

Desiring to Give: 2 Corinthians 8:10 – 9:9
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This morning we continue our brief study through 2 Corinthians 8-9 as we look at the subject of joyful giving. Today's study is entitled "Desiring to Give." In the verses we're going to look at Paul emphasizes the importance of *desiring* to give. He's not just interested in the gift, itself. He's not merely concerned *that* the Corinthians give, or how much they give. His heartfelt plea to them, and his prayer for them, is that they give joyfully, cheerfully, voluntarily, graciously. He wants them to desire to do it. We'll see this theme throughout the passage as we focus on a few aspects of Paul's appeal. We'll look at proportionate giving, giving that is above reproach, faithful giving, and cheerful giving.

Proportionate Giving

Our focus last week was the two examples Paul holds out before the Corinthians in verses 1-9. Paul is making a collection for the needy Jewish Christians in Jerusalem, and he's writing in 2 Corinthians 8-9 about the Corinthians' contribution. He first highlights the grace of God in the lives of the churches of Macedonia. They gave according to their means, and even beyond their means. And they did it joyfully, even in the midst of extreme poverty and a severe test of affliction. That's evidence of amazing grace, and Paul wants that grace to be an encouragement to the Corinthian church. Then, in verse 9, Paul points to the most loving and sacrificial and generous act in all of history—"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." That's the Gospel message in a sentence. Jesus left the riches of heaven. He embraced the poverty of humanity and even humbled Himself to experience the extreme poverty of the cross. And He did this so that we might be rich—so that we might have the spiritual blessings of forgiveness, of being reconciled to God, of being justified, credited with Christ's righteousness. This is the generosity of Jesus Christ, and by His grace we are motivated and enabled to show generosity to others.

So in his appeal to the Corinthians to give to this collection for the saints, Paul holds up the example of the Macedonians and the example of Jesus Christ. He's saying, look at the grace of God manifested in these ways.

Now, in verses 10-15 Paul lays out the New Testament principle of proportionate giving. Before we get to that, notice in verse 10 he mentions the Corinthians' *desire* to participate in this collection. Paul is reminding them of a commitment they made a

year prior to this. They had started gathering resources for the Jerusalem church. And verse 10 focuses not just on the fact that they were doing this, but that they *wanted* to do it! That's very important for Paul. He mentions it again in verse 11. He's exhorting them to finish what they started, and he refers to their readiness in desiring it. He wants their readiness, their eagerness, their desire, to be completed by following through with this collection.

Then he clarifies the expectations. He has spoken of the Macedonians who gave not only according to their means but beyond their means. He now clarifies that he's not asking the Corinthians to match or try to outdo the Macedonians. He's asking something very simple. He's asking them to give out of what they have (end of verse 11). He's asking them to give according to what they have, not according to what they do not have (verse 12). He wrote in a similar way in 1 Corinthians 16:2, where he was giving them instructions about this same collection. He wrote, "On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, *as he may prosper*, so that there will be no collecting when I come." That's proportionate giving. According to the measure of your prosperity, you give out of that. As you prosper, you give. Those who have less will give less. Those who have more will give more. The point is: give according to what you have.

What he's clearly not saying is that people should give away every last dime they have so that they become destitute and homeless. Verse 13, "I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened . . ." That's not the way this works. That's not what Paul is calling for. He knows that some folks might be suspicious of this collection, and so he wants to assure them that he's not trying to take all their money in order that the Jerusalem saints might live in luxury. That's not what he's trying to do. He's not trying to make the Corinthian believers materially poor and make the Jerusalem believers materially rich.

He's not even trying to level the playing field. He doesn't have an ideal in his mind that every Christian should have the same amount of money, and so we need to distribute the money around until it's all even. Now, that could be a little confusing if your translation says "equality" at the end of verse 13 and the end of verse 14. But Paul is obviously not pushing for absolute financial equality among all the churches, because he is not here asking the Corinthians to give to the Macedonians. The Macedonians are in the midst of a severe affliction and are extremely poor. The Corinthians were not facing a hardship like that. But Paul is not asking the Corinthians to give to the Macedonians. Rather, he's asking the Corinthians and the Macedonians to give to the needy

Jewish believers in Jerusalem. And he's telling them all to give according to what they have.

The ESV translates it "fairness," and that may be less confusing. The goal is not equality in the sense of financial uniformity. The goal is fairness. If there are believers who don't have basic necessities, then other believers should help them out. Those who have more than they need should give to those who have less than they need. That's the principle.

There's also a special dynamic between the Jewish believers in Jerusalem and these Gentile churches. The Jewish believers may have some desperate financial needs, but in terms of spiritual heritage and Christian leadership they have a lot to offer. So this seems to be a pretty fair exchange. The Gentiles have received spiritual blessings by way of the Jews, and now these Gentile churches have the opportunity to bless the Jewish believers with financial assistance.

Paul writes in this way in Romans 15 as well, another place where he talks about this collection. "At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem bringing aid to the saints. For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem [notice that theme again of *desiring* to give]. For they were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them [Paul is saying that in some way the Gentile churches owe this contribution to the Jewish believers]. For if the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings, they ought also to be of service to them in material blessings." (Romans 15:25-27)

This is fitting. This is appropriate. This is fair. And Paul wants the Corinthians to give *as they are able* in order to help the believers in need. He's asking for proportionate giving. The Macedonians gave very generously and sacrificially, but they still might not have actually given that much stuff. Even though they gave beyond their means, they just didn't have a whole lot to give. But the Corinthians, on the other hand, at least some of them, could have been pretty well off. They had a surplus. They had excess that they could either use to make their own lives more and more comfortable, or they could give it away. And Paul is saying, that's what needs to happen. You need to give it away. Those who have more than they need should give that surplus to help those who don't have enough.

As Americans, it may be difficult for us to distinguish needs and wants. There are a lot of wants that we quickly begin to think of as needs. I don't have a simple solution to this. But my hope is that we will be more and more shaped by the Scriptures and have a passion for the things that God is passionate about, and that we will be loving and kind and sacrificial and generous like our Lord Jesus Christ. I hope that as the Lord provides for us that

we would not be constantly on the look out for new ways to spend money on ourselves. The media is certainly very good at bombarding our minds with things we simply *have to buy!* I hope instead, by God's grace, we will be constantly on the look out for new ways to spend money on others—to help those in need, to be kind and generous to those around us, to support the church, to fund missions. So there's a question for you (and for me) to mull over this week. What do you really need? And what are some resources you have that you could use to bless others? Rather than turning inward and scheming about how you can spend it on yourself, look outside of yourself and strategize about how to make an eternal impact with your money and time and talents.

Giving That Is Above Reproach

In the next section of 2 Corinthians 8, Paul wants to show that everything about this collection is above board. He wants to assure everyone that this is being done with absolute integrity and honesty. And wants to protect himself and the churches from any accusations of wrongdoing. So he spends a whole paragraph describing these individuals who are going to handle the collection.

First of all, there's Titus (verse 16). Notice how Paul expresses his gratefulness for Titus. He says, Thanks be to God. Then he acknowledges that God is the One "who put into the heart of Titus the same earnest care I have for you." This is just like Paul's appreciation of the Macedonians. He gives credit to God for the good in their lives. We also see in Paul's description of Titus that Titus *desired* to do this. God had put it in his heart, and he was very earnest in his desire to go to Corinth. He was doing this of his own accord, as it says in verse 17. Titus sincerely wanted to be involved in getting this collection to Jerusalem.

Verse 18 mentions another brother, who is unnamed here. But, clearly, the Corinthians knew who this man was. He was famous among all the churches for his preaching of the gospel. He was also appointed by the churches to be part of this. The point is: he's trustworthy. The churches know him. The churches know his commitment to the gospel. The churches trust him and have commissioned him to help handle this collection.

Last week we saw several mentions of grace in this passage. Verse 19 here refers to the collection as "this act of grace that is being ministered by us." Paul says here as well that it is "for the glory of the Lord himself" as well as "to show our good will." The generosity Paul is calling for is enabled by God's sovereign grace, it is an act of grace, and it is for the glory of the Lord.

A third man is mentioned in verse 22. He, too, is unnamed, but he has good credentials. He has shown himself to be

trustworthy. Paul then emphasizes his esteem for Titus and for the brothers in verse 23. What is this all about? Why is Paul going on and on about these guys?

Verse 20 really gets to the heart of the matter in this paragraph. The reason these three men are so important, and the reason Paul feels the need to establish their credibility, is because he wants everything about this endeavor to be totally above reproach. Look at verses 20-21, "We take this course so that no one should blame us about this generous gift that is being administered by us, for we aim at what is honorable not only in the Lord's sight but also in the sight of man." Paul obviously wants this to bring glory to the Lord. He wants it to be honorable in the Lord's sight. But he also wants everyone to look at this and know that it is honorable and honest. He doesn't want anyone to point a finger at Paul or the churches and say, That's a scheme. Paul is getting rich off this.

So he goes into a lot of detail about how this is going to happen. Three guys are going to be involved in getting the collection from the churches over to Jerusalem. And these aren't just any three guys. They are gospel-loving, dedicated men. They have a long standing with the churches. They have been tested. They are trusted. The collection will be safe in their hands.

This is an important principle when it comes to money and ministry. The church needs to have clear guidelines for how the finances are handled so that everything is above reproach. There need to be trustworthy individuals overseeing things, and there needs to be more than one person involved so that there's a clear accounting of everything and so that if anyone were to bring a charge against an individual, there would be others who could vouch for their integrity and show from the books that everything is legit. I'm very grateful in this church for the deacons and treasurer and one of the elders who take care to handle the money very carefully and make sure that our church remains entirely above reproach in the area of finances.

Faithful Giving

In the next section, in 9:1-5, Paul calls the Corinthians to faithful giving. They have made a commitment to give, and he is holding them accountable to follow through on that commitment. He was doing the same thing in 8:10-11, which we looked at already. He commanded them in verse 11, "So now finish doing it as well . . ." They had started setting things aside a year before. Now Paul wants to make sure they're going to complete what they started. At the beginning of chapter 9 he comes back to this. He speaks again of their readiness, and even their zeal. Again, here's the theme of desiring to give. Paul says, I know you're passionate

about this. I know you are zealous to do this. And he reminds them that it was actually their zeal that stirred up others to be zealous about this as well.

Isn't that interesting! Do you follow what Paul is saying in verse 2? Macedonia is a reference to the churches in the region to the north of Corinth. Thessalonica and Phillipi were part of the region of Macedonia. Achaia is the region that Corinth was in. Corinth was actually the capital of Achaia. Paul is talking about the churches in these two different regions. Here's the timeline: the Corinthians (in Achaia), a year prior to this, said, Yeah, we're going to do this. We're committed to helping the saints in Jerusalem. We're going to start setting aside a portion of our things each Lord's Day in preparation to send all of it to Jerusalem. After Paul had that commitment from the Corinthians, he travelled up to Macedonia. And he boasted to the Macedonians about the commitment of those in Achaia. He told them about their zeal. And the Macedonians, as a result, got excited about this, too. They got so excited, in fact, that they gave beyond their means out of an abundance of joy. Now things have come full circle. Paul is now writing to the Corinthians boasting about the Macedonians. This is how we spur one another on in the body of Christ.

Paul is now seeking to spur on the Corinthians in a very clear and direct way. He wants to make sure their collection is going to be ready. And he's sending these brothers to make sure it will be ready. He doesn't want to be humiliated. He doesn't want the Corinthians to be humiliated, if it turns out they were all talk and no action. So he's sending these brothers in advance, as he says in verse 5. Here's the rationale. Paul doesn't want to arrive in Corinth and *then* call for them to give, because in that scenario it might seem more like he's trying to wring it out of them. It might seem more like an exaction. It might seem more like a mere duty. It might then seem like they are giving begrudgingly. And as much as Paul wants to be able to take a lot of stuff to Jerusalem to help the saints there, he doesn't want the churches to give out of mere duty.

He wants them to desire to do it. He wants them to give cheerfully. That's going to be our final point. But before we move on to that, let me just exhort us to be faithful givers. When we commit to give to something, let's follow through on our commitment—whether that be as a church or as individuals. There are missionaries who depend on the regular support we send to them, and we need to make sure we are faithful in that. If you, as an individual or as a family, choose to directly support a particular missionary or ministry, you should be consistent in that support. You should give regularly and faithfully to the church. Part of our church covenant is that we will share the responsibility of the

church by giving regularly. Let's make sure we do that. Let's make sure we are not fickle or sporadic in our giving. Paul is holding the Corinthians accountable for their commitment. And so I'm exhorting us in the same way today. Let's be faithful to give in the ways we have committed to give. May we be ready with a willing gift.

Cheerful Giving

And that leads to the final point, which we'll just look at briefly and then look at some more next week. The end of verse 7 says that God loves a cheerful giver. That's a radical statement, because it goes to the heart of the matter. This is not a call to give a certain amount, or a certain percentage of your income. This is different than the Old Testament tithe (giving ten percent). This is going to the heart of the issue and is therefore setting a much higher standard. This is like Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount saying that anger is like murder and lust is like adultery. He presses down to the heart condition, the motives and intentions of the heart. It's not just about actions. As long as I don't kill anyone, as long as I don't actually commit adultery, then I'm fulfilling my duty and I'm a good, law-abiding person. No, Jesus says, your problem is far deeper than that. Maybe you haven't killed anyone or committed adultery, but your heart is just as messed up as the person who has committed murder or adultery.

In the area of giving, Paul is showing us the New Covenant principle in this passage. It's a matter of the heart. You may think, Oh, well I give my ten percent. Paul says, I don't care about percentages. The real issue is your motives, your desires, your heart. Do you give cheerfully, for the good of others and the glory of God? Do you truly desire to give?

I think that question should lead us directly to the cross, because as we each look at our hearts we should see that we don't desire to give in the way we should. This was so convicting for me to think about this week, because I realize that I'm not nearly as generous as I should be, as I desire to be. I wish my desire to give was stronger. I wish I was more compassionate. I wish I was more kind. I wish I was more sensitive to the needs of others. My heart is so cold and apathetic, and I'm so selfish much of the time. These are evidences of my sin, and it shows why I need Jesus. I need His forgiveness, and I need the power of His grace to change me, to continue sanctifying me. That's what we all need.

So this exhortation should be convicting to all of us. No matter how little or how much you give—that's not the main issue. The issue is, what's going on in your heart? I hope this morning you'll ask yourself that question. May we see our sin, repent of it, and turn to the Lord for His forgiveness and His help. And then

may we see the fruit of His grace in our lives, as I believe we do see in many very encouraging ways in this church. He allows us to experience the joy of desiring to give.