

2 Corinthians 8:1-7

During our Sunday evening services this summer, we are going to look at parts of [2 Corinthians 8-9](#). We have a very limited number of opportunities in terms of the number of services to do this, so the goal will be to try and work with the main elements of these two chapters relative to the issue of financial integrity within a believer's life and also within the life of the local church. This is not an appeal for money. This is simply a study in the Scriptures on financial responsibility. We will see in [2 Corinthians 9:7](#) that "**God loves a cheerful giver**". In that verse Paul simply encourages each believer to give as he purposes in his heart, but not to do so in a grudging manner or out of compulsion. In v8 of that same passage, Paul provides a major principle when he states that "**God is able to make all grace abound toward you**". The goal of this particular study is to simply provide a background as to why Paul is giving this particular encouragement to the church at Corinth. As we shall see, it is rooted in the deep needs that existed in the church at Jerusalem.

^{2Co 8:1} Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia: ² that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality. ³ For I bear witness that according to *their* ability, yes, and beyond *their* ability, *they were* freely willing, ⁴ imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints. ⁵ And not *only* as we had hoped, but they first gave themselves to the Lord, and *then* to us by the will of God. ⁶ So we urged Titus, that as he had begun, so he would also complete this grace in you as well. 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.

After reading this passage of Scripture, there are several questions that we need to ask ourselves as we begin a study on financial integrity. These questions are designed to help each of us focus on those things in the Christian life that are important. Hindrances and distractions abound all around us and often surround our life in ways that we may not fully recognize or even understand. So these questions are very pointed and may create a level of discomfort. That is not necessarily the intent, but it certainly may be the result. We will not address these specifically, but will simply use them as a backdrop to help us deepen our walk with Christ, as well as our understanding of our personal finances.

1. What do we really want to do with our life?
2. How do we really want to live?
3. What is it in our life that drives us and motivates us more than anything else?
4. What would we consider to be the priority and primary focus of our life?
5. At a daily level do we live to serve ourselves, to live for ourselves, and to cater to our personal desires and wants, or have we found a greater purpose for living?
6. How much do we truly want to be a blessing to both the Lord and to other people?
7. Is it our desire to touch the lives of other people with love, kindness, concern, and a very Christlike spirit?

At some point in each believer's life they have to make a decision as to what is really important to them. Anyone anywhere can accumulate an abundance of things and wealth, while at the same time not actually possessing anything of any real value. There is nothing wrong with someone accumulating wealth. In reality money is neutral in and of itself. However, if accumulating wealth and things is what someone's life is actually all about, then in reality they are pursuing the wrong goals. Everyone is familiar with the passage in [Revelation 3:15-17](#) where Jesus told the church at Laodicea that even though they were rich, had become wealthy, and had no apparent needs that in reality they were wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked. One of the encouraging truths of the Christian life is that the believer possesses what the Scriptures call "**the true riches**". [Luke 16:11](#) says it this way,

Lk 16:11 Therefore if you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches?

In this context, "**the true riches**" are those things in a believer's life that have eternal value and create eternal rewards. Stated another way, "**the true riches**" are what allow the believer to become a channel of blessing in their life to others.

In [2 Corinthians 8-9](#), God has provided some remarkable truths relative to what it means to be a blessing to other people. In the first seven verses of [2 Corinthians 8](#), Paul tells us of a small group of believers in Macedonia that had very little. In modern terminology people would describe them as being very poor and living at a poverty level. However, what is so remarkable about this picture is that these believers were literally begging Paul to allow them to be a blessing to other believers. They felt so intently about this that God has recorded their strong desire in the Scriptures as an encouragement for future believers. Whatever it was that they had in their life, it certainly has to be recognized as something uniquely special. There was something in their heart that caused them to long to be a blessing to other believers that they did not even know. I remember specifically when the believers in Pakistan had someone plant a bomb at the front door of their church and how approximately 50 of them lost their lives and many others were in critical condition. I felt compelled that it was imperative that we demonstrate our love for them to purchase blood for those that were dying. They would never be able to repay us, but they were believers and their needs were intense and overwhelming. Many of their lives had been broken, family members brutally murdered, and children left without parents. The need was real and the need was great and as a church we had an opportunity to be a channel of blessing to someone else. Compared to their need and our abundance, our gift was really very minimal.

It should be apparent that how people view money is an very often an effective barometer of their true spirituality. We all know the story of the rich young ruler who in his mind was deeply spiritual. However, what Jesus did was expose where his heart really was. He was very rich and it was his riches that ultimately kept him out of the kingdom of God. If someone could communicate with him today, I wonder what kind of perspective he would have now relative to the value of wealth. I am sure that it would be quite different than what he thought when he met with Christ. [Luke 12:34](#) makes a very important statement,

Lk 12:34 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

It is important to appreciate that nowhere in the Scriptures does God forbid having wealth or possessing money. What it forbids is loving money and thinking that we must have more. Notice what Jesus told his disciples in the verse preceding [Luke 12:34](#),

Lk 12:33 Sell what you have and give alms; provide yourselves money bags which do not grow old, a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches nor moth destroys.

That verse was the encouragement that Christ gave to his disciples. I am certain that it is a verse that makes each one of us very uncomfortable whether we would like to admit that are not. [1 Timothy 6:10](#) says,

1Ti 6:10 For the love of money is a root of all *kinds of* evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

[1 Timothy 6:17](#) says,

1Ti 6:17 Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy.

[Proverbs 23:4-5](#) says,

Pr 23:4 Do not overwork to be rich; Because of your own understanding, cease! ⁵ Will you set your eyes on that which is not? For *riches* certainly make themselves wings; they fly away like an eagle *toward* heaven.

[Ecclesiastes 5:10](#) says,

Ecc 5:10 He who loves silver will not be satisfied with silver; nor he who loves abundance, with increase. This also *is* vanity.

It was Judas' love of money that eventually led him to betray Christ and damn himself to eternal torment. Jesus actually commented in [Matthew 26:24](#) that it would have been better if Judas had never been born. [Acts 5:1-2](#) is the story of Ananias and Sapphira. Their love of money led them to hypocritically lie about their giving and both of them lost their lives. [Deuteronomy 8:11-14](#) talks about how loving money will make people forget God.

Dt 8:11 "Beware that you do not forget the LORD your God by not keeping His commandments, His judgments, and His statutes which I command you today, ¹² lest--*when* you have eaten and are full, and have built beautiful houses and dwell *in them*; ¹³ and *when* your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and your gold are multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied; ¹⁴ when your heart is lifted up, and you forget the LORD your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage;

In the parable of the sower, [Mark 4:19](#) speaks of how people are deceived by riches and how the Word of God is choked out because of it.

Mk 4:19 and the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things entering in choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.

One of the lessons that certainly may come out of these studies is that those who violate God's financial principles in regards to money may find that they never seem to have enough of it. People who find

themselves in that situation probably need to consider whether they need more or merely want more. The Bible declares in [1 Timothy 6:6](#) that “**godliness with contentment is great gain**”. Having limited resources may often times be God’s way of revealing that a person’s priorities are out of alignment with God’s Word. Very often people have abused the resources that God had previously given to them, and especially through the abuse of credit. It is the mismanagement of what God had previously given them that has often led to their current lack of resources.

There are many reasons why people lack money. For some it may be simple greed or being stingy. [Luke 6:38](#) says,

Lk 6:38 Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you."

[Proverbs 11:24](#) says,

Pr 11:24 There is *one* who scatters, yet increases more; And there is *one* who withholds more than is right, But it leads to poverty.

[Proverbs 21:5](#) is about people are impulsive or hasty with money.

Pr 21:5 The plans of the diligent *lead* surely to plenty, But *those of everyone who is hasty, surely to poverty.*

Obviously, many people lack money because they are lazy. [Proverbs 24:30-34](#) gives the picture of a very lazy individual.

Pr 24:30 I went by the field of the lazy *man*, And by the vineyard of the man devoid of understanding; ³¹ And there it was, all overgrown with thorns; Its surface was covered with nettles; Its stone wall was broken down. ³² When I saw *it*, I considered *it* well; I looked on *it* and received instruction: ³³ A little sleep, a little slumber, A little folding of the hands to rest; ³⁴ So shall your poverty come *like* a prowler, And your need like an armed man.

Many people lack money because they have built their life around the wrong priorities. [Proverbs 28:19](#),

Pr 28:19 He who tills his land will have plenty of bread, But he who follows frivolity will have poverty enough!

Throughout the Scriptures there are guidelines that help the believer to know how to spend. [1 Timothy 5:8](#) says that a man is to provide for his own family and if he does not that he is worse than an unbeliever.

^{1Ti 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.

There are a number of verses that encourage believers to save for the future. There is nothing in Scripture that discourages that attribute in a person’s life. If someone is in debt, then money should be used to pay off that debt. In [Acts 20:35](#), Luke provided us the only direct quote from the earthly ministry of Christ recorded outside of the Gospels and it addresses the issue of giving.

Ac 20:35 I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.' "

When a believer is what I want to label as “discerningly generous”, it generally results in greater giving from God. It is impossible to out give God, so the promises that are associated with the issue of giving should stimulate every believer to become sacrificially generous. In America we are bombarded every day with the world’s advertising which is specifically designed to make its viewers discontent with what they have so that they purchase what they do not need with money that they do not have. Every time I walk through Lowe’s I see things that I think that I need, but in reality I do not. They are new and nice and shiny and on sale. They are designed to get me to purchase them whether I need them or not. Unfortunately, on top of that there are very bogus Christian ministries that are literally stealing millions of dollars from their supporters. There is the issue of personal self-indulgence in multiple areas and especially in various recreational activities and hobbies. Certainly we can also add to the mix a simple lack of faith in God’s provision.

As Paul wrote [2 Corinthians 8-9](#), he specifically had in mind the issue of the church giving to meet the needs of the poor. Many Christians in the early church were poor for many different reasons. One of those reasons stemmed from the fact that they had become Christians and were therefore de-synagogued which meant that the Jewish community would not purchase their goods or use them for services. It is interesting that Paul did not write concerning the poor in Corinth. Most likely that is because the Corinthian church was actually taking care of its poor. Secondly, Paul did not focus on giving to the poor in general. His focus was primarily on the needs of the believers in the Jerusalem church. From their very inception, they had to deal with extreme poverty. It is important to appreciate that on the Day of Pentecost that the majority of people who were there were actually pilgrims who had come for the Passover and those events that followed after. It is important to appreciate that there were no Christians anywhere else in the world, so many of the new believers remained in Jerusalem so that they could hear the teaching of the apostles. The majority of them were not wealthy and did not have the resources to remain in Jerusalem for an indefinite period of time. Many of them were visiting with their relatives, but when they converted to Christianity most of them had to leave. So the early Christians who lived in Jerusalem began to take in many of the believers. The hardship that this produced is very difficult to appreciate. It would be similar to the nearly 15,000 believers that were saved when Eddie preached on national television. In a Muslim country they were literally expelled from their families and the local Christians in and around Lahore, Pakistan had to take them in and help support them. Because they were Christians in Pakistan, the majority of the existing believers were also poor – which compounded the issues.

On top of their poverty in Jerusalem, there was also persecution. Listen to how Jesus communicated this to his disciples on the night of the Passover in [John 16:2](#)

Jn 16:2 They will put you out of the synagogues; yes, the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service.

This was their lot and the early Christians who lived in Jerusalem have to be commended. [Acts 2:44-45](#) gives us a picture of how the early church responded to this need.

Ac 2:44 Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, ⁴⁵ and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need.

[Acts 4:32](#) adds this when it says,

Ac 4:32 Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common.

The result of this great generosity is given in [Acts 4:34-35](#),

Ac 4:34 Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, ³⁵ and laid *them* at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need.

However, as the needs grew and the persecution increased, the Jerusalem church simply became overwhelmed with the needs and undersupplied with resources. So Paul recognized this particular need and determined to take up a collection for the church in Jerusalem from the churches that were in Asia Minor and throughout Europe. [Romans 15:25-27](#) says,

Ro 15:25 But now I am going to Jerusalem to minister to the saints. ²⁶ For it pleased those from Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor among the saints who are in Jerusalem. ²⁷ It pleased them indeed, and they are their debtors. For if the Gentiles have been partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister to them in material things.

Please keep in mind that many of the Jewish believers were still suspicious of Gentile believers. Paul recognized this and sought to strengthen the spiritual bond between the Gentile congregations in the church in Jerusalem. Helping with their poverty and persecution would certainly help remove some of the suspicion, bitterness, and hostility that still existed. Their gift would be a tangible expression of the spiritual reality that through His death that Jesus Christ had broken down the barrier that divided them.

[Ephesians 2:14](#) says,

Eph 2:14 For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation,

[1 Corinthians 16:1-3](#) speaks of this same collection for the saints in Jerusalem.

1Co 16:1 Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also: ² On the first *day* of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come. ³ And when I come, whomever you approve by *your* letters I will send to bear your gift to Jerusalem.