

## Giving – 2 Corinthians 8

### I. INTRODUCTION

#### A. Mark Twain

1. Though Mark Twain was a notorious **skeptic**, it wasn't uncommon for him to attend church.
2. He found most preachers boring but wrote of attending one service where he was moved by the sermon.
3. A **couple minutes** into the message he was listening intently.
4. The **eloquent** preacher was making a **fine argument**.
5. **10 minutes** later, Twain decided to give **\$2** in the offering.
  - a. **5 minutes** after that he decided to give **\$5**.
  - b. But the message went on & after **30 minutes**, Twain decided \$2 was **enough**.
  - c. At **40 minutes**, **\$1** seemed plenty.
  - d. At **50 minutes** the message was far longer than it ought to have been & Twain decided he'd give **nothing**.
  - e. After **an hour** had passed & the message was mercifully over, when the offering came, Twain said he took a dollar **out!**

#### B. Today

1. As we **return** to our study in **2 Corinthians**, we arrive at **2 chs** where Paul gives instructions on **giving**.
2. A word to our **visitors** this morning: The **Sunday message** is drawn from the passage we're studying in our mid-week **thru** the Bible study.
  - a. We cover **2 OT** books, then 1 NT book, until we've **studied thru** the entire Bible, then start all over again. This is our **2<sup>nd</sup> time** through.
  - c. **On Wednesday** evenings we cover between **1 to 5 chapters**, depending on where we are.
  - d. On **Sunday**, we take a closer look at a **few of the verses** we're covering Wednesday.
3. It **just so happens** that the section we've arrived at **this morning** deals with the subject of **giving**.
4. We are **not like some** churches & ministries who **talk endlessly** about money & giving.
5. But we are **not hesitant or embarrassed** about addressing the issue when we come to it in our journey through the Word.
6. **Paul has some great insights** to share with us about the role of giving in the life of the believer in our text today.

#### C. Context

1. Let me **set the scene** as we pick it up at v. 1.
2. Besides Paul's **passion to win** the lost to Faith in Christ, he had a **couple other priorities**.
  - 1) **Help the poor & 2) Build unity among believers**; specially between Jews & Gentiles. <sup>[1]</sup>

3. He saw a great way to **bring these 2 priorities together** by inviting Gentile churches to send relief to the poor & beleaguered Jewish believers in Jerusalem.
  - a. The church there had suffered fierce **persecution** with many of the Christians losing their jobs.
  - b. A **famine** made matters worse, so the Gentile churches **took up collections** & sent them as **relief** to their Jewish brothers & sisters by way of Paul and others.
  - c. There was some **suspicion & prejudice** on the part of the Jewish believers toward their Gentile brothers & **Paul saw the relief** as a great way to prove the love of the Gentiles to them.
  - d. In writing to the church at **Rome** about the relief, Paul said that the Gentiles **owed** their Jewish brothers & sisters a **debt of gratitude**;
  - e. After all, it was **their tenacious hanging** on to the Lord despite hardship that had resulted in the Romans hearing the Gospel & being saved.
4. As Paul wrote this, he was **wrapping up his 3<sup>rd</sup> missionary** journey & would soon be returning to Jerusalem.
5. He **wanted to take** with him a substantial **gift to** the poor saints there & had **already made the need** known to the churches all throughout this region.
6. But when his assistant **Titus** met up with Paul in Philippi, he told Paul the Corinthians **hadn't followed through** on their promise to send relief.
7. Titus had just come from Corinth & knew the **Corinthians had neglected** to give what they said they would.
8. So Paul **penned chs. 8 & 9** to encourage them to keep their promise.

## II. TEXT

### A. Vs. 1-2

**<sup>1</sup> Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia: <sup>2</sup> that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality.**

1. The city of **Philippi**, where Paul wrote 2 Corinthians, was in a region called **Macedonia**.
  - a. There were **several churches** in the cities & towns of this area.
  - b. Like Corinth, last time Paul had been in this area, he'd **spoken of the collection** for the needy believers of Jerusalem.
  - c. They'd **responded enthusiastically** as Paul's letter to the Philippians makes clear.
2. They were **eager** to give & had collected a **large gift**.
3. What made their generosity all the more **remarkable** was that they were going through their own time of **difficulty**.
  - a. Many Christians throughout the empire were **losing their jobs** because they could no longer participate in their **trade guilds**.
  - b. These guilds were an ancient form of a labor union.
  - d. Each guild had a patron idol & guild meeting involved worshipping the idol.

- e. So, many Christians were kicked out of their guild and had lost work.
4. Whatever the source of trouble, the churches of Macedonia weren't flush with cash.
5. Paul uses words for their **trial & poverty** which mean it was **severe & deep**.
6. Though their **circumstances were tough**, the **grace of God was so real** to them in the midst of their trial, it produced an **abundance of joy** so rich & full it spilled over into the **generosity of giving**.
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7. The **key** to understanding all Paul says about giving lies here in v. 1 where he says,

**We make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia . . .**

8. Paul used **9 different words** for the gift the churches made to the needy in Jerusalem.
- a. But the word he uses **most** often for it is "**grace**."
- b. Paul sees the collection the churches were making for the relief as the grace of God.
- c. **Grace had saved** them when they first put their faith in Jesus Christ.
- d. **Grace was saving** them now as they walked in faith in Christ & were conformed to His image.
- e. **Grace was flowing through them** to bring the love of God to those in need.
9. Here's the point: **Giving is grace & grace is giving.**
10. If you get nothing else today, get this.
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11. The word **grace means** unmerited, unearned favor, blessing freely bestowed.
- a. **Grace is a gift**; not wages, not earnings.
- b. It's is a gift & a gift is by grace.
12. **What so excited** Paul about the Macedonians was that **he could see** the grace of God that was at work in them **BY** the collection they'd taken for the poor.
13. What made it all the more remarkable is that **they** were suffering & poor.
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14. When you've experienced the grace of God, **difficult circumstances** aren't an excuse for not giving.
- a. On the contrary, **over the years** I've discovered some of the **most generous** believers are those who give, not out of abundance but out of austerity.
- b. Our giving ought to be centered in grace, not circumstances.
15. Besides, **when are circumstances EVER** an encouragement to give?
- a. Many say they **can't afford** to give, but as soon as such & such happens, **then** they will.
- b. Yeah-it rarely works out that way. They may have **good intentions**, but they don't follow through, which is exactly what the Corinthians were doing, as we'll see.
16. Listen → **Circumstances change, but the grace of God doesn't.**
17. As it was for the Macedonians, our giving ought to be **motivated by & an expression of** the grace of God.

**B. Vs. 3-4**

**<sup>3</sup> For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing, <sup>4</sup> imploring us with much**

## urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints.

1. The Macedonians **weren't foolish** in their gift.
2. They **considered what they could give**, then gave it by faith, trusting God would take care of their needs, as He promised to do.
3. The point Paul makes here is their **enthusiasm** in giving.
  - a. They gave it **willingly!** They **weren't coerced** or manipulated into giving.
  - b. I've heard a lot of **appeals** for money over the years.
    - 1) I've seen them on **TV**. I've been in the **stadiums & convention halls**.
    - 2) I've seen all the **hype & the desperate appeals**.
    - 3) I've heard the **stories**, the supposed "**word from the Lord.**"
    - 4) I've been '**guilted, threatened, cajoled, played, set up, hoodwinked.**
4. Whenever I see someone resort to these tricks to get my money, **any chance of my support is gone**.
5. **Paul** was the one who'd **made known the need** of the poor saints in Jerusalem to the Macedonians.
  - a. Having made the need known, he **left their response** to them & the Spirit.
  - b. He knew **if** what they gave **wasn't motivated & measured by** God's grace then it was all for nothing.
  - c. Well, the Macedonians were **so stoked on grace**, they literally **begged** him to take their gift.

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6. When was the last time you heard someone say, "**Can we take an offering, please?**"
7. Because some churches have so abused the subject of giving, other churches have **over-reacted** & become **apologetic** about it.
  - a. A couple years ago at a pastor's conference in **NZ** I spoke at, there was a minor controversy over the right way to receive offerings.
  - b. Some said you need to pass the plate; others said you leave a box on the table where people can drop their gift.
  - c. Listen – the **Bible doesn't tell** us one way or the other.
  - d. Several years ago, for a while, **we had only a box**.
    - 1) The reason **WHY** we didn't pass the bags but used the box was because we were reacting to the abuse some ministries have put on money.
    - 2) But after a while we were convicted about that & realized we can't let the abuse of others alter what we do.
    - 3) From some time now we've included the offering in the midst of our worship time because that's what our giving ought to be – worship to God!
    - 4) **It's a celebration of & participation in His grace.**
8. **Years ago** not long after I rededicated my life to Christ, I visited a church in **OC** that went a bit too far with what Paul says here & in ch., 9 where he speaks of giving to the Lord cheerfully.
  - a. The word there for cheerful is literally, hilarity.
  - b. So this church had the routine of when it was time for the offering, the worship leader would say, "Now it's time to give!"
  - c. Everyone would jump to their feet & begin shouting out 'hallelujahs' &

- ‘glorys’ & all manner of hullabaloo!
- d. I’d heard about this church & their reaction to the offering so I looked around; yeah—they were loud but they didn’t really look all that excited or enthusiastic.
  9. See that kind of **hyped-up emotionalism** is not at all what the Macedonians were about.
  10. If it was, Paul would have told them to **knock it off**.
  11. They simply counted it a privilege to be channels of God’s grace & were eager to be used by Him.

### C. Vs. 5-9

#### **<sup>5</sup> And not *only* as we had hoped, but they first gave themselves to the Lord, and *then* to us by the will of God.**

1. **What so blessed** Paul wasn’t **just** the amazing generosity of the Macedonians, but **what he’d learned** by their **example**.
2. You see, the Macedonians **understood giving**; they totally ‘got-it.’
  - a. Because giving was about grace, & grace about giving,
  - b. They **realized what God was looking for** wasn’t their money, their stuff, even their time.
  - c. **He wanted THEM**. So that’s what they’d given.
  - d. When they each contributed their gift, they didn’t drop in a denarius or two, then go away with the attitude, “Okay, I gave my part, I paid my dues, now the rest is mine to do with as I please.”
  - e. When they gave, whatever amount it was, **their mindset was, “That’s me.”**
  - f. **THAT’S** why they were so generous!
3. Let’s **put ourselves** in their place. We’re thinking, “When the offering is taken, **what** I give is a token, a symbol of all I am – all God’s grace has done, is doing, & will do in me.”
  - a. Now, **when the bag** comes by – What will you give?
  - b. Some **change & the lint** that’s collected at the bottom of your pocket?
  - c. Hey, if like the **widow’s mite** that’s all you have, then that’s generous.
  - d. But if you make in the upper 5 digits per year—does a wadded up dollar bill really represent you?
4. **Personal confession** time: Before I understood grace-giving as we find it here, my giving usually went like this . . .
  - a. I never thought about it outside of church.
  - b. But I was reminded of it when I went to church and they announced it was time for the offering.
  - c. I didn’t want the usher or anyone in my row to think I was a miser, so, I discreetly pulled out my wallet & looked in for a \$1 bill.
  - d. I would then pull it out & wad it up so the denomination couldn’t be seen.
  - e. I needed something to put in the plate, but I didn’t want anyone to see how much; I wanted them to think I was giving at least a 20.
  - f. If it was one of those days when all I had was a 10 or 20 in my wallet, **oh** it hurt.
  - g. I still gave it, albeit reluctantly.
5. **How I wish** someone had sat down next to be back then, opened my Bible to

this verse, had me read it then explained that God doesn't *want* my money; He wants *me!*

- a. God doesn't *need* my money! *I need to give it.*
  - b. In fact, I need to *give enough* of it that it *keeps me dependent* on Him.
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**6 So we urged Titus, that as he had begun, so he would also complete this grace in you as well.**

6. **When Paul sent** his assistant Titus to Corinth with the previous letter, he asked him to **check on the collection** the Corinthians had promised a year before.
  - a. When Titus met up with Paul in Philippi, he **reported** that the Corinthians had done **nothing**.
  - b. Not only was this 'no bueno' on their part, it was all the more obvious **in comparison** to the generosity of the Macedonians who were having a tough time.
  - c. Things in Corinth were much better for the believers – but they'd done less.
7. That's **why Paul uses** the Macedonians as an example to the Corinthians.
  - a. He **wasn't trying** to provoke competition or shame them.
  - b. He was simply giving the Corinthians **an example** of the generosity grace produces in a believer.

**7 But as you abound in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all diligence, and in your love for us—see that you abound in this grace also.**

8. **The grace of giving.**

**8 I speak not by commandment, but I am testing the sincerity of your love by the diligence of others.**

9. This is important! Paul is **NOT demanding** they give.
  - a. If he commanded it – then it **wouldn't be grace**.
  - b. **Remember, grace is giving & giving is grace.**
10. So while he would never command or demand they give – he could with utmost confidence show them through the example of the Macedonians that **grace produces generosity**.

**9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.**

11. Paul drew on a truth that framed the thinking of those early believers: **The goal of a disciple** is to be just like the rabbi.
  12. He's referring to the **incarnation**, where Jesus **laid aside** the glory & majesty of heaven to wrap Himself in humble flesh, live a life of physical poverty and die an ignominious death—all so that we could gain the glory & majesty of heaven.
  13. Jesus was all about grace, from first to last. So He gave the most – more than anyone in history.
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14. I say it again – **Grace is giving and giving is grace.**

15. John 3:16: God so love the world He \_\_\_\_\_? → **GAVE!**

**D. Vs. 10-12**

**10 And in this I give advice:**

1. He won't command them to give, but he will make a **suggestion** . . .  
**It is to your advantage not only to be doing what you began and were desiring to do a year ago; <sup>11</sup> but now you also must complete the doing of it; that as *there was a readiness to desire it*, so *there also may be a completion out of what you have.* <sup>12</sup> For if there is first a willing mind, *it is accepted according to what one has, and not according to what he does not have.***
2. He tells them it's **great they'd shown** such eagerness a year ago to be a part of the collection for the needy.
3. But the proof is in the **pudding**, as they say.
4. If they were **genuinely** willing & their hearts were in the right place, they'd follow through & give what they promised.
5. **Intention means nothing** if there's no follow through.
6. I can't go to a **stock-broker** tomorrow & say, "Back in the Summer of 2004 I **intended** to buy 100 shares of Google. I never got around to it, but I just knew it would be a good investment. So what do ya' say? How about cashing me out for that 100 shares?"
7. He'd call security & have me removed as a loon!

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8. Jesus gave us important guidance when He said, "**Do not lay up for yourself** treasure on earth where they can decay, diminish, & get stolen. Instead, lay of treasure in heaven, where it will endure." [Matthew 6:19-20]
  - a. There's only one time when we can lay up treasure in heaven; right now.
  - b. We can't take it with us, but we can send it on ahead.
9. This is a **prime day** to take hold of what Paul says here about intention & follow-thru.
  - a. Being that it's the first of the year, many people make resolutions.
  - b. Christians determine to read thru the Bible, pray more, start giving regularly.
  - c. Intention is great – but it means nothing without follow thru.

### III. CONCLUSION

#### A. Giving Ourselves

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[1] Acts 11:27-30 Galatians 2:6-10