

2 Corinthians 8:1-15

Our last study provided several motives for financial integrity, and they were based on the behavior of some very devout Christians from the Macedonian churches in Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea. Their giving was motivated by God's grace in their life and transcended very difficult circumstances. Their giving was with joy and not hindered by poverty, and it was generous, sacrificial, and voluntary. To these individuals it was a privilege to demonstrate their love for other believers.

[2 Corinthians 8 and 9](#) are about meeting the desperate needs of other individuals who were being threatened with death and starvation. Many of those suffering were believers, but many were not. The need for missions is an unending call that never ends. The challenge of the church is to reach and help those who find themselves in those kinds of desperate situations. If a church forsakes that responsibility, then in some ways they cannot be considered a legitimate New Testament church. They may be an institutional church or a denominational church, but not a New Testament church. Now, what is special about the opening verses of [2 Corinthians 8](#) is that the grace of God was being poured out abundantly on these churches of Macedonia. [2 Corinthians 8:1](#) says,

^{2Co 8:1} Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia:

They were personally experiencing the grace of God, His abundant favor, and His blessings in a very special way. However, after saying that, it is important to recognize that they were still churches that were very persecuted. [1 Thessalonians 1:6](#) says,

^{1Th 1:6} And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit,

The Greek word for “**affliction**” is “*thlipsis*” and means pressure, oppression, distress, and tribulation. It was a word that was used to describe the pressing of grapes together to extract the juice. The idea is that these people were being crushed by life. We have never personally experienced anything like what they were experiencing. The grinding poverty and the tribulation they were suffering made simple, ordinary life very difficult, and almost impossible.

[1 Thessalonians 2:14](#) says,

^{1Th 2:14} For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God which are in Judea in Christ Jesus. For you also suffered the same things from your own countrymen, just as they *did* from the Judeans,

[2 Thessalonians 1:4](#) says,

^{2Th 1:4} so that we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure,

We know that theirs was a “**deep poverty**” ([1 Corinthians 8:2](#)), a poverty down to the depths. The actual word for “**deep**” means extremely deep, or in our vernacular it means “rock bottom”. We get our English Word “bathysphere” from it, which is a vessel that is used to probe the depths of the ocean. High taxes, slavery, low economic status, and persecution had reduced the Macedonian believers to abject poverty. In fact, the word for “**poverty**” is a Greek word used to describe those who were forced

to beg to survive. Paul uses the same word in [2 Corinthians 8:9](#) to describe Christ's poverty when He emptied Himself and took on the form of a servant. However, in the midst of all of that, they still had an abundance of joy. [2 Corinthians 8:2](#) says,

2Co 8:2 that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality.

The nature of the ordeal that these believers were enduring was extreme in nature. However, one of the obvious principles in this verse is that godly giving utterly transcends difficult circumstances, and when it happens it creates deep joy in the believer. Their joy simply transcended the pain, the sorrow, and the suffering that they were experiencing. It appears that they rejoiced at laying up treasures in heaven. [Matthew 6:20](#) says,

Mt 6:20 but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.

The greater blessing is always to the giver more than the receiver. [Acts 20:35](#) says,

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.' "

[Luke 6:38](#), a very often abused passages, 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."

In the midst of their “**deep poverty**”, Paul says that they abounded in “**liberality**”. These Macedonians were deeply committed to living for Christ, so when they heard of other Christians that were in great need, they gave liberally out of their poverty. The word “**liberality**” means singleness, sincerely, simply, and with an open heart. It is a word that means generosity. In other words, they simply opened their hearts and gave all that they could even in their poverty. An interesting nuance is that the term “**liberality**” is the opposite of being double minded. Double minded people find their ability to give crippled because their concern is for themselves and for temporal matters. These concerns generally conflict with their concern for others and for the kingdom of God. It is hard for them to trust God and His promises to meet their needs.

Secondly, Paul also says that they gave beyond their ability to give. V3 says,

2Co 8:3 For I bear witness that according to *their ability*, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing,

Nobody had to make some kind of special appeal. There was no pressure on anyone. They simply recognized the need and gave freely. They went beyond their ability to give. The word “**ability**” is the word generally translated “**power**” – “*dunamis*”. It is the same word used in [Matthew 25:15](#) which says,

Mt 25:15 And to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to each according to his own ability; and immediately he went on a journey.

Please appreciate that the New Testament sets no fixed amount or percentage for giving. There is no 10% principle taught in the New Testament. Obviously, the Macedonians “**gave beyond their ability**” because of the pressing circumstances of the Christians who were greatly suffering in Jerusalem. Their need was very great, so the Macedonians giving was “**beyond their ability**”. Probably anything that they would have given would have been “**beyond their ability**”. [Hebrews 13:16](#) says,

Heb 13:16 But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.

What compelled the Macedonian was simply the needs that existed in Jerusalem. It appears that they took the words of Jesus in [Matthew 6:25-34](#) literally and the words of Paul in [Philippians 4:19](#) literally, which says,

Php 4:19 And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

V3 also says that their giving was voluntary. The last phrase says “**they were freely willing**”. In other words, their giving was of their own initiative. It was self-motivated and spontaneous. The NIV says “**entirely on their own**”. The AMP says “**they did it voluntarily**”. The ESV and NASB says “**of their own accord**”. The point is that they were not coerced, manipulated, or intimidated by false teaching to give. There was no deep, dramatic, or begging appeal for them to give. They simply gave freely – no coercion, no compulsion, no strong-arming and making someone feel guilty for not giving. If you ever have anyone pressure you that way, keep your money!

This is a very important point because there are many who advocate mandatory tithing, but New Testament Christian giving is entirely voluntary. There is no teaching in the New Testament for tithing. The argument for tithing is based on a misunderstanding of the Old Testament. The argument is that tithing was not commanded in the Mosaic Law, but also existed before it. The argument is that tithing transcends the Law and is a universal standard for giving. That argument, however, is flawed because it is faulty reasoning to assume that an ordinance is permanent simply because it existed before the Law was given. Animal sacrifices also existed before the Law, yet they were done away with by the final sacrifice of Jesus Christ during the church age.

The period from Moses to Jesus, when the Mosaic Law was in effect, had both free will offerings and required giving. [Leviticus 27:30-32](#) says,

Lev 27:30 And all the tithe of the land, *whether* of the seed of the land *or* of the fruit of the tree, is the LORD'S. It is holy to the LORD. ³¹ If a man wants at all to redeem *any* of his tithes, he shall add one-fifth to it. ³² And concerning the tithe of the herd or the flock, of whatever passes under the rod, the tenth one shall be holy to the LORD.

The required tithe was given to support the Levites in their priestly service to the Lord. [Numbers 18:21,24](#) says,

Nu 18:21 "Behold, I have given the children of Levi all the tithes in Israel as an inheritance in return for the work which they perform, the work of the tabernacle of meeting.

Nu 18:24 For the tithes of the children of Israel, which they offer up *as* a heave offering to the LORD, I have given to the Levites as an inheritance; therefore I have said to them, 'Among the children of Israel they shall have no inheritance.' "

What has to be appreciated about this practice is that during this time Israel was a theocracy, especially in the days before the monarchy of the kings, and the theocracy constituted Israel's government. So the tithe was a form of taxation. In addition, the Israelites had to pay a second tithe to fund the religious festivals. Then there was a third tithe that had to be given each third year to support the poor ([Deuteronomy 14:28-29](#)). So the taxation, or what we often call a tithe, was nearly 25%. Then on top of that, there were freewill offerings for things like building the tabernacle and later on taxes to their Roman overlords. They would have just loved 10%!

The principle that comes out of all of this is simple - freewill giving is to the Lord and required giving is to the government (such as with Joseph when the land of Egypt was taxed 20% during the years of plenty). Jesus clearly taught to give to Caesar what was his. Please appreciate that the amount that a believer gives as an offering is something that he personally determines. [2 Corinthians 9:7](#) says,

2Co 9:7 So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.

Thirdly, in v4 Paul says that they begged for the privilege to share.

2Co 8:4 imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints.

These people were literally begging to be a blessing to other people. The word for “**imploring**” is a strong word that means to plead. It is the same word that was used of a leper who begged Jesus to heal him, and it was used by a father's desperate plea for Jesus to cast a demon out of his son. It is the same word that Paul used in [2 Corinthians 5:20](#) when he begged sinners to be reconciled to God. The people that were making the sacrifice and investment were doing the begging. In my mind, this is the grace of giving because it has nothing to do with ability or being well off, but sees this kind of sacrifice as a spiritual privilege.

In reading v4 it almost seems as if Paul recognized their deep poverty and tried to talk them out of actually giving as much as they did. He thought that it was way beyond their means (and it was), but they insisted because they wanted to share in “**the fellowship of the ministering to the saints**”. That is a very interesting statement because what it says is that giving to the needs of others is a way of being able to fellowship with them. In reality the idea of “**fellowship**” is much more than just sitting around eating cake and drinking coffee after a service. It comes from a Greek word that implies both partnership and participation with other believers. In other words, the Macedonians felt that they were partners with the saints in Jerusalem and they wanted to invest in their lives sacrificially.

Fourthly, Scripture says that they first gave themselves to the Lord in v5.

2Co 8:5 And not only as we had hoped, but they first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God.

Let me say this in a different way. What this means is that these believers gave all that they were and had to the Lord. They were offering their life to God. If someone has not given themselves to the Lord wholeheartedly, then they will never have the kind of heart that the Macedonians portrayed. The supreme act of worship is not giving money to meet the needs of other people or to help Christian

missionaries or to even support the church. The supreme act of worship is not attending church or singing songs, but it is giving **ourselves** to the Lord. [Romans 12:1](#) says,

Ro 12:1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.

The NIV says “**this is your spiritual act of worship**”. The ESV says “**which is your spiritual worship**”. The NASB says “**which is your spiritual service of worship**”.

The problem is that when we give things rather than ourselves that it can easily become our religion. In fact, many churches artfully define salvation and maturity by how much someone gives. In many churches, the rich seem to have the most influence in the church. [James 2:1-6](#) talks about this,

Jas 2:1 My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, *the Lord of glory*, with partiality. ²For if there should come into your assembly a man with gold rings, in fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes, ³and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say to him, "You sit here in a good place," and say to the poor man, "You stand there," or, "Sit here at my footstool," ⁴have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts? ⁵Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world *to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him*? ⁶But you have dishonored the poor man. Do not the rich oppress you and drag you into the courts?

These Macedonians Christians reveal an important truth about giving and Christian maturity. They teach us that giving is not a matter of how much someone possesses, but it is an expression of a very unselfish and loving heart. When someone gives themselves to the Lord, what they are doing is releasing control of their life over to Christ. They are placing their life under His control. If someone is actually going to give themselves to the Lord, then they must purpose in their heart to allow their life to glorify Him in all that they do. His will must become the priority of their life instead of their personal will. This is when God is actually able to use someone. The way that a believer glorifies God is by fulfilling God’s purposes for their life. That entails many different areas of life. Think of it this way - financial integrity does not take place in a vacuum that is isolated from other Christian virtues. It must not be done contrary to what is in the heart for that would be hypocrisy.

Notice [2 Corinthians 8:7](#),

^{2Co 8:7} 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.

The word “**abound**” means to exist in abundance, to overflow, to be abundantly furnished with something, and to excel and be excellent. One of the responsibilities that I have as a pastor is to challenge you as a Christian to a higher level of spiritual growth. My responsibility is to challenge you, to urge you, and at times to provoke you to a greater level of spiritual maturity. Your responsibility is to respond to God’s truth and encouragement that is planted in your heart through His Word. What Paul is saying in this verse is that until the Corinthians were abounding in the listed spiritual attributes that it was very doubtful that they would “**abound**” in the area of financial integrity in their life. The idea of financial responsibility and integrity is integrally a part of a person’s spiritual character. The Bible is very clear

that if an individual is not faithful in what it calls “**unrighteous mammon**” (money) that God will not commit to them the “**true riches**”. [Luke 16:11](#) says,

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

One obvious reason why some people never seem to mature in their Christian life is because of their greed, stinginess, and unfaithfulness with how they handle money. They waste it on themselves and generally just give God their leftovers - which cost them nothing. The result is that they never mature in the deeper things of God in their life. What money does is reveal our values and our priorities in life, and much too often Christians have the wrong values and priorities. Notice that in v7 that the Corinthians, despite many of the negative things that had transpired in their church, had some amazing attributes - faith, speech, knowledge, diligence, and love. Apparently, however, they were still lacking in the area of financial responsibility and so Paul was using the example of the Macedonians to encourage them in this area. Despite all of their good qualities, they were still incomplete in this one area and Paul was encouraging them to grow in this particular area of grace. They simply had a need to mature in this area.

If I can state this in a relatively strong way, there is no way for a Christian to grow spiritually without committing their finances to Christ. Too often we are willing to give God our money (which is actually His to begin with), but He does not have our heart. We will not be able to finish what God has started in us without surrendering this area of our life to Him as well. Whether we like it or not, everything that we have belongs to God, and He has given it to us as stewards.

Please notice in [2 Corinthians 8:8](#) that Paul does **not** command the Corinthians to give.

^{2Co 8:8} I speak not by commandment, but I am testing the sincerity of your love by the diligence of others.

If giving to God’s work is forced or coerced, then it has no benefit and certainly does not please God. No matter what you give or how much or how little you give, God is not pleased unless it is willingly and cheerfully given. As your pastor I encourage you **NOT** to give what you do not want to give. If you cannot give cheerfully and willingly, then please do not give.