

2 Corinthians 8:1-24

Giving is an appropriate response to grace. Giving is also an essential ingredient of Christian service. As we receive fresh glimpses of God's goodness to us in his Son, our joy prompts renewed devotion to Christ.

We first give ourselves to him and then to others, according to God's will.

Summary

In 2 Corinthians 8:1-24, we see that generous giving is an appropriate response to grace and is an essential ingredient of Christian service.

1. Revisited Background

A severe famine in Judea had left many believers struggling in conditions of extreme poverty. Through the prompting of Paul, a benevolence fund was set up for contributions to help the struggling believers in Judaea to which the churches of Europe had contributed sacrificially and generously (**2 Cor 8:1-5**).

The believers in Corinth had also decided to do something about the need in Judea (**2 Cor 8:10**) but it appeared that the initiative had run out of steam (**2 Cor 8:11**).

2. Rising to the Challenge vv. 7-15

Paul was able to be both diplomatic and disarming when dealing with sensitive issues. He could commend the Corinthians for their faith, speech, knowledge, earnestness, and love. Yet he wanted to urge them on to excel in one more area of discipleship; generous and systematic giving. Paul has much to teach us when it comes to challenging our fellow Christians in a way that is both effective and sensitive. Far from scolding and shaming them because an important quality is lacking, he commended them for their good qualities and used that as a basis for further growth in grace.

Paul points to the incarnation (**2 Cor 8:9; cf Phil 2:5-8**). He would have his readers dwell on the lengths to which Jesus went in order to win salvation for his people.

Note the explanation of the reason for Jesus humiliation: it was 'for your sake'.

In the context of Paul's argument on the theme of giving, the logic is impeccable: given that the Son of God did all that for you, how can you be so mean-spirited in response? Even if their resources were scanty, a modest gift was surely possible.

The last thing Paul wanted was to beggar the Christians in Corinth.

If the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have (**2 Cor 8:12**).

Paul had no wish to produce a state of economic dependency in the churches in Palestine so that believers there came to depend on hand-outs.

Christian giving needs great wisdom (2 Cor 8:13-15).

The important principle is that everyone should have enough.

The crux of it all is the principle of solidarity (2 Cor 8:14).

3. Trustworthy Men vv. 16-24

As the chapter closes, Paul's main concern is for honesty and integrity (8:20-21).

Paul had to ensure that the money was administered wisely and in a way which would pass the most intense scrutiny.

He states his concern both negatively 'We take this course so that no one should blame us' (2 Cor 8:20) and positively: 'for we aim at what is honorable' (2 Cor 8:21).

The apostle decided to put the whole matter beyond question by asking the churches to appoint a delegation. The three men were commended to the church at Corinth.

Could the believers in Corinth still refuse to play their part when such highly esteemed men came through bearing gifts from other, much poorer churches?

The time had come to show these men, and the churches through them, that Paul's 'boasting' about the Corinthians had not been in vain (8:24).

4. Concluding Lessons

First, Paul only found it necessary to address the subject of giving because the believers in Corinth had been remiss about meeting a commitment they had made a year beforehand (8:10). A promise of help that is not kept leaves a legacy of disappointment. Indeed, if making promise and then failing to deliver becomes a habit, our own credibility will suffer.

Secondly, the Christians in first-century Macedonia are a challenge us today.

Do we give as we feel like it, or as we are able? The pattern of our giving will show the extent of our concern for our fellow Christians and the degree to which we have understood and valued the great self-giving of Christ.

Thirdly, it is also worth observing the way that Paul encouraged the believers in Corinth to rise to the challenge (8:7). Many of us have our disappointments in church life as other Christians have let us down in a variety of ways. People do not always respond well to being berated for their failings, even when it is justified, but few can resist a winsome appeal that highlights the ways in which they are already doing well and then spurs them on to new heights of excellence.

Fourthly, leaders in churches today would do well to emulate Paul's concern that the financial affairs of the churches should be above reproach (2 Cor 8:16-24).

When sadly there is a financial scandal in the church, it leaves the watching world confirmed in the view that Christians are all hypocrites anyway.