

We've Missed the Importance of Community in Christ

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Text: 2 Corinthians 8:13-24

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Series: Confessions of an Imperfect Church (2 Corinthians)

Introduction: Open your Bible to 2 Corinthians 8. We are continuing our series through the book of 2 Corinthians entitled, "Confessions of an Imperfect Church". And like the imperfect church at Corinth, we have a long way to go in our growing and changing in Christ. Today's confession is this: "We've Forgotten the Grace of Giving". 2 Corinthians 8 is divided up into four messages on giving. Last week we looked at the Reasons for Giving and the Greatest Example of Giving. This morning we are looking at the "Giving as a Community".

Context

Last week we talked about the way Christians are to give. Paul was taking up a collection for the impoverished **Jewish saints at Jerusalem**. He would do this for ten years. The Gentile churches were giving toward the offering. You had the poor **Macedonian** Christians outgiving the rich and **lavish Corinthian church** by a long shot. What was their secret? How could the poor Macedonians give so much when they had so little?

Last week in verses 1-11 we learned **five things they lived by**, and we need to live by.

- I. Give regardless of **circumstances**, vs. 1-2
Verse 2, "their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part"
- II. Give **enthusiastically**, vs. 3-4
Speaking of the Macedonian believers, Paul said in **verse 4**, they were "begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints".
- III. Give to be like **Jesus**, vs. 5-9
Verse 7, "as you excel in everything—...see that you excel in this act of grace also." They were to be like Christ who "though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich" (**verse 9**).
- IV. Give **voluntarily**, vs. 10-11
Paul said that they were not simply to donate to this collection but that they were "to desire to do it" (vs. 10), and to have a "**readiness in desiring it**".
- V. Give in **proportion** to what you have, vs. 12

Each one was to give “according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have” (vs. 12).

It seems strange that we Christians need encouragements to give, when God has given so much to us. God had enriched the Corinthians in a wonderful way, and yet they were hesitant to share what they had with others. They were not accustomed to *grace* giving, so Paul had to explain it to them. ¹

Today we are learning about how giving unites us in community. We are not just here for an event. **The Body of Christ is a community of believers.** The church is the **ekklesia** – the called out assembly. We are called out of the world to live together in community, not just for **Sundays** and **Wednesdays**, but for **life!**

9/11 Cleanup

My family and I watched a documentary on the 9/11 tragedy. It didn't take a great number of people to bring 500 thousand tons of steel and concrete crashing to the ground. It doesn't take a whole lot to destroy things. But ten years later, we see that tens of thousands of people helped in the cleanup and reconstruction of the memorial and the new Freedom Tower that will stand when it is finished 1776 feet in the air.

In the same way, in the church, it is easy to destroy and offend and be selfish, but it takes all of us to “maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:6).

Question

I want to ask you a question: Are you committed to community in this church?

That's what this passage in 2nd Corinthians 8 is all about.

There was an inequality in the giving to Paul's collection.

The poor saints of Macedonia were vastly outgiving the rich saints in Corinth. So we come to our first point... We ought to...

I. Give with equal commitment with the rest of the Body, vs. 13-15

Paul says in **2 Corinthians 8:13–15** (ESV) — “For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened, but that as a matter of **fairness [equality]** 14 your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need, that there may be **fairness [equality]**. 15 As it is written, “Whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack.””

Paul says, each believer needs to be committed to give –there needs to be an equality because we are a Body in Christ, we are a **family**.

¹ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (2 Co 8:13). Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books.

A. Committed to give because we are **family**. It's not "us" and "them" in the Body of Christ. Each part gives to the other that we might supply each other's need!

Paul viewed Christians as being brothers and sisters in a large family. As such we have a responsibility to care for each other. Every member is important. Every member should be giving.

Verse 13, "For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened, but that as a matter of **fairness**" Paul is not advocating borrowing in order to give. Paul is not advocating a forced redistribution of wealth. The commitment to give is completely voluntary. We all need equally to give.

Some may be able to give more than others, but Paul was saying there was an inequality. The rich Corinthians

Illustration: A+ Blood

I was so happy this week when I found out my blood type. I went to donate blood at Life Source here in Hoffman Estates. I called my wife, and I told her I passed with flying colors. They told me my blood was A+! Ok, it's A positive. But there's something even better than an A+. There's O type blood that is universal. I've gotten As and Bs but never Os! O is universal blood. Now just because I have A positive blood that is less useful, does not mean I'm going to give less.

In the same way, there are some who are able to give more or in ways that seem to go farther, but every one ought to be giving as God has prospered them.

Remember the rich Corinthians were giving relatively little compared to the poor Macedonians. Each part needs to give and serve as part of this community in Christ.

Are you giving as a part of the family, the Body of Christ?

B. Committed to give because of **gratitude** for the Gospel. For the rich Corinthians, the poor Jews gave a far greater gift.

Verse 14, "your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need, that there may be **fairness [equality]**."

Now wait a minute! What did the poor saints in Jerusalem give to the Gentile Corinthians? What is Paul referring to when he speaks of the Jerusalem church's "abundance". It is the Gospel. So who gave more?

"Through Paul, the Jerusalem church had given the Corinthians the riches of the new covenant—the far greater gift."²

² Hughes, R. K. (2006). *2 Corinthians : Power in weakness*. Preaching the Word (161). Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books.

We all ought to give, because when we give, we are giving directly to the Gospel ministry. You are giving to the local church and to churches scattered around the world that we support in missions.

Illustration: Bonheoffer's Joy

I just finished Dietrich Bonheoffer's biography, and it was interesting to see how he coped with difficult circumstances. He did it with joy for the Gospel. Dietrich Bonheoffer was an aristocrat and a theologian. He lacked nothing and was esteemed to be a scholar even in his mid twenties. Now he found himself in the Gestapo prison. He would suffer in prison for two years.

Yet even though he was suffering, he never seemed to be without joy. He was always trying to bring joy and cheer and the love of Christ to those around him.

On his way to his death two weeks before the end of WWII, he had been transported with fifteen other prisoners in the back of a truck that was heated by a wood burning stove. They could hardly breath. It was meant to hold about four people and their luggage, but they were stuffed in like sardines and drove for days with smoke filling the air and with almost no food and water.

Yet Bonheoffer would pastor them, and bring focus their minds, not on what they did not have, but on what they did have.

Even when he was to die by the Nazis, he joyfully went to the scaffold. They said of him that they'd "never seen someone so joyfully submitted to the will of God".

Are you "joyfully submitted to the will of God"?

C. Committed to give because everything we have is a **miracle** of God.

The final line of our text with its quotation of **Exodus 16:18**. He says in verse 15, "As it is written, 'Whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack.'" Paul is quoting from the passage that talks about the Israelites going out to gather manna. No one lacked whether they gathered little or much. The miracle of the manna provided only for the people's needs, and the rest rotted! It could not be saved! Each was to gather only what was needed, and give the rest away. Now, under the new covenant, it is maintained by normal, gracious giving.³ The miracle is what God has wrought in the hearts of his children.⁴

Like Manna from heaven, all we have is from God. Let us use it for His kingdom!

II. Give under trustworthy **leaders**, vs. 16-23

³ Hafemann, *2 Corinthians*, p. 341.

⁴ Hughes, R. K. *2 Corinthians*, 161.

A. God's leaders are to be **moved** by God's leading.

2 Corinthians 8:16–17 (ESV) — “But thanks be to God, who put into the heart of Titus the same earnest care I have for you. 17 For he not only accepted our appeal, but being himself very earnest he is going to you of his own accord.”

God places His leaders in the flock. We are told in the New Testament that God is intimately involved in distributing spiritual gifts amongst believers for the building up of the Church body. **Ephesians 4:11-12** says:

“And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.”
(ESV)

As the Holy Spirit is involved in granting gifts for leadership, edification and encouragement with the church, we see that He is also directly involved in filling leadership positions in particular Church bodies. In **Acts 20:28**, speaking to the Elders of the Church in Ephesus, Paul made this statement:

“Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.” (ESV)

In other words, the Elders of the Church at Ephesus were appointed not just by men, but by the Holy Spirit.

Because God's leaders are chosen by God, they are also moved by God. Paul mentions the “earnest care” Titus has for the Corinthian church. A true shepherd is willing to “lay down his life for the sheep” as Christ did for His church.

God put into the heart of Titus to gather this collection among the Corinthians. Are you praying for your leaders to be moved by God in their vision for this church?

B. God's leaders are to be **subject** must be human accountability.

2 Corinthians 8:16–17 (ESV) — “18 With him we are sending the brother who is famous among all the churches for his preaching of the gospel. 19 And not only that, but he has been appointed by the churches to travel with us as we carry out this act of grace that is being ministered by us, for the glory of the Lord himself and to show our good will. 20 We take this course so that no one should blame us about this generous gift that is being administered by us, 21 for we aim at what is honorable not only in the Lord's sight but also in the sight of man. 22 And with them we are sending our brother whom we have often tested and found earnest in many matters, but who is now more earnest than ever because of his great confidence in you. 23 As for Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker for your benefit. And as for our brothers, they are messengers of the churches, the glory of Christ.”

Context: Paul appointed two men to go with Titus who were well known and trustworthy. One of them was even “famous among all the churches for his preaching of the gospel” (vs. 18). They sent another that they said, “we have often tested and found earnest in many matters” (vs. 22). These three men were “messengers of the churches” for “the glory of Christ” (vs. 23). This has got to be the single highest compliment ever given to a believer. They are messengers of the churches, a glory to Christ. Wouldn't you like that on your epitaph? They bring glory to Christ. They live in such a way that they have such high responsibility, they can be sent out as messengers – caretakers for the churches.

Praise the Lord for those who handle the finances in our church. It's a major responsibility and a great sacrifice of time, but it is absolutely necessary.

TBC Accountability

We have monthly members' meetings to demonstrate accountability, but I could tell you we can always use more help. If there are faithful brothers or sisters here who have a background in finance, please pray about helping. Talk to me or to Bro. Marcel.

Spanish Ministry

It's amazing though how much our little church has been able to give to our missionaries and to the cause of the Gospel here. Who would have thought we could have begun a Spanish ministry here next to our church. You gave and also we prayed, and the Lord sent 40 union laborers to help us. But *God put it into my heart and to the hearts of your leaders to build this ministry, and you have supported it!*

III. Give to prove your testimony of love, vs. 24

2 Corinthians 8:24 (ESV) — “So give proof before the churches of your love and of our boasting about you to these men.”

Literally the Greek says, "In the faces of the churches." Let everybody see how generous you are. Let everybody see how magnanimous you are. Let them see the proof of your love.

You say you love, prove it. "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends," Jesus said. Jesus said, in John 13:35 (ESV) — “By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

Paul says, “Let's see your love, put it on display for all the churches.” This is the opportunity to give visible demonstration of your love for the saints, of your love for the church, of your love for the Lord of the church. Our testimony is linked to our love.

When people look at a church and say, "That's a generous church, that's a giving church," that seals their understanding of our love.

Honduras Church

I think of the greatest gift Jill and I were given on the mission field. Each month this little church in Honduras sent us \$50. That was the equivalent of about \$500 dollars to us! They were our biggest supporter. And it demonstrated the love of Christ!

Conclusion: Let me close by reading our church covenant.

Church Covenant

God, by His sovereign grace and omnipotent love alone, has led me to repent of my sin and believe on Jesus Christ, trusting Him alone as my Savior and Lord. As one who has been baptized by immersion as a believer in Christ, I desire to unite with this church family. Therefore, I enter into a covenantal relationship with the members of this church. In humble reliance upon the Holy Spirit, I endeavor, so long as my conscience allows me, to pursue the following:

- (1) To meet together for any and all services on each Lord's Day, as the Lord shall give me opportunity, to serve and glorify Him in His worship, to edify one another, and to work together for the good of His church
- (2) To diligently guard the truth, upholding the standard of sound words recorded in Scripture and reflected in our Confession of Faith
- (3) To earnestly seek God's face in prayer both private and corporate for the pleasure of His presence, the needs of the saints, for personal and corporate cleansing from sin and holiness in our journey of sanctification, and for personal and corporate revival as He pleases to give it.
- (4) To avoid participation in any organization which violates the Scriptures or our Confession of Faith
- (5) To wholeheartedly support, love, and care for the church's ministries and members, offering: my prayers, my financial gifts of tithes and offerings, my service
- (6) To boldly witness for the Lord Jesus Christ, living a transformed life and proclaiming the gospel as the Lord guides my steps
- (7) To actively pursue personal holiness before God, loving others as Christ has loved us
- (8) To promote the unity of the church, being a peacemaker with all in the body of Christ

- (9) To respectfully follow the elders and other leaders of this church, trusting and supporting their leadership
- (10) To humbly submit to the church's discipline, graciously repenting when approached about personal sin, and lovingly restoring others who become entangled in sin if they should come to repentance
- (11) To be active in the work of the ministries of the local church, unless providentially hindered
- (12) I also purpose to maintain family and private worship; if God has given me children, to train my children according to the Bible, to walk carefully in the world, to be just in my dealings, faithful in my engagements, and appropriate in my conduct, to avoid gossip, not speaking that which is evil, and to avoid unrighteous anger, to abstain from all forms of activity which dishonor my Lord Jesus Christ, cause stumbling to a fellow believer or hinder bringing a soul to Christ, to be zealous in my efforts to advance the cause of Christ our Savior, and to give Him preeminence in all things.
- (13) I also purpose to guard the biblical structure of the family opposing all forms of abortion and homosexuality.
- (14) I further purpose to encourage my fellow brethren in the blessed hope of our Lord's return, to watch over one another in brotherly love, to remember each other in prayer, to aid each other in sickness and distress, to cultivate Christian sympathy in feelings and courtesy in speech, to be slow to take offense, but always ready for reconciliation.
- (15) I moreover purpose that if I remove from this place, I will seek to as soon as possible to unite with some other church of like faith and practice where I can carry out the spirit of this covenant and other principles of God's Word.

This covenant I make in the presence of Almighty God, the Searcher of all hearts, with a true intention to fulfill my obligations, as I shall answer at the Last Day, when the secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed. I most humbly beseech the Lord to strengthen me by His Holy Spirit for this end, and for His glory and honor.

We are to live life together. This is the community of Christ. Let us give together, let us live together, and let us all be ready for death one day when we meet Christ!