

THE MINISTRY OF GIVING
2 Corinthians 8 & 9

I have a letter here from the apostle Paul to Vineland Park Baptist Church. It's about giving. What do you suppose it says?

For some reason, perhaps because the most TV preachers are excessive in their begging for money, the preachers here at Vineland Park don't usually talk about giving. Giving is as much a part of our life of discipleship as any other part.

In 2 Cor 8 & 9 we have some of the clearest instructions in Scripture about giving. Paul was telling the church at Corinth that they were now mature enough to help other churches and missions.

The Bible does not condemn wealth but it does warn about trusting in wealth and the selfish use of material goods.

The Hebrew culture viewed wealth as a sign of God's blessing. And it was a blessing if the possessor of that wealth was generous to others.

Mark 10:23-27

²³ And Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!" ²⁴ And the disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said to them again, "Children, how difficult it is to enter the kingdom of God! ²⁵ It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God." ²⁶ And they were exceedingly astonished, and said to him, "Then who can be saved?" ²⁷ Jesus looked at them and said, "With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God."

Matt 19:23-27

²³ And Jesus said to his disciples, "Truly, I say to you, only with difficulty will a rich person enter the kingdom of heaven. ²⁴ Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God." ²⁵ When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished, saying, "Who then can be saved?" ²⁶ But Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

The local Christian church, as a body of believers, came into being when a group of 120 disciples were gathered in an upper room in Jerusalem. The Holy Spirit came in fulfillment of Joel's prophecy and about 3000 souls was saved.

It wasn't long before certain realities of Christian living needed to be faced. Paul had encouraged the believers in Corinth to "make room in their hearts" to be open to the needs of one another. So Paul gives the church at Corinth instruction in the grace of giving.

1. GIVING IS AN ACT OF GRACE 8:1-2

We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, ² for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part.

Giving is a grace. The Greek word *charis* is used eleven times in these two chapters; six times it refers to the spiritual gifts; twice the collection itself is called "grace" [8:6, 19]; once it describes the model for Christian giving – Christ's sacrifice [8:9]; and twice to express thanks to God for providing the motivation and resources for participation in the ministry of giving [8:16, 9:15].

2. GIVING from POVERTY 8:1-9

We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, ² for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part.

³ For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own free will, ⁴ begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints— ⁵ and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us.

⁶ Accordingly, we urged Titus that as he had started, so he should complete among you this act of grace. ⁷ But as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you – see that you excel in this act of grace also.

In 57 A.D. the churches did not own huge assets of property as it does today. The early church was mostly made up of mostly poor people. Half of the population of the Roman Empire was slaves, and it was among these poor people that the gospel spread rapidly.

In Macedonia, the churches were “in a severe test of affliction,” and they suffered “extreme poverty.” A famine caused a desperate need in Jerusalem. The famine lasted for more than a decade and one of the hardest hit areas was the province of Macedonia.

The Macedonians begged Paul for the privilege of making themselves poorer to ease the hunger of fellow believers.

⁸I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine.

New Testament giving is not a prescribed amount as was the Old Testament tithe. The tithe went away with the other OT commands about support of the temple and the priesthood. That is not to say that giving per se has ceased but the principles have changed. One principle is it is voluntary; another is that it is up to the believer to determine how much to give.

Giving is part of the Christian experience. Something is missing when giving is not a priority. Cf. Acts 2:44-45; 4:32-35; 6:1-3.

The Macedonians gave liberally to meet the needs of people they had never met and who lived hundreds of miles away. Note that they first gave themselves to the Lord and then to others [5].

⁹For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.

There are some mixed metaphors here between spiritual and material riches. A Christian may be poor in material wealth and rich in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. The thing that is consistent is that giving is a Christian grace and the model for gracious giving is God.

Should poor people be expected to give? The ideal model for Christian giving is not the very rich person who gives a small portion of his fortune. The model is Christ who made Himself poor and gave Himself that we through His poverty might be made rich.

3. PRINCIPLES of CHRISTIAN CHARITY

8:10-15

¹⁰ And in this matter I give my judgment: this benefits you, who a year ago started not only to do this work but also to desire to do it. ¹¹ So now finish doing it as well, so that your readiness in desiring it may be matched by your completing it out of what you have.

Apparently the fund-raising to help the poor in Jerusalem had been interrupted by some of the conflicts in the church. Having resolved these issues Paul says “finish the work you started.”

At some point Titus had begun to collect gifts from the Corinthians to help the poor in Jerusalem [1 Cor 16:1-4]. Now Paul is going to send Titus back to complete the task [8:6].

Paul tactfully refers to the example to the Macedonians {Thessalonica, Philippi, and Berea}, who though they were economically much poorer than the Corinthians, had been very generous, even begging Paul to let them help.

¹² For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have. ¹³ I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened, but that as a matter of fairness ¹⁴ your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need, that there may be fairness. ¹⁵ As it is written, "Whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack."

Notice that it was not how much they give, but the attitude with which they give.

There is the principle of the manna in the OT [15]; did everyone have enough? What happened when they tried to hoard the manna? (Ex 16:17-20)

Paul also points out that their positions could be reversed at some future time [14].

3. GIFTS MUST BE ADMINISTERED WITH INTEGRITY 8:16-24

¹⁶ 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. 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. ²⁴ So give proof before the churches of your love and of our boasting about you to these men.

Now Paul deals with how the funds are to be handled by those who collect them. What about these fund-raising outfits that rake off 90% for themselves.

Part of good stewardship is to know who is getting the money that you give.

We can't be sure but it appears that Paul is sending three men to ensure that the funds are properly taken care of. The first man is Titus [16-17] whom they know.

Another man [19] may have been Luke or Barnabus, no one knows for sure.

A third man (22) had earned Paul's admiration for his zeal and also had expressed his confidence that the Corinthians would respond to this appeal.

These men are "messengers" {apostles} of the churches.

Paul tells them to prove his boasting on their behalf (24).

4. PROMISED GIFTS SHOULD BE GIVEN PROMPTLY AND GLADLY 9:1-5

Now it is superfluous for me to write to you about the ministry for the saints, ² for I know your readiness, of which I boast about you to the people of Macedonia, saying that Achaia has been ready since last year. And your zeal has stirred up most of them. ³ But I am sending the brothers so that our boasting about you may not prove vain in this matter, so that you may be ready, as I said you would be. ⁴ Otherwise, if some Macedonians come with me and find that you are not ready, we would be humiliated—to say nothing of you—for being so confident. ⁵ So I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to go on ahead to you and arrange in advance for the gift you have promised, so that it may be ready as a willing gift, not as an exaction.

Apparently, Paul had been accused of exaggerating the Corinthian's giving in order to stir up those in Macedonia, and vice versa. There is no evidence that he was overstating either case. The church had promised a generous gift and Paul wanted it ready when he arrived.

Paul is concerned that, when he makes his own visit to Corinth, he may find the Corinthians unprepared and the offering they had talked about incomplete. This would be embarrassing for Paul and especially to the Macedonians as well [4].

For this reason Paul is sending Titus and two other men to Corinth in advance of his visit [3]. The church had promised to provide a generous gift, and Paul wants it to be ready when he comes. It may be that Paul thought they were scaling back what they had promised [5].

5. GIVING BENEFITS THE GIVER AS WELL AS THE RECEIVER 9:6-10

⁶ The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. ⁷ Each one must give as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. ⁸ And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.

⁹ As it is written,

^z "He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor;
his righteousness endures forever."

¹⁰ He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness.

In verse 6, Paul states a principle found in Proverbs 11:24.

One gives freely, yet grows all the richer;
another withholds what he should give, and only suffers want.

Jesus taught the same principle in Luke 6:38.

... give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you.

Their giving is to be completely voluntary and given without grudging.

The word “cheerful” is hilarious!

Give as made up in your mind; not forced.

Have no regrets.

No one is to manipulate your conscience or impose some legalistic formula.

The result of this kind of giving, which pleases God, is stated in verse 8.

Verse 9 is from Psalm 112:9:

He has distributed freely; he has given to the poor;
his righteousness endures forever;
his horn is exalted in honor.

The person, who gives generously to the poor, will be rewarded appropriately.
The benefits are spiritual but sometimes material as well.

6. GIVING PROMOTES PRAISE TO GOD AND FELLOWSHIP AMONG BELIEVERS

9:11-15

¹¹ You will be enriched in every way for all your generosity, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. ¹² For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints, but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God. ¹³ By their approval of this service, they will glorify God because of your submission flowing from your confession of the gospel of Christ, and the generosity of your contribution for them and for all others, ¹⁴ while they long for you and pray for you, because of the surpassing grace of God upon you. ¹⁵ Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!

Generous giving will not only result in benefits to the giver and to the receiver, but will issue forth praise and thanksgiving to God.

When Paul delivers the Corinthian's gift to the Jerusalem church he anticipates an "overflowing" of thanksgiving because of their generosity. It will also show that the conversion of the Corinthian's was real, because it produced tangible good works. The Jerusalem church will pray for them.

It is important to remember that the Jerusalem church was mostly Jewish and the Corinthian's were mostly Gentile. In Christ prejudices must be put away.

Paul concludes with another reminder of God's indescribable gift of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.