

2 Corinthians
Leon L. Combs, Ph.D.

Chapter Eight

The apostle devotes the next two “chapters” to the subject of giving to meet the financial needs of fellow Christians. He begins the discussion by using as an example the generosity of the churches of Macedonia (Philippi, Berea, Thessalonica). They had great sufferings but they exceeded their expected levels of giving to help meet the needs of other Christians. There are many Scriptures warning us of the love of money such as the following:

1Tim 3:3 not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, uncontentious, free from the love of money.

1Tim 6:10 For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith, and pierced themselves with many a pang.

Heb 13:5 Let your character be free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, "I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you,"

There are also many examples of people who have come to ruin because of their love for money such as Achan (Josh 7:1-25), Balaam (Num 22-24), Delilah (Judges 16:4-6), and others. There is no sin in having money and there are Biblical guidelines for using money such as:

Providing for the needs of family: *1Tim 5:8 But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith, and is worse than an unbeliever.*
Paying debts: *Rom 13:8 Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law.*

Saving for the future: *Prov 21:20 There is precious treasure and oil in the dwelling of the wise, But a foolish man swallows it up.*

Prov 30:25 The ants are not a strong folk, But they prepare their food in the summer;

Having met the Biblical obligations for the use of one’s financial resources for himself and his family, the Christian is then obligated to give for the Kingdom. Most of the Biblical mandates for giving of time and money is to help fellow Christians (Matt 25:31-46). The churches in Macedonia were giving very generously to help their fellow Christians in the poor church in Jerusalem. From its inception the Jerusalem church had been financially poor. This church was composed mainly of pilgrims and Hellenistic Jews who had been added to the church at the day of Pentecost:

Acts 2:9 "Parthians and Medes and Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia,

Acts 2:10 Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the districts of Libya around Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes,

Acts 2:11 Cretans and Arabs-- we hear them in our own tongues speaking of the mighty deeds of God."

Soon after this major conversion event there were 5000 men in the church (Acts 4:4). Many of these new converts were alienated from their families because they became Christians and so had no home and could not afford living quarters in inns. Native Jerusalem Christians then had to take care of these new brothers and sisters and that put extreme financial hardships on them. Initially the Christians shared and helped each other as much as possible:

*Acts 2:44 And all those who had believed were together, and had all things in common;
Acts 2:45 and they began selling their property and possessions, and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need.*

Acts 4:32 And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul; and not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own; but all things were common property to them.

Acts 4:34 For there was not a needy person among them, for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales,

Acts 4:35 and lay them at the apostles' feet; and they would be distributed to each, as any had need.

But eventually the church was overwhelmed with needs:

Acts 8:1 And Saul was in hearty agreement with putting him to death. And on that day a great persecution arose against the church in Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.

Paul recognized the need and was determined to help:

Rom 15:25 but now, I am going to Jerusalem serving the saints.

Rom 15:26 For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem.

Rom 15:27 Yes, they were pleased to do so, and they are indebted to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in their spiritual things, they are indebted to minister to them also in material things.

Paul first wrote to the church at Corinth about the collection in his first letter to them:

1Cor 16:1 Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so do you also.

1Cor 16:2 On the first day of every week let each one of you put aside and save, as he may prosper, that no collections be made when I come.

1Cor 16:3 And when I arrive, whomever you may approve, I shall send them with letters to carry your gift to Jerusalem;

1Cor 16:4 and if it is fitting for me to go also, they will go with me.

The collection had been postponed due to the disruption between Paul and the Corinthians but now that peace was restored he was determined to finish the collection. Paul then begins his second letter to them with reminders of the giving of the Macedonia churches.

2Cor 8:1 Now, brethren, we wish to make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia,

2Cor 8:2 that in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality.

2Cor 8:3 For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability they gave of their own accord,

2Cor 8:4 begging us with much entreaty for the favor of participation in the support of the saints,

2Cor 8:5 and this, not as we had expected, but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God.

The motivation of the churches in Macedonia was the grace of God. When we realize what grace we have received from God we yearn to demonstrate that grace to others and particularly to those fellow Christians in need. When we finally realize that God is our Father and is also the Father of all other Christians we begin to grasp the responsibility of being in the family of God. There was never any hesitation on the part of Jesus to do His Father's will for He completely understood the Fatherhood of God. As we also begin to grasp that marvelous concept of being in the Family of God we should have great compulsion to fully participate in that family. The Macedonian churches were also very poor and they endured much persecution. Paul told of some of the persecutions at Thessalonica and Philippi (Acts 17:5-8, 1 Thess 1:6, 1 Thess 2:14-15, 2 Thess 1:4, Phil 1:29). Despite their poverty and persecutions they gave joyously for the church at Jerusalem. Their confidence in the sovereignty of God allowed them to give beyond their ability. The word translated as "liberality" can also be translated "sincerity". They were able to give so generously because they had no love for money. They had been set free (liberated) from their self-dependence so they were free to love others.

Phil 2:3 Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself;

Phil 2:4 do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.

Giving of their own accord is giving without being compelled by someone else to give. They were self-motivated to give because they viewed everything they "had" as belonging to God. This attitude is not handicapped by any concept of tithing for someone legalistically bound to tithing quits giving when that magical number is reached. Animal sacrifice, Sabbath keeping, and tithing were Old Testament concepts that are not recognized under the New Covenant. We Christians recognize that all we have belongs to the Lord, not just a tithe. You may read more on this topic at <http://livingtheology.com/Tithe.htm>.

In verse four we see that the churches in Macedonia begged Paul to allow them to give! The word translated "begging" means "to implore" or "to plead" and the translation "with much entreaty" means "with much urging" or "most insistently". These early Christians refused any rationalization that they were poor and did not have to give. The "favor" of participation means that they begged to be allowed to be involved in the grace of helping Christians in need.

Verse five shows that Paul was more than Paul expected and he saw that they first gave themselves to Jesus and to them by the will of God. The first giving of a Christian is to give himself:

Rom 12:1 I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.

2Cor 8:6 Consequently we urged Titus that as he had previously made a beginning, so he would also complete in you this gracious work as well.

2Cor 8:7 But just as you abound in everything, in faith and utterance and knowledge and in all earnestness and in the love we inspired in you, see that you abound in this gracious work also.

2Cor 8:8 I am not speaking this as a command, but as proving through the earnestness of others the sincerity of your love also.

2Cor 8:9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.

2Cor 8:10 And I give my opinion in this matter, for this is to your advantage, who were the first to begin a year ago not only to do this, but also to desire to do it.

Titus began the offering process about a year earlier so Paul urged him to complete the offering. The Christians at Corinth abounded in everything according to the grace of God. Their faith was a gift of God. "Utterance" refers not to speech but to doctrine of truth and knowledge refers to the ability to apply doctrine to all areas of life. The earnestness and love that they demonstrated had been inspired by Paul and the other workers for Christ. He was then urging them to show the grace of God by their giving. Note that Paul was not commanding them to give. If he had to command them to give then the giving would not be from their heart. He was lifting up a need for them and wanted them to prove the genuineness of their faith by their giving. The others of whom he was referring were the churches in Macedonia and he was urging them to use their giving as an example for them to follow.

In verse nine Paul lifts up the example of Jesus Christ. Jesus left the immeasurable riches of heaven and of being with the other members of the Trinity to become poor so that we might partake of the riches of heaven. Of course the riches of heaven do not just refer to the material wealth but of the sharing of the glory of God. The poorness of Jesus does not just refer to His lack of material goods but of His loss of being in the company of the other members of the Trinity. His losses were for our gains:

1Peter 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

1Peter 1:4 to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you,

1Peter 1:5 who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

Paul then gives his opinion in that they should finish what they started a year ago. He adds that their giving should be from their desire to give and not from any compulsion on his part.

2Cor 8:11 But now finish doing it also; that just as there was the readiness to desire it, so there may be also the completion of it by your ability.

2Cor 8:12 For if the readiness is present, it is acceptable according to what a man has, not according to what he does not have.

It seems that many people begin a great task but never finish it. They initially seem to have good motives and they make the time and effort to do what they said they would do. But after a time they disappear. Suddenly other matters are more important. People always do what they most want to do at the time and if there is no heart desire to complete a task it will be easy for them to become turned to some other task. The completion of a task brings much reward. A person should always “let his yes be yes and his now be no”. We should always weigh our desires to complete something before we sign up for the project. Unfortunately I have known many people whose “yes” quickly became “no”.

James 5:12 But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath; but let your yes be yes, and your no, no; so that you may not fall under judgment.

Verse 12 tells us never to borrow to give. We should give out of our prosperity.

1Cor 16:2 On the first day of every week let each one of you put aside and save, as he may prosper, that no collections be made when I come.

2Cor 8:13 For this is not for the ease of others and for your affliction, but by way of equality--

2Cor 8:14 at this present time your abundance being a supply for their want, that their abundance also may become a supply for your want, that there may be equality;

2Cor 8:15 as it is written, "He who gathered much did not have too much, and he who gathered little had no lack."

In the above verses Paul spells out the reason for the giving. They were not to give so that the others could have above their needs nor were they to give so that they could not support their basic needs. The equality to which Paul is speaking is not like a Marxist or socialistic concept but it is for a balancing of resources. Paul’s statement is in line with what was said by John:

1John 3:17 But whoever has the world's goods, and beholds his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?

Christians are not isolationists regarding each other but rather we are one body:

Rom 12:5 so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.

Christians with abundance should be ready and willing to share with those in need and if later the needy come into abundance they should look for brothers and sisters in need. Nothing we have here belongs to us but all belongs to God. Paul then uses a common adage “as it is written” to infer that what he is about to say is from the Old Testament. In this case his quote is from Ex 16:2-3, which was written during the wilderness wanderings of Israel. They had manna to eat but they had to gather it and then they would share with those who did not gather enough.

2Cor 8:16 But thanks be to God, who puts the same earnestness on your behalf in the heart of Titus.

2Cor 8:17 For he not only accepted our appeal, but being himself very earnest, he has gone to you of his own accord.

Paul now uses the efforts and attitude of Titus as an example to the Corinthians. Leaders can demand people to follow but true Christian leaders lead by example as servants of Jesus Christ and Titus was an excellent example.

2Cor 8:18 And we have sent along with him the brother whose fame in the things of the gospel has spread through all the churches;

2Cor 8:19 and not only this, but he has also been appointed by the churches to travel with us in this gracious work, which is being administered by us for the glory of the Lord Himself, and to show our readiness,

2Cor 8:20 taking precaution that no one should discredit us in our administration of this generous gift;

2Cor 8:21 for we have regard for what is honorable, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men.

2Cor 8:22 And we have sent with them our brother, whom we have often tested and found diligent in many things, but now even more diligent, because of his great confidence in you.

2Cor 8:23 As for Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker among you; as for our brethren, they are messengers of the churches, a glory to Christ.

We do not know the identity of this person that traveled with Titus. Some think that he was Luke and others that he was Tychicus. Speculation is meaningless. He was easily recognized because he was traveling with Titus. Paul chose the companion not based upon his business experience but upon his spiritual maturity and integrity. The appointment of this person by the churches afforded Paul and Titus some protection from people who would accuse them of collecting money for false purposes. He afforded them some large degree of accountability and the modern church would be wise to follow this example. Paul wrote in 1 Cor 9:3-15 that although he had every right to accept money from them he would not do so. Paul was a man of great integrity and devotion to the Lord. He was also very wise and knew that someone would try to discredit him and say that the collection was for his benefit. He says that he has tested the second brother and has great confidence in him and he has a great confidence in them. He then adds that everyone else working with him in the ministry of Christ is also working only for the glory of the Lord.

2Cor 8:24 Therefore openly before the churches show them the proof of your love and of our reason for boasting about you.

He ends this “chapter” by saying that they should openly show the proof of their love for all Christians and for the reason that Paul has for boasting about them.