

2 Corinthians 8:1-15 cont.

As Paul makes his way through this letter, it should be clear that he is not giving the Corinthians a command about giving. In fact [2 Corinthians 8:8](#) says,

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

Whatever giving that someone practices should be done voluntarily and with a willing heart, or else it is not what could be considered to be grace-giving. What Paul has done is to simply provide an example of other believers who were willing to give sacrificially even in their deep poverty. Someone's financial status does not determine whether or not they are more or less important than someone else. The Macedonians, of whom Paul is speaking, were extremely poor - what we might call "dirt poor", and God has used them as an object lesson of both faith and generosity for a very wealthy church. The question that maybe each of us would need to ask is whether or not we are truly an example for other people to follow in this area of our life. In other words, would other believers be challenged by our example of giving? It has to be appreciated that the deep love that the Macedonian believers had for Christ and for others who were in desperate need is what actually sparked their generosity. They not only demonstrated, but they proved their love for others by their sacrificial gift. So, what Paul is doing is urging and exhorting the Corinthians to follow the example of the Macedonians and to prove the sincerity, authenticity, and genuineness of their love by giving to the believers in Jerusalem. It would reveal what was really taking place in the heart of the Corinthians.

Now, just so we do not lose the emphasis of the example, Paul provides [2 Corinthians 8:9](#) which says,

^{2Co 8:9} 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.

Obviously, Christ is the supreme example. He dwelt in the glory, majesty, dominion, and power of the Godhead. He dwelt in what the Bible calls in [1 Timothy 6:16](#) as "**unapproachable light**". In other words, the splendor and brilliance of the Godhead was unapproachable. Christ possessed every good and perfect thing that could be possessed, and He had all the worship and adoration of heavenly creatures. Yet for our sakes He became poor and divested Himself of His eternal riches. Just think of what he was willing to sacrifice. God became a man. He took on flesh and blood. He was rejected and despised by men which He had created. Notice that "**He became poor, that you...might become rich**". In fact, the beginning of v9 says "**For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ...**" Each of us know that Christ came down from heaven and gave His life as a sacrifice for us personally. He was motivated by an unmerited kindness to people who did not deserve His sacrifice. "**He was rich**" and owned everything in heaven and on earth, but the true riches are never composed of that which is material. We live in a culture that has enjoyed a high level of prosperity for a long time, but unfortunately in that timeframe that prosperity has become the focus of the lives of many people.

We just have to think about this for a moment because Christ possessed all of the riches of heaven. There was nothing that was not His, yet for our sakes He was willing to become poor so that our lives could benefit from His sacrifice. Through His sacrifice believers received all of the blessings of salvation - forgiveness, joy, peace with God, spiritual life, and eternal life. [1 Peter 1:4](#) says that God has begotten us to "**a living hope**" (v3) and,

1Pe 1:4 to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you,

Romans 8:17 says,

Ro 8:17 and if children, then heirs - heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him*, that we may also be glorified together.

The simple point in all of this is that the sacrificial love and giving of Christ's life should motivate genuine believers to give freely, sacrificially, and generously to others who have great needs that they simply cannot meet on their own. Please appreciate that this is not an appeal for you to give money to this church. This is not an appeal for sacrificial giving for this local congregation. It is not that at all and it has not been intended for that purpose since the beginning of the study. This is an appeal to follow the example of Christ and to be sacrificial in your giving when there is a legitimate need to do so. Listen to how James brings attention to this in **James 2:15- 16**,

Jas 2:15 If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, ¹⁶ and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what *does it* profit?

1 John 3:17 says,

1Jn 3:17 But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?

It is my opinion that God will bring people like this into our life in order to test us and to prove the reality of our love for others or the superficial reality of our love for others. The truth cannot exist in isolation from our everyday lives. I have said it often, but theology and doctrine are for living. They are not words for those in the ivory towers, but they are principles and truths that are to govern the lives of believers. There are not two worlds in which believers live - there is only one. When someone gives sacrificially to help someone with a great need, that is a spiritual as anything that they could do that they thought was spiritual such as prayer or Bible study. In some ways, the seemingly mundane issue of the Corinthians offering to help other believers in great need was deeply connected to the central truth of Christianity, namely, that the voluntary poverty of Christ is able to make those who are spiritually destitute to actually inherit the kingdom of God. Paul was not trying to induce the Corinthians to give by gimmicks, tricks, persuasive rhetoric, or fear. His methodology was simply to provide the example of the Macedonians and the supreme example of Christ as the model that brings about the grace of giving into a believer's life. It is unbiblical to be selfish when a great need exists.

Now I realize that there are few topics in the church at large that are more sensitive to congregations than the issue of money. Any mention of giving, contributions, or fundraising campaigns is generally viewed as being inappropriate, intrusive, and for many very offensive. In fact the critics accuse church leaders of constantly appealing for money and often times mishandling what they receive. In the nearly 22 years that I have pastored this church, I have never taught on money or giving unless it was in the text that we were studying. We have never made a special appeal for members to give, and we have never had any kind of fundraising campaign to bolster the financial coffers. That will not change. Unfortunately, in many churches it seems that they really have lost a sense of priority as to what the real

business of the church actually is. Trust me, but you cannot find anywhere in the New Testament that building large edifices or personal ministry empires is a priority. In fact, it is not even mentioned. It is tragic that congregations and denominations have misdefined the word “success” to the extent that they have. What is mentioned is the Great Commission and taking the gospel to the ends of the earth to help those who are spiritually destitute so they might be saved. Unfortunately, within the confines of modern Christianity there are men and women who are out right hucksters, and they willfully, cynically, and unethically swindle and defraud people (even the poor) to build their petty religious empires. Often times they are aggressive and use high-pressure tactics and deceptive scams that literally drain off millions of dollars in schemes that do not advance God’s kingdom or God’s agenda.

Now, in the face of that reality, every church and each believer must understand the divine will with regard to money, as well as its use by believers and its use within the church itself. Sacrificial giving is a particular and significant element in God’s design for the Christian life. In most cases it advances His kingdom, honors and glorifies His name, meets the needs of legitimate Christians, lays up treasure in heaven, and ultimately brings God’s blessing into the believer’s life. Christians are to be careful stewards of the resources that God has entrusted to them. They must be wise about earning, saving, investing, and spending money. It is just as important to be careful in how they give.

In these two chapters, Paul is dealing with stewardship that is characterized by integrity. He would teach that giving is to be voluntary and that believers should be faithful in that area of their life. It will be evident that giving should be proportionate to what one has. Please appreciate that giving does not involve a fixed amount or a percentage such as 10%. In the New Testament it is entirely voluntarily and from a cheerful heart in so doing. Paul understood the principle that a Christian’s generosity will lead to God’s blessing in their life. [2 Corinthians 9:6-8](#) sets this principle when it says,

^{2Co 9:6} But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. ⁷ So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver. ⁸ And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work.

Any effort within a local church that has any kind of integrity to it should never pressure people to give. If the motivation for giving becomes compulsory in nature, then it is not a biblical method and should be rejected. No one should be coerced into giving – no one.

[2 Corinthians 8:11-12](#) says the following,

^{2Co 8:11} 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. ¹² 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.

If this passage is understood in its context, Paul is actually charging the church to be missions minded and in our terminology complete the mission project that they had previously started. I would take it one step further and say that it is an absolute necessity for any New Testament church to have a permanent commitment to the Great Commission and to missions is a primary ministry of their church. Please understand that there will always be mission needs. People are reeling under the weight of sin,

disease, death, hunger, poverty, ignorance, and ungodly governments. Literally thousands of people die without Christ every day simply because people just like us never cared enough to help them. In the context of v11-12, Paul is encouraging the Corinthians to finish what they started. Please appreciate that the needs of the Christians in Jerusalem was actually a foreign field to the Corinthians. Notice in v11 that Paul said that these Corinthians had a readiness to give and therefore they needed to complete what they had already started. It had actually started nearly a year before. V10 says,

^{2Co 8:10} And in this I give advice: It is to your advantage not only to be doing what you began and were desiring to do a year ago;

In [1 Corinthians 16:1-3](#), Paul instructed the Corinthians that their giving was to be done in a systematic, orderly, and routine manner on the Lord's Day.

^{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.

Historically, Paul had been falsely accused and those accusations had raised doubts about his personal integrity among the Corinthians. What that had done was to effectively halt the collection that was being gathered for those saints in Jerusalem who were desperately in need of support. Nothing cripples people's willingness to give as much as a loss of confidence in those who lead them. So Paul had to spend some time restoring the confidence that the Corinthians needed in his leadership. So that is why in v11 Paul is encouraging them to complete what they had started. In v12, Paul encouraged the Corinthians to give proportionately to what they had. He never expected them to give beyond their actual means and ability to give. That was why in the beginning of this chapter in v4 it appears that Paul actually thought that the Macedonians were giving beyond their ability to give, and so he apparently encouraged them not to give so much.

V12, however, says that if the individual first has a willing mind, then their willingness and eagerness to give beyond their means is acceptable to God. However, and this is important, God expects giving to be done according to what someone has and not according to what they do not have. For instance, never borrow to give. In other words, do not go into debt in order to be able to give. In some cases there are people who use their lack of resources as an excuse not to give it all. That is between them and God. If someone has minimal resources, then they can only give a little. If someone has more substantial resources, then they can give larger amounts. However, what is important to understand is that in relationship to God the amount is never the issue. The issue is the attitude with which a gift is made. God simply expects believers to give in proportion to their resources - not more, not less. Do not put your families in a position of unnecessary hardship. Sacrificial giving must be responsible, and so Paul wants the believers to give generously, but not to the point where the believer's families were being hurt.