

Pastor Jeremy M. Thomas
Fredericksburg Bible Church

107 East Austin

Fredericksburg, Texas 78624

830-997-8834 jthomas@fbgbible.org

A1349 – December 8, 2013 – 2 Corinthians 8:1-7
The Example Of The Macedonians

If you will open your Bible to 2 Corinthians 8 we will transition today from the first division of the book, chapters 1-7, to the second division of the book, chapters 8-9. It's important to grasp the logic of the transition. In the first division Paul wrote to Express his Joy over the Majority that had Repented. They had failed to stand up for the apostle Paul when he last visited and was strongly opposed by an opponent (2:5-11). In return, Paul departed and sent the severe letter (1:15-23; 2:3-4; 7:1). The entire situation brought Paul a lot of inner turmoil because of his great love for them (2:4; 7:5). However, God comforted him by the coming of Titus who reported that the Corinthians had repented in light of the severe letter and were now positive to Paul (7:5ff). This brought Paul great joy (7:4ff)! In the second division Paul now Encourages Them to Complete the Good Work of Giving to the Saints in Jerusalem. This work of taking up a collection for the needy saints in Jerusalem had begun before but had never been completed (1 Cor 16:1-4; 8:6). The opposition to Paul had been in the way but now that they had overcome this obstacle it was time to avail themselves of God's race by engaging in the ministry of giving to fellow Jewish believers in need.

So the connecting link between chapters 1-7 and chapters 8-9 is that the majority of the Corinthians had repented and were now being given the opportunity to complete the good work of collecting for the needy saints in Jerusalem. The principle is that sin must be repented of before further opportunities for spiritual growth can be entered into. Sin is a barrier to spiritual opportunities and spiritual advance. But once sin is repented of further opportunities for spiritual growth can occur. So now that they had repented Paul presented an opportunity to spiritually advance through the grace ministry of giving. So in this section Paul is encouraging them to give to the saints in Jerusalem to alleviate their physical sufferings.

Now it's important to recognize that giving in the NT Church is distinct from tithing in the OT nation of Israel. I won't belabor the point as there are other lessons that deal exclusively with this issue and we'll touch on many differences as we go through chapters 8 and 9. But we may briefly say three things up front. First, giving in the Church age is for believers only whereas giving in OT Israel was for believers and unbelievers within the nation. In the Church giving is only encouraged of believers, it is not encouraged of unbelievers. The Church is to support itself and not receive funds from unbelievers or governments, etc...But tithing in the OT nation of Israel was a national tax that was required of believers and unbelievers alike. The nation was composed of believers and unbelievers and the national tax was indiscriminate in this respect. There was always a believing remnant and a non-remnant but whether you were a believer or not it was required of you that you pay the national tax so that is a very clear difference between giving in the NT Church and what is known as tithing in the OT nation Israel. Second, giving in the Church age is exclusively voluntary according to the amount one would like to give and not a set amount. There is no required amount one must give. There is no ten percent requirement. One may simply give as much or as little as he wants proportionate to his assets. But tithing in the OT nation Israel was required by law and stipulated to be on average annually, 23 1/3 percent. There were actually three tithes or tenths, two of those tenths were annual taxes and one of them was triannual. So the average annually worked out to be 23 1/3 percent but in reality you would pay 20 percent in year one, 20 percent in year two and 30 percent in year three. This again is a major difference between giving in the NT Church and tithing in the OT nation Israel; there simply is no stipulated amount we must give in the NT Church whereas there was in OT Israel. Third, and perhaps most importantly, giving in the Church age is according to grace and not law. Grace, and you will see this as early as verse 1 in today's text, 8:1, giving is in terms of the grace of God and not law. What we mean by the grace of God is that it is not something natural. It is not something that can be produced by the natural man. Sure the natural man can give, he gives to all kinds of charities, there is a certain liberality that the natural man can produce. But giving according to grace produces unnatural giving and we will see that too in today's text, verse 3, 8:3. Now under the law it was not by grace but it was by law. Law means it was part of the nation's constitution such that if you didn't pay the IRS came and got you and took you to jail. It was not by grace,

it was the law and the natural man could pay the tax. There was nothing unnatural about it. But under grace giving in the NT Church there is an unnatural ability that is sourced in the grace of God. So three differences between giving in the NT Church and tithing in the OT nation Israel; giving is by believers only whereas tithing was for believers and unbelievers, giving is voluntary according to how much you want to give whereas tithing was a required amount set on average at 23 1/3 percent annually and giving is by grace whereas tithing is by law. They are totally different. And so if you go to a church that requires you to tithe or preaches tithing then they are putting you under a system of OT legalism and it's a blasphemous thing, it destroys grace, it's anti-biblical and you should leave and find a grace-oriented church.

I mention these things up front but now we want to get into this section and I mentioned that now that the Corinthians have repented Paul is giving them an opportunity to enter into the grace ministry of giving and in particular to certain saints of Jerusalem. I particularly point out saints in Jerusalem because if you glance down at verse 6 you see that Titus had already begun this collection on his last visit but it didn't get completed. And if we turn back to 1 Cor 16:1 we see that the collection was indeed for the saints of Jerusalem. "Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so do you also. 2On the first day of every week each one of you is to put aside and save, as he may prosper, so that no collections be made when I come. 3When I arrive, whomever you may approve, I will send them with letters to carry your gift" where? "To Jerusalem." So the collection was for the saints of Jerusalem and Titus had started making these collections but it was never completed so that's what Paul is now encouraging them to do, complete the good work they had started.

Now why were the saints in Jerusalem in such need? There were at least four reasons we can cite scripturally that contributed to their need. First was the fact that the Jewish believers in this region were now being ostracized from Jewish society. If you turn to Acts 2:41 you see the passage immediately following the controversial Acts 2:38 where Peter told the Jews on Pentecost, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins." That passage has been so maligned by the Church of Christ that it is virtually unintelligible to the average Gentile reader of the Bible. And so we have people thinking you have to get water baptized in order to get forgiveness even though Paul says in 1 Cor 1 that Christ didn't

send him to baptize but to preach the gospel. So very clearly you create a contradiction once you try to add water baptism in the gospel. Paul says he wasn't sent to baptize but to preach the gospel so water baptism isn't part of the gospel. What is it? Well, if it was understood what water baptism meant to a Jew in the 1st century all confusion would quickly vanish. For a Jew, as you see in verse 41, who received Jesus as the Messiah, he would immediately be water baptized. Why? In order to dissociate himself from Judaism and publicly identify himself with the one he was believing in, that is, Jesus. Water baptism was nothing more than a symbolic way in Jewish culture of cutting oneself off from being identified with one group and identifying himself with a new group. And these identifying marks were very important in Jewish society. So much so that to dissociate oneself from Judaism by being baptized in the name of Jesus would signify a formal break with Jewish society. And all privileges which come with being in good standing with the Jewish community would simply be unavailable to you. And that's why you see in Acts 2:44 that the Jewish believers are all living in communal fellowship with one another. They didn't have access to the goods and services of Jewish society any more. There were all on their own. So in verse 45 the rich were selling their property and possessions and sharing them with those who had need. They had to come up with their own benevolence system. If you turn to Acts 4:32 you see the same type of early communal fellowship in Jerusalem among the Jewish saints. "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." This was their benevolence system. Notice verse 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 and lay them at the apostles' feet, and they would be distributed to each as any had need." So there was a benevolence account put into place among the early Jewish believers in Jerusalem and the reason was because as these people believed and were baptized it formally cut them off from any privileges of being in good standing with Jewish society. So the baptism had nothing to do with going to heaven, it had to do with a formal cutting off from Jewish society and a statement of new identity with Jesus Christ. As a consequence those who had need could not have their needs met by the system of charity put in place by Judaism. So the new believers formed their own benevolence fund. Now it's important to recognize that this is not socialism. These verses are used by the liberal Christian to say that Jesus and the apostles were

socialists. But this is not socialism at all because socialism means no private property, it means the government owns all property and so the government distributes wealth where it wants to, by taking from the rich and giving to the poor but you see in these passages in early Acts that the individuals had private property and they voluntarily sold their property and possessions and gave it to the poor. So this is entirely different from socialism. The Bible does not support socialism. The Bible is capitalistic. It supports private ownership and voluntary giving. So the next time you hear some jerk say the NT teaches socialism you can show him very easily this is not socialism. The first reason there was great need in Jerusalem is that the Jewish believers in this region were ostracized from Jewish society by being baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. But apparently this communal support was not sufficient to solve their needs. Their needs were further compounded by a second cause. Second is the fact that there was a famine during the reign of Emperor Claudius, the effects of which were still prevalent, particularly in the land of Judea. Turn to Acts 11:27. "Now at this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. One of them named Agabus stood up and began to indicate by the Spirit that there would certainly be a great famine all over the world. And this took place in the reign of Claudius." The prophecy of Agabus was fulfilled around AD46 and Paul was writing ten years later in AD55-56, so the effects of this famine were still prevalent. We know in particular in the land of Judea is where you first find believers outside the land taking collections and sending them to the believers in Judea. Verse 29, "And in the proportion that any of the disciples had means, each of them determined to send a contribution for the relief of the brethren living in Judea." Note by the way that they didn't send money in general to all the people in Judea, they sent the money to believers in Judea. The unbelieving Jews could tap into local charities run by the authorities of Judaism but that was cut off to the believing Jew. So they sent their funds exclusively to the believers. The Church supports its own. And I'm going to show you later there is a very practical application of this in healthcare that you and your family can take advantage of and for a fraction of the cost and great coverage. Believers sharing with fellow believers and it meets the criteria for Obama's Affordable Health Care Act, or should I say non-affordable. So a second factor contributing to the need in Judea was the great famine under Emperor Claudius. But that's not all. Third is the fact the Jews in the land had to pay double taxes; they had to pay taxes to Rome and taxes (or the tithe) to the Jewish authorities. As to both of these taxes recall that our Lord said in the

Gospels to Peter before the Church, “render unto Caesar what is Caesars and to God what is God’s.” The Jews in the land had double taxes, that which belonged to Rome and that which belonged to God to support the Temple worship, the 23 1/3 percent. Jews outside the land in *Diaspora* only had to pay the single tax to Rome. So the double tax was only for the Jewish believers in and around Jerusalem and this contributed to their need. Finally, a fourth possible reason is the church in Jerusalem had a larger number of apostles, teachers and missionaries to support than other local churches. Jerusalem was where the church began and Acts 15:4 evidences they had a lot of leadership to support financially. So if you add all four of these burdens up; ostracism from Jewish society via baptism in the name of Jesus, famine that particularly affected the region of Judea, double taxes to Rome and the Temple and more ministry leaders to support, you get a situation in Jerusalem where the saints are struggling financially, despite the efforts they personally made to live in community. And so when Paul went out and established churches in Galatia, Asia Minor, Macedonia and Achaia he got them solidified in the faith and then encouraged them to meet the needs of their fellow brethren in Jerusalem (cf Rom 15:26; 1 Cor 16:1; 2 Cor 8:1-5; 9:2, 4; Acts 20:35).

So with that background let’s take a look at 8:1 and see how Paul urges them to help the needy brethren in Jerusalem. There’s a tactic Paul uses here. Sometimes we need to think about tact. I know lots of people who know the truth but they have no tact in presenting it. It’s just boom, boom, boom and you go handle it buddy. They lack tact and they don’t think tact is important. It’s just the truth and if you don’t like the truth you can go suck an egg. And yet that’s not the tact Paul uses. Paul doesn’t say, “Now you need to give money to those hurting believers because I’m an apostle and I said so.” That is a tact some people use but that’s not the tact Paul used. Paul could have used that tact. He was an apostle and He spoke with authority of Jesus Christ but he didn’t do that. Nor does Paul say, “It’s your duty to give to your fellow believers and so you should do it.” It may have been their duty and he could have said that but he didn’t say that either. Instead what Paul does is give an example by saying, “You know, there are these other believers in the churches of Macedonia and they gave up to their ability and even beyond their ability. They gave out of the depths of poverty. Would you like to be a part of this work as well?” Sometimes it’s how you say it that makes all the difference in the world. In other words, if we just said something with more

tact the other party might agree readily whereas if we say it without tact they don't agree; an important lesson to learn, not from Jeremy Thomas but from the Apostle Paul.

And notice in verse 1 the source of the Macedonian's giving. **Now, brethren, we wish to make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia.** What's the source of the giving? The ultimate source? The **grace of God**. It wasn't mere human philanthropy. Philanthropy is natural not supernatural. It's something the natural man can do. But what the Macedonian's did no natural man can do. Why? Because it requires the grace of God, the supernatural enabling of God by the Spirit of God and no natural man has the Spirit of God. So the situation Paul is revealing to them is one that involves a supernatural enabling and it's the epistolary parallel to the gospel story of the widow's mite. Remember the widow who gave one mite, two lepta, two copper cents which amounted to 1/64 of a denarius. 300 denarius was a year's wages so 1/64 of that is nothing, practically nothing, about a penny, and yet the Lord says she put in more than all the rich people. And why? Because it was such a big amount? No, because she gave out of her poverty, she put in all that she had to live on, it came out of the food budget, but they gave out of their wealth, they had plenty to spare. It's a remarkable story and this is the epistolary parallel to that story, the **grace of God** toward the Macedonians such that they gave according to their ability and beyond. That only occurs by the supernatural enabling of God.

Macedonia was named after Phillip of Macedon, the father of Alexander the Great. He was the man who made Alexander great because he gave him great training. Alexander was the personal student of Aristotle. And he conquered the world in just 11 years. In 11 years he conquered Persia and extended his kingdom all the way to the Indus River in India. He was 21 and he set out to conquer the world and his entire career was one of conquering. He was one of the greatest military commanders in the entire history of the world. And this is the territory of his father, Phillip of Macedon. And who now lives in Macedon? Believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. Phillip came and went, Alexander came and went, but Christ remains. This territory is still inhabited by believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. Now at the time we know there were churches at Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea, there may have been churches at Apollonia, Pella, Neapolis and Amphipolis, we don't know.

All we know is that Paul traveled this route and there were believers along this route in the three cities of Thessalonica, Philippi and Berea and the grace of God had been given to them or granted to them. God was the source of the grace that resulted in two things in verse 2.

First, **that in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy.** We know from the epistles written to the Thessalonians and the Philippians and the transitional book of Acts that those two churches faced persecution. Paul himself was kicked out of Thessalonica. Thessalonica is where Paul wrote about the imminent rapture because they had fellow believer getting persecuted unto death and so he comforted them with that truth. At Philippi Paul was arrested illegally, along with Silas and jailed. Philippi is where Paul and Silas were singing in prison and the earthquake came and the doors flung open so they could escape and the Philippian jailer, thinking his prisoners had escaped, raised his sword to shove it down his throat and Paul stopped him, "We're still here, none have escaped." That incident led to the great question, "What must I do to be saved?" to which Paul responded, "Believe on the Lord Jesus and you shall be saved, you and your household," meaning, salvation is by faith alone. And just as Paul faced affliction in these cities so the believers there also faced **a great deal of affliction.** And yet what was their response? Whaaa? Crying? Throwing a big temper tantrum? Woe is me? No, the text says, **an abundance of joy.** That's not a natural response. That's a supernatural response. That's a response rooted only in verse 1, the grace of God. Only He can enable us to respond that way when people are dying and being persecuted illegally for their faith.

The second result of the grace of God in verse 2, is that **in...their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality.** The Greek is difficult to translate, very difficult, especially the last word, **liberality**, which should be translated "singleness of purpose" or "single-heartedness." The churches in Macedonia had a single purpose when they gave and that was to aid the saints in Jerusalem. Believers helping other believers across denominational lines. Of course they didn't have denominations back then but in any case the doctrinal agreement was strong at the time and so they are ready and willing to help the saints in Jerusalem.

Now I want you to note two things about the Macedonian's circumstances. First they were **in a great ordeal of affliction** and that alone is enough to

keep most people from giving. And yet in great affliction they didn't store up for themselves but they gave to others! But that's not all. Second, they were also in **deep poverty**. These people were down to the bottom. They didn't have money to buy groceries, they didn't have money to pay the rent, these people were broke! And the Greek says they reached down in the bottom of the piggy bank and gave. It's a remarkable story of the grace of God. You can't do that on your own steam, out of the flesh, if you have no money for groceries tomorrow and you give it to some other believers that's supernatural, and as I mentioned before, it's the epistolary parallel to the story of the widow's mite in the gospel. But the big story here isn't their affliction, as bad as it was, and it isn't their giving from deep poverty, the story is the grace of God.

Verse 3 explains what the grace of God did. **For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability, they gave of their own accord.** This is remarkable. They gave more than they could afford to give and they did it voluntarily. The Greek word **of their own accord** means of their own choice, voluntarily. They didn't have anyone twisting their arm. "Now you better give or else God's not going to bless you." They didn't have anyone putting pressure on them. It was just what they wanted to do. Why did they want to do it? Because the grace of God was at work in their life and this fueled them to want to give. Notice how much they wanted to give in verse 4.

Begging us with much urging for the favor of participation in the support of the saints. The Greek **favor of participation** in the NASB is better translated "gracious fellowship." They begged Paul and urged him despite his telling them, you're poor and you need the money, don't give, and yet they begged him to take it and urged him to take it. And why? So they could be involved in the "gracious fellowship" of **supporting** other **saints**. They wanted to be a part of other believer's lives; they wanted to give to them. And they begged Paul to take the money to them. They were digging the last pennies out of the piggy bank and saying "Paul, take this to them." And Paul would say, "No." And they'd say, "Yes, this is our own choice, this is what we want to do with our money. That is not philanthropy. That is theophanthropy, a love of God for man shed abroad in the hearts of believers!

And this, Paul says in verse 5, **not as we had expected**. That's the mark of grace. It's not something **expected** because it's extraordinary. And he puts a strong contrast here, *alla* in the Greek, a strong contrast. They didn't just give money to the saints in Jerusalem. Before that they gave themselves to something else and this is always necessary, this is the remarkable thing in the passage. He says, **they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God**. See, before you can give with the proper motives to others you have to first give yourselves to the Lord. That's the key! That is, do you give yourself to Him? Do you say, "This is not my life and these are not my assets but they're Yours and I give myself to you." That's dependence, that's faith, that's submission to God. You give yourself to Him first and you say, "Whatever you want, that's what I want." Paul did not expect this. This was totally unexpected but they did first give themselves to God and to the apostle's authority which is the will of God. We are to obey the voice of the apostles because the apostles are the voice of God and therefore to follow the apostle's voice in the Scriptures is to follow the voice of God in heaven. They are one and the same word, there is no other authority. Scripture and only Scripture, *sola scriptura*! We give ourselves to it, we surrender to God! Paul did not expect this but this is the proper order, if you are going to give to others you must first give yourself over to God and to His authority in the Scriptures given by the apostles. Then and only then can you think about giving to others.

Verse 6, **So we urged Titus that as he had previous made a beginning, so he would also complete in you this gracious work as well**. That is, now you have the opportunity, O Corinthians, to follow their example. They gave in the midst of affliction and out of the depths of poverty. You made a good beginning, we had a few problems between you and I, but those are all cleared up now so we're urging Titus to **complete in you this gracious work as well**. Notice what kind of work it is? It's grace work. It's not working it up, it's not operation boot strap, it's grace work and that grace, according to verse 1 comes from God. It's the grace of God. There's no pressure under the grace of God. No arm twisting. You can relax. God's going to work in you a desire to give and when you know it's there and you have that desire you give and that brings about a completion of His work in your life, apart from which you could not be complete. That's what this verse is all about.

Verse 7, **But just as you abound in everything**, and boy did they, we already knew this from 1 Cor 1:5ff, they had every spiritual gift at Corinth and that led to a few problems, particularly with tongues, but here are some of the spiritual gifts listed again; **faith and utterance and knowledge**, all gifts of the Spirit, and he's now exhorting them to abound in this gracious work of verse 3, giving according to their ability and perhaps beyond, willingly. But not without two things; not without **sincerity** and not without **love**. Remember, when you exercise a spiritual gift, any spiritual gift, it must be exercised in love or its nothing but a big bother to everyone else, you're a clanging cymbal Paul says, just a big noise that everyone wishes would shut up. You've got to exercise the gifts in love. I've got to teach in love, you've got to exercise faith in love, help in love, give in love, etc...etc...etc...all the gifts are exercised properly only in the context of love, with love in control. Love is the greatest, it will always remain. You can have a faith that moves mountains, you can have tongues of angels, you can know all mysteries and yet if you don't have love, you're nothing (1 Cor 13:1-3). You can give all your possessions to the poor and surrender your body to the flames but if you have not love it is no profit to you! None! And finally Paul concludes by reminding us, this kind of giving is a grace **work**. This is not about working it up! This is not about tithing! This is not about being some great philanthropist. This is about God's supernatural ability given to you as you depend upon Him and let His grace do its work.

In conclusion, Paul very tactfully makes known to the Corinthians in verse 1 the grace of God that had been given to the churches in Macedonia. In verse 2 these churches faced tremendous persecutions and yet they had great joy. And not only that but they also gave with a single mind to the cause at Jerusalem out of the depths of poverty. In verse 3 Paul testifies that they gave according to their ability and even beyond it and yet it was of their own voluntary choice, no one twisted their arm, the grace of God was at work. Verse 4, even begging Paul and urging him to be involved in the gracious fellowship with the saints at Jerusalem. They wanted to be involved in this work of the ministry. And verse 5, this was not what Paul expected given their circumstances, but what they had done, in order to set the stage for this grace giving to take place, was first gave themselves to the Lord and to the teaching of the apostles, this was the will of God for their lives as it is the will of God for all believers. Verse 6, the work had begun with Titus but been interrupted and never brought to completion, now was the time to complete

it, this grace work. Verse 7, just as they abounded in spiritual gifts of faith, tongued and knowledge, so with sincerity and love they should now abound in the grace work of giving too! What an example and what an opportunity.

In summary what kind of application can we take away? First, giving to other believers in other places. I make particular application in the healthcare arena. There are millions of believers in this country and we don't have to be a part of the pagan insurance system. Maybe your employer pays for it, fine, great. But there is an alternative for those who need insurance and don't have it. It's an alternative that meets the criterion for the Affordable Health Care Act and its believers sharing with other believers. I alert you to three organizations. I have been in discussion with Dr Mark Eden and he has done some research on it and is very impressed. You can research it yourself and I'll help you with any information you need. The three organizations are all Christian organizations so it's believers helping other believers. Christian Care Ministries, Christian Healthcare and Samaritan Ministries. There's a chart on the internet that compares all three, it's a little dated but it gets you pretty far down the road pretty quick. You can get involved with any one of these ministries and have excellent healthcare at a fraction of the cost because you're not paying all that overhead. You're also not supporting abortion procedures. So the first application; and this is a little outside the bounds of immediate application, but it is helping other believers meet their medical needs and with the healthcare issue on the table I thought I'd mention it, and that is, giving to other believers in other localities. Our church has done that in certain situations. It's completely valid. Second, giving in this way is based on God's grace. It is not based on man's works. We're not talking about doing anything the natural man can do. We're talking about doing something only God can supernaturally induce. And when you depend upon Him the stage is set for His grace to accomplish the things you desire to do but don't think you can do. The first step is admitting you can't do it, but His grace can do it.

[Back To The Top](#)

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