressions of gratitude to God. They underwent severe trial, but they discovered – as all Christians do – that God gives grace to us in our trials. If we did not meet with trials and difficulties, we might never learn to appreciate the joy God’s grace and help bring. The Macedonian Christians’ joy then overflowed in generous giving as the poverty of others was brought to their notice.

Perisseia (‘abundance’) means ‘a surplus’ or an ‘overflow.’ The Macedonians did not give grudgingly, reluctantly, out of a sense of duty, or under duress. Nor were they motivated by fear of divine punishment or of Paul’s displeasure. They gave gladly, freely, joyfully, knowing that ‘God loves a cheerful giver’ (2 Cor. 9:7).

They were also poor. The word Paul uses for ‘their extreme poverty’ is the word from which we derive the English word ‘bathysphere’—the ship we use to probe the depths of the ocean—a Jacques Cousteau kind of word. They were in deep poverty. They were at the bottom—dirt-poor! They were poor and picked on. The grinding poverty and the crushing tribulation made life very difficult—impossible by our standards.

To express how little the Macedonians actually had, Paul described their impoverishment in strong language. ‘Deep’ translates the phrase *kata bathos* (lit., ‘according to the depth’). The corresponding English expression would be ‘extremely deep’; or in the vernacular, ‘the pits’ or ‘rock bottom.’ *Ptōcheia* (‘poverty’) describes those with almost nothing, forced to beg or survive. Paul used it in 8:9 to describe Christ’s poverty. The Macedonians’ refusal to allow their poverty to stifle their generosity made them models of Christian giving.

Severe trial and extreme poverty hardly seem likely parents for such offspring as overflowing joy and rich generosity, but it we have not recognized paradox in the Christian life we have not begun to understand it.

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But out of their difficult situation they did what most of us would consider impossible. In a parched existence, squalid little churches gushed forth with the joy of giving. It was the *grace of giving*. There is no other accounting for it.

At the end of verse 2, Paul explicitly states what has been implied throughout the passage, piling up words to express the profound generosity of the Macedonians. ‘Overflowed’ translates *perissueō*, the verb form of the noun translated ‘abundance’ earlier in verse 2. Though it can refer to material riches, *ploutos* (‘wealth’) is more commonly used in the New Testament to speak of spiritual riches (e.g., Eph. 1:7, 18; 2:7; 3:8, 16; Phil. 4:19; Col. 1:27; 2:2; Heb. 11:26), as it is here. Though they were not rich in material possessions, the Macedonians did possess a ‘wealth of liberality.’ *Haplotēs* (‘liberality’) can also be translated ‘simplicity’ (11:3) or ‘sincerity’ (Eph. 6:5; Col. 3:22). It is the opposite of duplicity, or being double-minded. But the Macedonians were rich in single-mindedness, and gave no thought of themselves or this world.

c) *Sacrificial Giving (8:3)*

³*For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord...*

He now makes three points about the generosity of the Macedonians. First of all, it was truly sacrificial. They gave ‘beyond’ (literally, ‘contrary to’) their ability, which can only mean they were prepared to go short of what people would regard as essentials in order to give. The Macedonians had been willing to accept real sacrifice to help meet the needs of others.

Paul’s use of *martureō* (‘I testify’) reveals his firsthand experience of the Macedonians’ generosity (cp. Phil. 4:15-18). They gave in proportion to what they had, ‘according to their ability.’ *Dunamis* (‘ability’) literally means ‘power’ or ‘strength,’ and here refers to the Macedonians’ capacity or means (cp. its use in Mat. 25:15) to give.

The Macedonians gave according to what they had but in proportions that were sacrificial. Their giving was ‘beyond’ what could reasonably be expected of such a poor congregation. The Macedonians’ giving was on their own initiative; it was self-motivated and spontaneous. *Authairetos* (‘of their own accord’) refers to one who chooses his own course of action. The Macedonians were not coerced, manipulated, or intimidated, but gave freely.

It is evident from 8:10 and 9:2 that about a year had passed since Paul first told the Corinthians about the collection. When Paul told the Macedonians about the zeal of the believers in Achaia (where Corinth was located) to contribute, the Macedonians were moved to give (9:2). Events had now come full circle. The Corinthians’ zeal had initially prompted the Macedonians to give, and now Paul held them up as an example of sacrificial giving for the lagging Corinthians to imitate.

d) *Eager Giving (8:4)*

⁴*...begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints—*

In the second place, he says they took the initiative in the matter. He had not raised the issue with them, perhaps because he knew they were so poor, but they had ‘urgently pleaded’ to be allowed to participate. Here was remarkable evidence of true character transformation by God’s grace. It shows too that true Christian conversion ought to have social concern as one of its fruits.

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Paul once again stressed that he in no way pressured the Macedonians to give. Instead they asked, even begged to participate. *Deomai* ('begging') is a strong word, meaning 'to implore' or 'to plead. The phrase 'with much urging' could be translated 'most insistently' and further testifies to the intensity of the Macedonians' desire to contribute.

The sense is that Paul, seeing their extreme poverty, was reticent to take their gifts because he knew it would deepen their deprivation and plight. But they wouldn't be denied. 'Paul, we entreat you, don't deny us this honor.' Such is the grace of giving. It is not dictated by ability. It has nothing to do with being well-off. It is willing. It views giving as a privilege. It is joyously enthusiastic.

The expression, 'the privilege of sharing,' uses two of the New Testament's loveliest nouns. The NIV translates *charis* (normally rendered 'grace') as 'privilege' here. The use of this word is most significant, for it shows that Paul regarded Christian service as well as Christian salvation as a gift bestowed by God on undeserving sinners. 'Sharing' translates *koinōnia*, often rendered 'fellowship.'

e) Self-Giving (8:5)

⁵*...and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us.*

Thirdly, and finally, the Macedonians had gone even further. Apparently the sense of divine call that impelled them to give to others had been used by God to bring them to a very deep level of commitment. This was first of all to the Lord and then to Paul. This must mean that they placed themselves utterly at the Lord's disposal, and that they saw offering to help Paul in any way they could as a means of channeling their dedication to God's great purpose.

'First' (*prōtos*) has the meaning here not of first in time, but of first in priority. The Macedonians' first priority was to give themselves wholeheartedly to the Lord, and giving financially to the church followed. The supreme act of worship is not giving money, attending church, or singing hymns, but giving oneself (cp. Rom. 12:1-2). Then, having given themselves to the Lord, the Macedonians also gave themselves to Paul, Titus, and Timothy. In fact, it was their devotion to the Lord that led them to submit to the leadership of their pastors.

What is at the root of such grace-giving? Grace is first rooted in our response to God. It's all so basic: when we know that our lives are not our own, neither will we think that our possessions are our own. It's easy to surrender part when we've already given the whole. There is an implicit lesson here: it won't do any good to give our possessions to God unless we have given ourselves. In response to the gospel we are, indeed, to 'give' ourselves to the Lord Jesus and to His ministers and other believers. Committed self-giving to the Lord and to others is basic to Christianity.

We first give ourselves to Him and then to others, according to God's will. Along with the giving of ourselves goes the will to be generous. Commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ leads us to go beyond what any might expect us to do.

2. Encouragement for the Corinthians (8:6-8)

a) Complete the Giving (8:6)

⁶*Accordingly, we urged Titus that as he had started, so he should complete among you this act of grace.*

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Titus's responsibility was to complete the arrangement for the same relief offering from the Corinthians. He had evidently begun this task earlier. Now he was to see it through to completion.

Titus had 'made a beginning' of the work of collecting the Corinthians' offering about a year earlier (9:2). He had recently returned to Corinth bringing the severe letter, and Paul had urged him to help the Corinthians complete their giving. So Paul through his letters (cp. 1 Cor. 16:2) and Titus through his visits had both informed the Corinthians about what they expected them to do.

Because the Macedonians, in their poverty, had been so sacrificial, Paul has no hesitation in urging Titus to encourage the Corinthians to fulfill their promise. He may well be implying, by the way he connects their giving with that of the Macedonians, that it was much easier for them than it was for their brother Christians in that province. It seems they were much better off.

As far as Paul was concerned, the collection among the Corinthians would be just as much an 'act of grace,' that is, a product of God's grace in their lives, as it had been with the Macedonians (vs. 1). In this way he shows he believed all Christian action is ultimately the product of God's Spirit at work in our hearts.

b) Excel in Giving (8:7)

⁷But as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you—see that you excel in this act of grace also.

What are the implications for the Corinthians and for us? Earlier Paul had encouraged Titus to try to bring the Corinthians to completion/maturity in this area of giving. The Corinthians were a gifted group—many had 'faith' or 'speech' or 'knowledge' or 'earnestness' or 'love,' but they did not 'excel in this act of grace'—grace. Despite all their good qualities, they were incomplete, and Paul wanted them to grow.

The Corinthians abounded in saving, securing, sanctifying 'faith,' having a strong trust in and reliance on the Lord. *Logos* ('utterance') refers here not to speech, but to doctrine. 'Knowledge' is the ability to apply doctrine to the issues of life. 'Earnestness' (*spoudē*) means 'eagerness,' 'energy,' or 'spiritual passion.' 'Love' (*agapē*) is the noble love of self-sacrifice.

It is easy for us to be critical of the Corinthian church, for the First Epistle and the closing chapters of the Second show us some of its failings, but we must not exaggerate these or we will produce a caricature of a New Testament church which we may then use as an excuse for our own failings. Perfect they were not, but in so many ways they demonstrated the real change God's Spirit had wrought in them through the transforming gospel they had received.

When the Corinthians' faith, speech, knowledge, earnestness, and love were examined, they received to marks. However, the reality of these graces or virtues required the confirmation of practical generosity. Faith without works is dead. Faith in the Lord Jesus produces generosity.

Which brings us to the major implication: there is no way to grow to spiritual maturity without committing your finances to the Lord. Jesus can have our money and not have our hearts, but he cannot have our hearts without our money. Some may have reached sticking spots in your spiritual growth because you have not begun to give as the Scriptures and conscience are directing you. There are many 'reasons' why one doesn't give. But God's Word says to excel in this act of grace now.

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c) Love by Giving (8:8)

⁸*I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine.*

Paul exhorts the Corinthians in tones of warm encouragement. Since they excel in so many things, let them also excel in their generosity (v. 7). But there is no element of coercion or command. They have the example of the Macedonians. Let the Corinthians now give expression to their love.

Paul did not want to command the Corinthians to give. Rather, as they heard of the Macedonians' example, he wanted them to test the sincerity of their profession of love for the Lord Jesus and His people.

Paul is not here commanding but rather encouraging the Corinthians to give. He would not do so in such a matter as this, for now their own motivation was all-important, and inner motivation is not best achieved in others by wielding a big stick. To test the sincerity of love is not necessarily to cast doubt on it. After all, Christ Himself was tested in the wilderness temptations, and showed his total commitment to His Father's will. Rather, it is to give love the opportunity of showing its reality.

The voluntary, generous, sacrificial giving modeled by the Macedonians was an example not only for the Corinthians but also for all believers. It is the path to experiencing God's rich blessing in time and eternity.

3. Example of Christ (8:9-10)

a) Theology of Giving (8:9)

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 by his poverty might become rich.*

Paul places before the Corinthians another example of grace. The first example, the Macedonians, had been poor, the second, the Lord Jesus Christ, had been, like the Corinthians, rich. Paul often points his readers to Christ as the supreme Example. The reason for this is partly theological, for he was convinced of the perfection of Christ in every sphere, but it was also due, of course, to the fact that he was such a Christ-centered man, so that it was natural for his mind to turn to Christ no matter what subject was under discussion.

Jesus was and is the great example and motivation for giving. So the apostle reaches for the highest example and the ultimate motivation here. Though Christ, in His preexistence with the Father, could hold a white-hot star in the palm of His hand, He emptied Himself of His riches and became one of us and then died for us—such was His poverty. That was Heaven's stewardship program—the genesis of *the grace of giving*—and it is the pattern for us.

The apostle used the term 'grace' to refer to Christ's giving because His self-giving as motivated by unmerited, spontaneous kindness to undeserving sinners stemming from pure and uninfluenced love. That act of the Savior defines grace giving at its purest level.

Here, in this one verse, surely for all its apparent simplicity one of the most profoundly theological Paul ever wrote, he has captured both the essence of what it meant for Christ to become Man and also the great purpose of the incarnation. What does Paul mean by the poverty of Christ? There can be little real doubt that he is not here thinking simply of the conditions of

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Christ's earthly life, such as his birth in a stable, the few possessions he had, and the fact that he was stripped even of these by the Roman execution party. There was an even deeper poverty which the incarnation made possible, that stark 'poverty' which the cross itself represented, for there He had nothing, not even fellowship with the Father He loved and who loved Him. He was stripped bare not only of the few material things He had possessed, but of what was dearest to Him, the loving face of His Father.

Though as God Jesus owns everything in heaven and on earth, His riches do not consist primarily of what is material. The riches in view here are those of Christ's supernatural glory, His position as God the Son, and His eternal attributes.

The word 'rich,' then, must relate to Christ's pre-incarnate life (cp. Phil. 2:6; Jn. 17:1, 6), for it was never true of His life on earth. Here we see what has been called the principle of interchange. There is a great example of this in 5:21, where Christ takes our sin and bestows on us His righteousness. In our present verse, He takes our poverty in marvelously gracious exchange for His riches. Through Christ the Corinthians had become rich. They had great riches that could never be taken away from them, for they were the gift of God. As Jesus Himself said, they had treasure that could neither deteriorate nor be stolen (Mt. 6:19-21; cp. 1 Pe. 1:4).

This text, surely one of Paul's most powerful, teaches that Jesus' personal existence did not begin with His birth in Bethlehem in the last years of Herod the Great. The words 'He was rich' indicate an unlimited pre-existence ('He was' is actually a present participle in the Greek: 'being rich'), while the words 'He became poor' speak of His entry into the stream of history at a particular time and place (the aorist tense of the verb 'to be poor' indicates a specific, completed action). The words 'He became poor,' which relate to His human life, serve to point up the greatness of the wealth of that former existence in contrast to His incarnate life. Jesus' 'poverty' is described in Philippians 2:6-8; it was His humility in incarnation and life, and His obedience in death. Paul earlier in this letter said 'God made Him ... to be sin' (5:21). It is through the poverty of that sacrificial, reconciling death that we sinful paupers become, in Him, 'rich' in the righteousness of God.

Some have understood the statement, 'He became poor,' as a reference to Christ's financial poverty during His earthly life. But this verse is not a commentary on Jesus' economic status or the material circumstances of His life. The Lord did not make believers spiritually rich by becoming economically poor. Paul used the terms 'rich' and 'poor' in this verse in a spiritual sense (cp. 6:10). The Lord Jesus Christ became poor in His incarnation. He left heaven's glory and laid aside the free use of His divine prerogatives (cp. Phil. 2:6-11). In the incarnation of Christ, the eternal God became poor by taking on human flesh and humbling Himself even to the point of death on the cross.

The purpose of Christ's condescension was that 'through His poverty' poor sinners 'might become rich.' He did not make them materially rich but gave them all the blessings of salvation—forgiveness, joy, peace, eternal life, light, and glory. Sinners desperately need the riches of Christ because they are spiritually destitute.

We may discern a twofold application. First, we need gladly to receive the Lord Jesus Christ in our hearts, thankful for His sacrificial saving work on our behalf. Secondly, in all matters related to giving and gifts we ought to imitate His generosity. Clearly the self-giving death of Jesus is a major motive for our generosity.

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This is the ultimate motivation for giving. There is no greater! Giving is a matter of grace from beginning to end. Christ gave Himself for us. We receive His grace, and then we give ourselves to Him and to others in His name.

Some may view Paul's inclusion of this verse with its profound theological truth in the context of giving as incongruous. But that loses sight of the fact that theological truth does not exist in isolation from everyday life. When we consider this great expression of the incarnation's meaning in this practical setting, it underlines for us the fact that Christian theology and practice are intimately connected. The great truths we believe should radically affect our whole outlook as to what it is to live the daily Christian life.

b) Benefit of Giving (8:10)

¹⁰*And in this matter I give my judgment: this benefits you, who a year ago started not only to do this work but also to desire to do it.*

Paul is not cajoling the unwilling, but seeking to facilitate the giving of the willing. While we must deeply regret any inability to give what we intended or promised, the desire to give is as vital as the giving itself. Our willingness is important to God, and that makes our gifts acceptable to him, whatever they are.

It was, the apostle knew, to the Corinthians' advantage to give sacrificially and generously. When believers give generously, God will bless them generously in return.

A year earlier, the Corinthians' initial giving to help the Jerusalem church was an encouraging sign to Paul that they had been truly converted. Thus, if again they now went back to taking an offering for the Jerusalem church, it would confirm that they were for real. However, if the Corinthians refused to complete their commitment, it would demonstrate that they were not part of God's people. The implicit warning is: past performance doesn't count if there is no desire to be generous in the present.

4. Exhortation to the Corinthians (8:11-15)

a) Completed Giving (8:11)

¹¹*So now finish doing it as well, so that your readiness in desiring it may be matched by your completing it out of what you have.*

The only command in Paul's teaching on giving in the whole of chapters 8-9 is the imperative that introduces verse 11. All the Corinthians need to do is to take steps to collect the money together. We can easily fail in genuinely good intentions simply through an inability to get ourselves organized. This is why we should, if possible, put such good intentions into action straight away, lest we become so preoccupied with other things that our decision to give gets forgotten for a time. The most genuine and generous good intentions, if they remain unfulfilled, can leave others in great hardship.

All the Corinthians' good intentions would have meant little had they failed to complete the collection, so Paul urged them to 'finish doing it.' Their 'readiness to desire' to give was meaningless apart from 'the completion of' the project. The Corinthians' giving was not halted by apathy or selfishness, but by the rebellion against Paul incited by the false apostles. But since the relationship between the apostle and the Corinthians had been restored, it was time for them to complete what they had started. Though Paul expected the Corinthians to give generously, he did not expect them to give beyond their means, only 'out of what you have.'

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a) *Proportionate Giving (8:12)*

¹²*For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have.*

Paul notes their ‘readiness’ (*prothumia*; ‘willingness;’ ‘eagerness;’ ‘zeal’) approvingly, because such readiness is an indication of the Corinthians’ hearts being volitionally generous. God’s focus is on the heart. And God desires willing hearts that eagerly give ‘according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have’—in a word, proportionate giving. We are to give according to what we have, which means that both rich and poor can give great gifts to God—when they give according to what they have, from the heart.

What is important in the exercise of gifts, in this case the giving of money, is ‘willingness’ to share what one has with other people. The poor widow, whom the Lord commended for giving the two copper coins (Mk. 12:42-44), was poor in resources; but she was rich in ‘willingness’ to share from what she possessed. It is this attitude that the apostle is commending here.

Verse 12 establishes an important principle, already illustrated concretely by our Lord when He said that the poor widow’s two coins were worth more than the much larger offerings of the rich (Luke 21:1-4). The value of a gift is not to be estimated purely in financial terms, for a gift smaller in monetary value may be much larger in terms of sacrifice.

b) *Reciprocal Giving (8:13-15)*

(1) Present Experience (8:13-14)

¹³*For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened, but that as a matter of fairness* ¹⁴*your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need, that there may be fairness.*

Paul may now be anticipating an objection to the collection project. He is not looking for a reversal of financial status between the Corinthians and the Jerusalem Christians, so that the latter should become well provided for at the expense of the former (v. 13). He is concerned though for the two groups to move somewhat closer to equality. Verse 14 does however contemplate the possibility, not of the deliberate reversal of financial status but rather of a providential reversal. Perhaps one day the Corinthians would be in financial need and the Jerusalem church (presumably along with others), seeing that need, would show their own generosity in helping to meet it.

Paul was not out to make the rich poor and the poor rich. Instead, his goal was to oppose favoritism and instead to bring about some ‘equality’—not economic egalitarianism in a Marxist or socialist sense, but a balancing of resources. Paul wanted those with more than they needed to help those who had less than they needed. Though at the present time the Corinthians’ abundance was a supply for the Jerusalem saints’ need, that might not always be the case. The fortunes of life could change, and the time might come when persecution or disaster could impoverish the Corinthians.

It is doubtful Paul is referring to an exact *quid pro quo*, because the impoverished Jerusalem church would likely never be able to pay back the Corinthians. But on the other hand, through Paul the Jerusalem church had given the Corinthians the riches of the new covenant—the far greater gift.

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It is not that he was expecting the Corinthians to be sole donors (v. 13). It is, Paul affirms, to be a matter of ‘equality’ (v. 14). He does not mean exact *material* equality as in an enforced per capita method of contributing which would reduce everyone to the same economic basis; it is a *spiritual* equality that is in mind. According to the varying resources of each, there should be an equal ‘willingness’ to give so that one brother does not coast along at the expense of the too-great sacrifice of another. It is to be an *equality of willingness*.

(2) Past Example (8:15)

¹⁵As it is written, “Whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack.”

Verse 15 with its quotation of Exodus 16:18 underscores the effect of such giving as it describes how equality and reciprocity were maintained under the old covenant when the Israelites went out to gather manna. There the reciprocity was maintained by a miracle of the manna. Now, under the new covenant, it is maintained by normal, gracious giving. The miracle is what God has wrought in the hearts of His children. And that is why Paul’s message was not a Sermon on the Amount. Paul leaves the amount of the gift up to the Corinthians, because he is convinced that the quantity of their giving will match the quality of their changed hearts.

Paul illustrates his principle of *equality* or spiritual fairness by the quotation from Exodus 16:18, which refers to the Lord’s provision of manna in the wilderness. By God’s miraculous working, those who had little and those who had plenty *both* had sufficient. Paul’s point is that wherever God’s people, however well or poorly endowed, are prepared to use their gifts and money willingly, there will be *equality*; there will be no injustice. Some may have more and others less, but all will have enough.

Paul illustrated his point with a quote from the Old Testament that comes from the account of Israel’s wilderness wanderings. When they gathered the manna, ‘some gathered much and some little’ (Ex. 16:17). Yet ‘he who had gathered much had no excess, and he who had gathered little had no lack’ (Ex. 16:18). Apparently, they shared what they gathered, so each person and family had enough to eat. So it is in the body of Christ; those who have an abundance share with those who are in need, so that everyone has enough.

During the wilderness wanderings, all the people gathered the manna that God had provided to supply their need of food. They had to do it on a daily basis, but they discovered that each had just what they needed (Ex. 16:13-36). As in Israel’s early history, so would it be in the Christian church.

The application arising from this is clear. We should, according to our resources, fulfill the principle of ‘fairness’ or *equality* by *willingness* to share. Specifically, we must search our conscience to ensure that some fellow Christian is not having to do more or pay more in the fellowship of believers because we, selfishly, are doing less or paying less than we could.

Those who truly experience the saving grace of Christ give. In fact, giving itself is a grace. The *grace* of God was given to the Macedonians, who then earnestly begged for the *grace* of taking part in the relief of the saints. Upon their example, the Corinthians were urged to complete the *grace* of God in their lives. But most of all it was and is the *grace* of Christ (v. 9). God’s people give joyfully according to what they have. Let us all be God’s people.

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B. Administration of Giving (2 Corinthians 8:16-24)

Chapters 8-9 of 2 Corinthians contain Paul's extended motivational plea to the Corinthians to get on with the grace of giving because their failure to do so would reveal their repentance to be vain and their salvation a delusion. The flow of Paul's thought was logically powerful and motivating. Nevertheless, he was not at all sure that the Corinthians would complete their offering for the poor in Jerusalem. One of the reasons was very personal—namely, his enemies in Corinth had accused him of financial abuse, suggesting that the reason he didn't accept payment for his services was that he had other ways of fleecing the flock (see 12:14-18; cp. 2:17; 7:2; 11:7-12). So now Paul based his motivation to give on his own integrity and the integrity of the process of taking the offering from the Corinthians to Jerusalem. Paul put forth his financial probity and his adherence to the highest principles as reason for the Corinthians to complete their offering for the Jerusalem church.

No one knew better than Paul that his initiative in instituting the collection would lay him open to the accusation that the money was destined for his pocket. Indeed, to this day few things are so destructive of the credibility of the ministry as the implication of covetousness and dishonesty. To preserve his credibility, Paul took every precaution to dissociate himself from any direct contact with the money. The concept of the collection was bigger than the person of Paul. In the meantime, to expedite its conclusion in Corinth he is sending not one, or even two, but three persons to supervise. These verses, then, are in effect a mini-letter of commendation of these three Christians to the Corinthian church. They serve to remind all Christians and church leaders to exert extreme care in all matters related to church money.

Earlier in the epistle, Paul had referred to letters of recommendation. He said he had no need of one, because the work God had done in the Corinthian church itself was like such a letter in his case (3:1-3), a letter from God Himself establishing his credentials as an authentic worker for Christ. Here, however, he writes what is in effect such a letter commending three men to the church of Corinth. The reason for this is surely that the impending visit of these three to that city's church was of such an official nature and with such responsibilities that Paul felt character references desirable. They were to be handling money given by the churches for the poor Christians in Jerusalem, and finance needs to be done by trustworthy people.

Paul distanced himself from the actual gathering of the offering from the Corinthians. By doing this, his enemies could not accuse him of extortion through placing undue personal pressure on the Corinthians or by his force of personality. Neither could they accuse him of having his hand in the till. So in this section Paul penned a letter of commendation for three brothers who would collect the offering from the Corinthians—apart from him. They included his soul brother, the famous brother, and the earnest brother.

1. The Named Brother (8:16-17)

¹⁶*But thanks be to God, who put into the heart of Titus the same earnest care I have for you.*

¹⁷*For he not only accepted our appeal, but being himself very earnest he is going to you of his own accord.*

Paul's soul brother was, of course, Titus. Titus was Paul's soul brother in that he had a heart for the same earnest care for the Corinthians that Paul had. It hadn't always been this way. Titus had been uneasy when Paul gave him the unenviable task of delivering his severe letter to the Corinthians. But Titus was not only refreshed by the Corinthians, but also a deep bond of

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affection had developed between them (cp. 7:7, 13-16). The experience of Titus in Corinth had made him just as earnest as Paul in his care and concern for the Corinthians.

Titus was a Greek (Gal. 2:3) and Paul's 'true' son in the faith (Titus 1:4), in that he had been brought to faith through Paul. He was of exemplary character. He did not serve for any personal advantage, and he never sought to exploit people (12:18). He had become one of Paul's regular companions – a 'partner and fellow-worker' (v. 23). Paul mentions the concern Titus has for the Corinthians, but he attributes its origin to God. This kind of outlook should become a habit of mind for Christians, for otherwise we rob God of the glory due to His name.

Titus, who knew them so well and loved them so dearly (cp. 7:15), was also wholeheartedly committed to the relief effort for the Jerusalem saints. Paul did ask Titus to participate, and he accepted the apostle's appeal. But so earnest was Titus's support for the project that he went to Corinth of his own accord. His voluntary participation along with Paul was further evidence of the unanimity between the two.

God had made Titus's heart and soul like Paul's other-directed heart. He shared Paul's special love for the Corinthians. And the earnestness of Titus for the Corinthians was the same as Paul's—specifically that they should excel in the grace of giving (v. 7)—thus demonstrating the validity of their faith and salvation. Titus was so earnest about this that he was virtually on his way 'of his own accord' before Paul asked. Titus, as the only emissary here named, would assume leadership of the trio.

There has been speculation both as to the identity of the two unnamed men accompanying Titus and also the reasons for Paul's silence about their names. It seems particularly odd when he has referred to Titus by name in the same context. Why did he write this way? Perhaps Titus was to be the group's leader, and perhaps Paul felt that one way of marking him out as such was to make it necessary for his friend to introduce the others on their arrival at the church.

2. The Famous Brother (8:18-21)

a) Appointment (8:18-19a)

¹⁸With him we are sending the brother who is famous among all the churches for his preaching of the gospel. ¹⁹And not only that, but he has been appointed by the churches to travel with us...

The second brother of the three was anonymous, though ironically he was 'famous' among the churches and 'appointed' by the churches. The phrase 'the brother who is famous among all the churches' is literally, 'the brother whose praise in the gospel is among the churches.' The inclusion of this highly regarded individual signaled Paul's intention to handle matters with absolute honesty and integrity.

This brother apparently had a ministry of some sort in more than one church. By 'all the churches' Paul may have meant, 'all the Macedonian churches.' We know of the Philippian, Thessalonian, and Berean churches in Macedonia, but there may have been others there. On the other hand, Paul may have meant that the man had a still wider ministry, one rather like his own in that it touched many churches. We cannot be sure and it matters little. In either event, here is further evidence from the Corinthian epistles that Christian had a sense of oneness that transcended local church boundaries. The churches (presumably those in Macedonia) had chosen the brother referred to in verses 18-19 to accompany Paul in carrying their offering to Jerusalem.

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But while the second brother's fame tells us little, the fact that he was 'appointed by the churches' tells us that he was elected by a show of hands, as the Greek indicates. Thus it could not be said that he was Paul's personal envoy, but only the elected representative of the Macedonian churches. No one could say that the messengers were Paul's hand-picked lot.

The Macedonian churches have 'chosen' him (the verb suggests 'by a show of hands.') The word 'appointed' indicates that the churches had undertaken their selection serious, with perhaps the churches voting upon their choice.

His appointment by the churches protected Paul and Titus from any false accusation that they were in collusion to mishandle the money. The reason for the apostle's concern was not that he and Titus could not be trusted, but rather that Paul's enemies in Corinth could not be trusted. The unnamed preacher would act as an objective, outside auditor, ensuring that no valid criticism about the handling of the money could be made.

Who is he? One possibility is that this famous evangelist among the Macedonian churches was Luke. That Luke, the author of Acts, was present in Philippi (from which this letter was possibly written) from 50 to 57 AD may be inferred from the first 'we/us' passage in Acts which ends at Philippi and the second such passage which begins at Philippi (Acts 16:11-17; cp. 20:6). It is quite possible that Luke remained at Philippi through those eight years and had become famous in the region. One who was capable of writing the gospel, as Luke was, may well have been famous for his preaching of the gospel.

There is little point in theorizing about the identity of either unnamed man as we do not have adequate information about them. Luke's name appears in commentaries more often than others, and he could have been one of them, but we will probably never know for sure. As Paul appears to have been in Macedonia when he wrote this letter, it seems likely these two brothers were themselves Macedonian Christians.

Some have speculated that the unnamed brother was Tychicus, others that he was Trophimus or Luke. But since his name is not given, such speculation is futile. The Corinthians would certainly recognize him, if for no other reason than that he would arrive with Titus. The implication of Paul's words, however, is that they already knew him as a distinguished preacher of the gospel. Paul did not choose him to help with the collection because of his business acumen, but because of his spiritual maturity, unimpeachable character, and reputation for integrity.

From earlier centuries this description was thought to refer to Luke. But there is no solid evidence for Luke's identification as this brother. Others have guessed that the famous brother was Barnabas or Silas or Timothy or Aristarchus or Sopater or Secundus or Trophimus or Tychicus. But whoever it was, Paul could think of no higher commendation than this man's gospel fame, and therefore someday this anonymous brother's name will be recognized before the Throne in the only fame that counts.

It would be interesting to know the identity of this 'brother,' and we may wonder why Paul does not give his name. However, it reminds us that many unnamed Christians do sterling work in the interests of Christ's kingdom. Although their identity is unknown to us, it is not to God. Better by far to be known by Him than by our fellow men and women.

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b) Aim (8:19b)

...as we carry out this act of grace that is being ministered by us, for the glory of the Lord himself and to show our good will.

The purpose of the offering was for the glory of the Lord Himself. There were several ways in which the offering might show their respect for Him. Its largeness would have expressed the gratitude they felt for the grace of the Lord Jesus. Its spontaneity would have signified the joy they found in knowing God through His Son. Its costliness would have exhibited to unbelievers the sacrificial love of God, whose example they imitated.

In typical fashion, Paul viewed the offering as being first of all for the glory of the Lord. It was also to provide real financial help for the Christians who would receive it, but Paul rightly viewed all service done by a Christian for others as primarily service for God Himself.

In addition, the purpose of the offering was to show Christian good will towards brothers and sisters in need. Tangible expressions of love mean much when we pass through difficult times. Christians in Jerusalem were going to be encouraged not only by the gifts they received but also by the love and concern they represented.

c) Administration (8:20-21)

²⁰We take this course so that no one should blame us about this generous gift that is being administered by us, ²¹for we aim at what is honorable not only in the Lord's sight but also in the sight of man.

Paul's caution was all the more justified because he expected the Corinthians' gift to be a large one. *Hadrotēs* ('generous gift'), which appears only here in the New Testament, refers to an abundance. It would have been a tempting target had Paul really been the embezzler his enemies falsely accused him of being.

Paul's phrase, 'this liberal gift,' may refer to the total offering from all the churches or simply from the Macedonian churches. He may however intend simply the offering of the Corinthians. If so, it was a tactful encouragement to them to give generously. Paul felt the heavy responsibility of administering the gifts of God's people. The liberality of their giving only increased this sense of accountability. Sending an appointed representative was very astute on Paul's part. Paul was very candid about his reason for using an elected courier. He did not want to give his enemies any quarter for criticism. Paul knew that few things would destroy his ministry as much as doubts cast upon his integrity in matters of money. So in verse 21 he further emphasizes the extreme care taken. These words in verse 21 echo Proverbs 3:4 and show that while Paul was careful to do what was right in the Lord's sight, his driving interest was doing what was honorable in the sight of man, both friend and foe.

As verse 20 shows, Paul was most concerned that everything should be done with an eye not only to financial fidelity but also to an impeccable outward testimony in relation to it. The scrupulous management of money in the church is essential. If gifts are to honor the Lord, there must not be the slightest impropriety. Three principles in this passage guide us. First, we are to avoid blame over the way in which we administer the money God's people give (v. 20). There should be no grounds for people finding fault with our stewardship. Second, we are to aim at what is honorable, not only in God's sight, but also in the eyes of our fellow men and women (v. 21). Third, by implication, it is better if responsibility for the care of money is shared, rather than left to one person (vv. 18-22).

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3. The Earnest Brother (8:22)

²²*And with them we are sending our brother whom we have often tested and found earnest in many matters, but who is now more earnest than ever because of his great confidence in you.*

Paul now names a third unknown soldier whom we will call the earnest brother. Because Paul mentioned him last, we surmise that he was of lesser seniority. But Paul's calling him 'our brother' suggests that Paul knew him well. It is not clear whether he was appointed by Paul or elected by the churches. That Paul knew him suggests that he was chosen by the apostle. But verse 23 calls both anonymous men 'messengers of the churches,' which argues that they were sent out by the churches. However, the thing that Paul wanted us to see was that this unnamed brother was 'earnest,' that he had a God-given zeal and energy to get the job done—especially as to completing the collection. And more, he was confident that the Corinthians would do it. He believed in them! Such a positive, energetic spirit could not help but cause the Corinthians to do the right thing.

Though he is not named, he is highly commended; Paul described him as one 'whom we have often tested' (from *dokimazō*; to approve after testing) 'and found diligent in many things.' His diligence or zeal was enhanced 'because of his great confidence in' the Corinthians. He had heard of their repentance and renewed loyalty to Paul, which made him all the more eager to be involved.

Paul mention's this other brother's great confidence in the Corinthians. Perhaps he has already visited the church at some earlier time, although in this case it is difficult to understand why Paul does not name him. Perhaps he has friends who have visited it, or else his confidence in them may have been based on the good reports he had received from Paul and Titus. We do not know, but Paul must have been glad to have such a positive person available to send at this time.

4. The Three Brothers (8:23-24)

²³*As for Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker for your benefit. And as for our brothers, they are messengers of the churches, the glory of Christ.* ²⁴*So give proof before the churches of your love and of our boasting about you to these men.*

Then Paul summarized the members of what amounted to his financial committee, reemphasizing their noble, unimpeachable, character. Titus was not only Paul's 'partner' (*koinōnos*) in ministry, but also a 'fellow worker' (*sunergos*) among the Corinthians. And as for the two unnamed brothers, they were 'messengers' (lit., 'apostles') of the churches. That phrase, occurring only here in the New Testament, designates them as official authorized representatives of the churches. Showing the high caliber of men to which the early church entrusted money, Paul called the three 'a glory to Christ.'

Paul summarized all three brothers in verse 23. The designation of Titus as 'my partner' (*koinonos*) is the only place Paul used this word for a colleague. He was his earnest, intimate associate—his buddy. The unnamed brothers were 'messengers (literally, 'apostles') of the churches' (i.e., the poor, giving churches of Macedonia. And as such they were 'the glory of Christ'—manifestations of Christ's life-changing glory.

All are brothers in the Lord but they do not have the same function. They all acted as representatives, but Titus represents Paul and the other two the Macedonian churches. Paul describes Titus as his partner and fellow-worker. He also uses the latter term of Timothy in Romans 16:21, of Priscilla and Aquila in Romans 16:3, and of Urbanus, known to us only

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through his reference to him, in Romans 16:9. His use of this term underlines Paul's warm relationship with those who worked with him in evangelism and the care of the churches. He was an apostle of Christ and so had great responsibilities. He was the leader of the team of missionaries that traveled with him from place to place, but he does not emphasize his status. He and the others worked together as brothers and as partners.

The latter two persons are designated 'brothers,' which is a semi-technical title for those who work closely with Paul under his leadership. Paul refers to them as 'representatives (literally 'apostles') of the churches,' by which he means agents or couriers appointed by him, who shuttle between himself and the churches.

Paul was eager for these men to be well received (v. 24). Here was an opportunity for the Corinthian church to demonstrate its love for Christ in practical ways (cp. v. 8). They would of course need hospitality and every assistance in the work they were called to do. Paul had spoken to them about the Corinthian church with loving pride, and he was keen that, through the visit of their representatives, the Macedonian churches would see clear evidence of their love for Christ. This shows he was keen for Christians to think well of each other.

Such representatives of the churches deserve to be honored by all the Corinthians as they went about their task. God's people at Corinth were able to demonstrate their love by generous hospitality and practical help to aid them in the completion of their work.

The importance of the offering extended beyond the Corinthians into eternity. 1) It would prove the validity of their faith—that it was not in vain. 2) It would help the impoverished church in Jerusalem survive. 3) It would demonstrate the miracle of the new covenant—Jews and Gentiles are actually one in Christ. 4) It would declare the glory of the Lord to the church and to the world.

For next time: Read 2 Corinthians 9:1-15.