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A1352 – December 29, 2013 – 2 Corinthians 8:16-24
The Credentials Of The Gift Collectors

If you'd turn with me to 2 Corinthians 8 we will return to our study of the most intense section on giving in the NT. Nowhere does the NT give such clear and distinct principles for giving during the Church age than these two chapters. And unfortunately these two chapters aren't studied or practiced by many NT churches. Typically what you get in NT churches is the tithing approach with a lot of pressure and guilt trips for not tithing. But the NT approach is voluntary giving as one is prospered and it's just another example of how far the church in general has drifted from sound teaching of the word!

The historical situation in which this instruction on voluntary giving comes is Paul's exhortation of the Corinthians to help out the needy saints in Jerusalem who were suffering poverty due to several issues; ostracism from Jewish society, double taxation, the widows controversy, lasting effects of a local famine, etc...These problems combined caused great need by these saints from those who were at the time in greater abundance.

Interestingly, Paul's approach is very tactful in that he doesn't exert his apostolic authority and command them to give but he simply sets forth two examples of grace giving in order to encourage them to follow the example of others. The first example of giving is verses 1-7, the churches of Macedonia. Paul in verse 1 makes known to the Corinthians that the grace of God had been given to the churches in Macedonia in that, verse 2 they had an abundance of joy in the midst of great affliction and despite their troubling circumstances they gave with a single mind to the needy believers out of the depths of poverty. Indeed, verse 3, they gave according to their ability and even beyond it and yet it was all of their own voluntary choice showing that the grace of God had been at work in their lives. In verse 4 they even begged

Paul and urged him to be participants in supporting the saints at Jerusalem. In verse 5 this was not what Paul expected given their circumstances of persecution and poverty, but having given themselves to the Lord first and to the teaching of the apostles which is the will of God, their giving was flowing out of God's grace work in their lives. In verse 6 this grace had been at work a year before but it was interrupted by their antagonism to the apostle Paul. However, now that the breach was healed they urged Titus to complete the grace work. They now had an opportunity in verse 7 to abound in the grace work of giving just as they abounded in the spiritual gifts of faith, tongues and knowledge! What an opportunity to advance spiritually through grace giving.

In verse 8 Paul makes clear that his example of the Macedonians' liberality was not a command for them to give but a test designed to prove through their earnestness that God had built love into them also. He then gives the second example of giving in verses 9-15, the giving of the Lord Jesus Christ. In verse 9, they knew of "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ" in that although He is rich as God, He became poor in the incarnation, taking to Himself true humanity, in hypostasis and kenosis even to the point of death on a cross, so that through His gift we might become spiritually wealthy. It is therefore Paul's thinking in verse 10 that it is to their advantage to not only make a beginning to give and to have a desire to give but verse 11, to actually do it and according to their ability. In verse 13, this is not to provide luxury lives for some believers while making them poor, but it is rather for equality sake such that those who are greatly lacking at a time can have some relief out of those who have abundance. In verse 14 there may come a time when those in need now will have an abundance and those in abundance now will be in need. Giving to the saints at Jerusalem now would provide an opportunity for them to return the favor because most groups of people go through times of plenty and times of want. In verse 15 Paul bases this principle of equality on God's provision for the Israelites in the wilderness when those who gathered much did not have excess and those who gathered little did not lack.

So the two examples of grace giving out of poverty are the Macedonians and Christ. Both had little but gave much. The application is that we should engage in reciprocal giving to other believers, even in other places, as they have need. At some time we may be in need and they could give to us. We can do this on the local church level by providing for needs in other local churches

in which there is doctrinal agreement. We can also do this on an individual level. I mentioned the various healthcare sharing ministries as a valid way to supply for the needs of other believers in the ever increasing expense of medical care as an alternative to Obama's government mandated insurance program.

Today in verses 16ff Paul turns to the practical steps of taking up a collection from one group of believers so that it can be transferred to another group of believers and the obvious implications of who and how the money would be handled. As such Paul puts forth the credentials of three delegates who either would or were already travelling to Corinth in order to receive the gift and transfer it to the saints in Jerusalem. As such, this section amounts to a letter of commendation. The reason Paul himself didn't go himself was because his opponents could use it against him to argue that he was only in the ministry for sordid gain. So to avoid this Paul selects one man who was close to him, Titus, who was his fellow worker and two men who were not close to him, but well-known to the Christian community at large. So the issue now is not the giving *per se* but who collects the money, how the money was to be collected and how the money was to be handled. Christians must take great care in the handling of money so that we are set apart from the world's handling of money. All too often the news reports how some church employee had been skimming a percentage of the money for years and cooking the books. This is a sorry testimony but one that points up the great temptation of money to man's sinful nature. Of course the world is tempted by money and their falling for it is understandable since they don't have the Holy Spirit dwelling within them or the principles of grace dependence by which to overcome the temptation. But as Christians we do have these assets and while this does not secure perfect obedience it does mean they are provided and available for us to tap into. In any case when believers handle money improperly it is a poor testimony and so those who handle the money in the Church must meet at least three criteria. First, they must be proven over time to be faithful to God in other areas before given the task of handling money. If they can't be faithful in other areas then there is no proven track record that would give cause that they would be faithful in this most important task either. Second, follow meticulously a set of procedures for handling money that is carefully outlined and well known to others. If there is no set of carefully outlined procedures that is known to others there is no accountability and no clear money trail and cause for accusation is left

open whether or not any mishandling is occurring. Third, transparency must be maintained so that the people can have an understanding of where their money is being placed and how their money is being put to use so that trust can be developed and increased confidence in giving.

In this section Paul sets out to reveal the credentials of the three delegates who were traveling to Corinth to administer the gift so that the Corinthians were ready with their collection in hand when they arrived and could have confidence handing over their gift. These men of high character and the meticulous standards they followed set them apart from the world's lower character and looser standards that allow room for theft.

In verse 16 Paul begins with thanks to God. **But thanks be to God who puts the same earnestness on your behalf in the heart of Titus.** Titus was the first of the three delegates who was traveling to Corinth to receive the Corinthian's gift. According to vv 6 and 10 he had gone before a year earlier to make the collection but their gift remained incomplete. Paul urged him in v 6 to go again and complete this grace work. In verse 16 Paul is thanking God who put, not puts, but aorist tense, past completed action, "had put" **the same earnestness** in Titus' heart on behalf of the Corinthians that Paul had in his heart. The Greek word translated **earnestness** means "eager desire." God puts new desires in our heart; desires that would not be there except for His work in conjunction with the teaching of the word and our positive reception of it. So while Paul urged Titus to go and complete this work on behalf of the Corinthians, God had already put this desire in Titus' heart so he already planned to go himself. Titus has sort of a semi-independent ministry. At times he is dependent on Paul and they are clearly co-workers, but this did not mean that he didn't have his own side ministry that he carried out independently of Paul.

That's what verse 17 is getting at, **For he not only accepted our appeal, but being himself very earnest, he has gone to you of his own accord.** This was something that Titus wanted to do whether or not Paul urged him to do it. God had placed this desire in his heart as evidenced by his desire to do it **of his own accord.** I want you to notice how verses 16 and 17 go together. God sovereignly placed a desire in Titus' heart such that Titus wanted to do it of his own accord. Those are not contradictory statements any more. Acts 4:27-28 - it was God's predetermined purpose for Christ to die on

the cross and the responsible agents who put Him there were Herod, Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the people of Israel. Both are true. And in these verses God sovereignly put a new desire in Titus' heart and it was not contrary to Titus' desire to do something of his own accord. Men always do what they want to do according to the greatest impulse or influence. Choices are not determined by impersonal chance independent of influences. I have held and still hold that a person always does what he wants to do but that every decision is influentially determined by the factors which weigh most heavily on the person's mind. This is sometimes called soft compatibilism. And while no view of divine sovereignty and human responsibility has been set forth that pleases everyone, as far as I can tell, every passage involving divine sovereignty and human responsibility can be explained by the model that the greatest influence on a person's mind directs him to choose in a certain direction. But as you see in vv 16-17, to Paul, Titus' earnestness to go to the Corinthians and finish the collection was ultimately sourced in God because he give thanks to God for placing this desire there and not Titus, independent of God, coming to this desire. Titus then wanted to go because of the influential earnest that God had placed in his heart.

Now the tense Paul uses in verses 6, 16, 17 and 18 for urging him to go and for him having gone are aorist tenses and could indicate that Titus was already on his way to Corinth with the delegation but the tense could also equally indicate that their departure was imminent and the decision is merely an interpretive choice. In either case the message was clear; the Corinthians should quickly complete the collections so that when Titus arrived everything would be ready and no need for further collections would be necessary.

So Titus is the first of the three delegates, but Titus alone would not be above reproach because Titus was a co-worker with Paul and so in verse 18 there is a second delegate, an unnamed but famous brother well-known among all the churches. **We have sent along with him the brother whose fame in the things of the gospel has spread through all the churches;** here is a Christian that had become famous. The Greek word means he had become well-known by his acts which resulted in widespread "recognition." He was the talk of many churches because of his acts. This specific **brother's** acts pertained, Paul says, to **the things of the gospel**. So he may have been particularly evangelistic or had the gift of evangelism, someone like Billy

Graham who is widely recognized and therefore famous. And it was talked about much but we would want to quickly qualify these things by saying that it was God who made him famous and not self-effort. And the purpose of his fame in this case was so that he would be a man with the credentials to go to Corinth and collect the gift.

The point of verse 19, not only was he famous **but he has also been appointed by the churches to travel with us in this gracious work.** The Greek word **appointed** means “to elect or choose for an office or task.” This famous believer was chosen by the churches for the task of travelling with Paul and others in the **gracious work** of administering the grace gift. Ultimately we see that Paul would join with these delegates when they set off to Jerusalem.

Now this was being done, from Paul’s perspective, for two reasons. First, **for the glory of the Lord Himself.** This should be obvious since the ultimate purpose of all things is **the glory of the Lord.** That’s the purpose of history, that all creation resound to the glory of God. And of course, administering or couriering a gift for a group of believers on behalf of another group of believers must be **for the glory of the Lord** and not for us to get another chip in our belt for doing a good deed. Instead it is a demonstration of His grace work in one group of believer’s lives on behalf of another. The second purpose is **to show our readiness.** The Greek word for **readiness** means “willingness.” It is having an exceptional interest in being of service to others, of ministering. They really wanted to minister and when they had an opportunity to minister they were ready and willing to take the opportunity. The obvious question we should all ask ourselves is whether we are ready and willing to serve others or self? Real ministry is serving others and that entails looking for opportunities to serve and taking advantage of those opportunities.

Now the manner in which they administered the gift is very important because if it was administered improperly then the glory of the Lord goes out the window. Verse 20 reveals the manner in which they administered the gift. He says, **taking precaution.** The word means to stand aloof, to try to avoid and it refers to the stringent procedures that the trustworthy and reliable men would follow in order to make sure that all the money given reached the destination and no one stole any money. The purpose of which is

so that no one will discredit us in our administration of this generous gift. To be discredited is a great discredit to Christ so they took stringent care in how they handled the money in order to avoid being invalidated in their ministry. Even if these men didn't do anything wrong but something looked wrong to others it would destroy their credibility. So there were very well thought through procedures they followed. One is reminded of the procedures used by Ezra when he traveled to Jerusalem from Babylon with a ton of money from the Persian royal treasury; before they departed they weighed out all the money and when they arrived they weighed out all the money again in the presence of many leaders in order to ensure that every penny that departed arrived. It was a careful, well-thought out procedure. And because it was carried out responsibly it credited to the account of those men. The same kind of procedure is in mind here under the expression "they took precaution " and the purpose was so their ministry would not be discredited.

Verse 21 explains the internal reason; it's a causal adverb, **for we have regard for what is honorable, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men.** The Greek word **regard** actually comes from a word for the mind, *pronoao* and refers to a carefully thought through process. We would say they carefully thought about **what is honorable.** The Greek for **honorable** refers to that which is "good, excellent, blameless." They established the most excellent and blameless procedures in order to be above reproach. A lot of times people don't think about how they are being perceived in the handling of money and they do small things that raise questions. This is careless and as a Christian you ought never to handle money carelessly; in such a manner that might lead others to think you are involved in some form of theft. Instead you ought to think through each step by asking yourself what is this going to look like to others. Paul said they thought carefully through what is excellent in order to please two audiences. First, **in the sight of the Lord.** This should be obvious since His eyes are in all places. He sees whatever we do and so we ought to remember when handling money that His eyes are watching and we're not going to slip one by on Him. But interestingly Paul's emphasis is **not** on doing things honorably **in the sight of the Lord, but** on doing things honorably **in the sight of men.** The emphasis is on how we are perceived by men. Some people think it doesn't matter how men perceive what we do; only that God knows our hearts. But Paul made it a point to be perceived properly by men as well as God. This

way his credibility was never damaged and his proclamation of the gospel was unhindered. And if you decide to make your concern how you are perceived in the sight of men then I think you'll be fine in the sight of the Lord.

So the second delegate was a famous man well-known in all the churches for the things of the gospel. In verse 22 we find the third delegate, also unnamed, **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.** The key to this **brother** is that he had **often been tested and found diligent.** This is a hallmark of someone who is entrusted with handling money. They must have shown themselves faithful in little things over a long period of time. It is what qualifies them to be given the opportunity to be faithful in greater things, like money. Again, money is such a sensitive issue and it's mishandling such an indelible mark on one's character, that the task should not be handed over to them without observing many years of testings that resulted in approval. This third delegate, though unnamed, came with high credentials and Paul was certain that here to there would be success.

Now in verse 23 he differentiates between Titus and the two other brothers. He says, **As for Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker among you.** He was close to Paul, a ministry partner, a co-worker, and that may cause some of them concern. However, the other two men were not co-workers. He says of them **as for our brethren, they are messengers of the churches, a glory to Christ.** So it was a mixed delegation, one from close association with Paul, two that were brethren but not closely associated with Paul. This selection was carefully thought through so that Paul did not give his opponents an opportunity to advance the argument that Paul was only in the ministry for sordid gain!

Paul closes his letter of commendation with a two-fold exhortation. First, **openly before the churches, show them the proof of your love.** Paul was sure that God had wrought this love in their heart and a liberal gift would publically show the other churches this love. There was nothing boastful or arrogant about other churches knowing that the church at Corinth had given liberally. It rather gave cause to boast in the God who builds love in our hearts through our reflection on God's love for us in Christ.

It is good to know that God is at work in our lives and in the lives of believers all over the world. Second, and also to show them **our reason for boasting about you**. Paul had already boasted in the Corinthians despite the fact that some were still opposed to him. They had made a good start a year before. So if they completed this good start now his boastings in them would not prove vain. The only basis for such a hope is Paul's belief that God would work in and through this letter along with the coming of Titus and the two brethren to bring about change in their lives. That's my only hope for ministering this content too, that God is at work in you both to will and to do His good pleasure. So I exhort you to act on the new desires God places in your heart and to fulfill the hope that I have for you.

In summary, in vv 16-24 Paul lays forth a letter of commendation for the three delegates chosen to travel to Corinth and take the collection. Titus was the first and in verse 16 the credit is given to God who placed an earnestness on the Corinthian's behalf in the heart of Titus. This is evident, Paul says in verse 17, in that he not only accepted their appeal to go but he already had an earnestness to do so and wanted to go to them of his own accord. The second delegate in verse 18 is an unnamed but famous brother because of his proclamation of the gospel. In verse 19 he was chosen by the churches to travel with Paul in the grace work of delivering funds to the needy saints at Jerusalem. This was for the purpose of the glory of the Lord Himself and to show their willingness to serve. Verse 20 describes the manner as one of highly precautionary so as not to result in a discrediting of their ministry of this generous gift. Verse 21 explains the internal reasons for such precautions; they realized the importance of honorable dealings that were in the sight of the Lord and also in the sight of men. In verse 22 the third delegate, also unnamed, but many times tested and found to be approved. These three were either on their way or soon on their way to Corinth. In verse 23 they had distinct relationships to Paul; Titus was a co-worker of Paul, the other two men were brethren and messengers of the churches. In Verse 24 he exhorts them to give liberally in order to show the other churches their love and to confirm Paul's boastings about them.

In conclusion what can we learn? First, meticulous procedures for handling money. In verse 20 they took precaution in order to administer the gift properly so they would not be discredited. We in a local church must also have meticulous procedures for handling the voluntary contributions of

believers. This also includes managing the finances properly and distributing money properly in such a manner that does not enable other believers but provides genuine help in time of need. This is necessary so that the ministry here is not discredited. Second, time proven faithfulness to God prior to handling the money. In verse 22 the third brother had often been tested and found faithful. We also should not put new believers or unproven believers in the position of handling the money. The financial managers must have a long and proven record of faithfulness to God before stepping into this ministry. This involves openness and transparency. If you want to know about our month-to-month giving and expenses that information is posted in the hall between here and the fellowship hall. If you want to know about our financial polices you can ask one of the elders. Third, multiple people involved in collecting the contributions. Paul mentions three men that were involved in the collection. This is a safety precaution. It not only protects you, it also protects the men involved in the collecting. We follow this same precaution. There are two or three men who make the collections and keep up with the giving and spending and all the elders have access to this information so as to be above reproach.

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