

Giving God's Way

(2 Corinthians 8:1-15)

Do you give money back to God in a way that pleases Him? Our giving reveals our true spirituality. In this passage, Paul appeals to the Corinthian believers to finish collecting the offering to help their needy Christian brothers and sisters in Jerusalem. In his appeal, we find three requirements for giving God's way. First ...

Give generously (8:1-7).

Paul was not only proud of the Corinthian believers, but also the Christians in Macedonia, their northern neighbors (present-day northern Greece). In Macedonia, on his second missionary journey, Paul founded churches at Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea (Acts 16-17). Corinth was the capital of the southern province of Greece, at that time called Achaia (Uh-kay'-yuh).

Paul uses the generosity of the Macedonian believers as an example to encourage the Corinthians believers to give generously. He writes, *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* (8:1-2). Although the Macedonians were experiencing *extreme poverty, they overflowed in a wealth of generosity*. Macedonia was a very poor region that had been plundered by the Romans and ravaged by famine.

The Macedonians considered their giving a small token of appreciation to God for their salvation. They are an example of what truth (Matthew 6:21)?

Paul continues: *For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, ⁴ begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints* (8:3-4). Apparently, they had calculated how much they could afford to give and then gave even more. They gave *beyond their means*. Therefore, Paul asked them to give less but they begged to be allowed to give more to help the needy saints in Jerusalem. When was the last time your pastor begged you to give less?

Their giving was obviously not a desire for recognition or praise. Therefore, Paul writes: *and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us* (8:5). Their giving was motivated by a desire to first commit themselves to the Lord and then to follow His will by giving to this cause. They gave because they knew the truth of James 1:17. Personalize and write this verse below:

Paul continues, *Accordingly, we urged Titus that as he had started, so he should complete among you this act of grace* (8:6). About a year earlier (8:10, 9:2), Titus had begun collecting the Corinthians' offering. He had returned to them with Paul's severe letter we now call First Corinthians. In that letter, Paul gave what principles about collecting the offering (1 Corinthians 16:2a-c)?

This means each Sunday at church the Corinthians would bring an offering for this special need. Paul wrote *each of you*, which means every person should give something. I think even children should be taught to give an offering each Sunday.

Now, in this second letter, Paul urges the Corinthians to complete their giving for the saints in Jerusalem. He writes, *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* (8:7). The Corinthians had been blessed with spiritual gifts, but also with wealth. Paul wants them to excel in the grace of giving.

To give God's way, **give generously** and ...

Give lovingly (8:8-9).

Paul doesn't want the Corinthians to give out of a sense of obligation or duty. Therefore, he writes, *I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine* (8:8). Paul's request is to prove their love is *genuine* by comparing it with *the earnestness of others*- the generosity of the Macedonian churches.

The real proof of our love for the Lord and other believers is not words or feelings, but actions. What reveals a person does not have God's love abiding in him or her, according to I John 3:17?

Next, Paul cites the Ultimate Example of how to **give lovingly**. He writes, *For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor* (8:9a-c). Because Jesus is God who came to earth in flesh and blood, *he was rich*. In His deity, He existed in eternity past, and the riches of heaven and earth belonged to Him. However, He gave it all up to die on the cross for our sins (Philip. 2:6-8).

Though Jesus was *rich*, because of His love for us *he became poor*. This refers to more than being economically poor. He did this so *by his poverty we might become rich* (8:9d). Jesus went through all His earthly trials and suffering, including the cross, so we could become spiritually rich. These riches include forgiveness, joy (Jn 15:11), peace, and purpose. However, there is much more. Read 1 Peter 1:4 and explain:

In Christ, we are rich, and that wealth is *kept* for us in heaven. It will not decay, it cannot be canceled, and it is non-transferable. No matter what happens on earth, our riches in Christ are safe and unchanged in heaven because Christ lovingly gave His life for us (Jn 10:18).

To give God's way, **give generously, give lovingly**, and ...

Give proportionately (8:10-15).

Paul continues, *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* (8:10). Paul's advice, not command, is they finish what they started. Apparently, they promised to give a certain amount of money but did not follow through. Therefore, Paul exhorts them, *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* (8:11).

One day Jesus is sitting near the offering box in the temple. He watches as the worshippers drop their money into the offering box. The rich people put in very large amounts. Then, a poor widow comes by and drops in two small copper coins, worth about a penny together. Jesus calls His disciples over and tells them the widow has given more than all the others (Mk 12:41-43). Why, according to Mark 12:44?

Our giving should be out of, or in proportion to, what we have. God looks at the sacrifice, not the amount. Paul continues, *For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have* (8:12). Whatever we give is acceptable, if we give it with readiness, or eagerness. God wants us to give according to what we have, not what we do *not have*.

In verse thirteen, Paul explains giving **proportionately** is a *matter of fairness*. He writes some should not be *burdened*, while others are eased. We shouldn't give to the point we are *burdened* and put in financial hardship.

Paul further explains, *your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need, that there may be fairness* (8:14). The Corinthians are prosperous and can share with those in need. Palestine had been hit by a severe famine, and the believers have suffered persecution for more than a decade (Acts 8:1-3, 11:27-30). The Jewish Christians provided the Gentiles with the wonderful Gospel of Jesus Christ. Now, the Jewish churches are dependent on the Gentiles churches for financial support. The Corinthian church should therefore give *so there may be fairness*.

Quoting Exodus 16:18, Paul writes, *"Whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack"* (8:15). God wanted all His people to have enough food during the wilderness wandering so He sent thin, white flakes called "manna" to appear on the ground every morning. Apparently, they shared the manna they gathered so everyone had enough to eat.

In the same way, the Corinthians who have an abundance should share with believers who do not have enough. That's what we are to do as Christians. Those who have abundance are to share with those who are in legitimate need. We must also remember though, as Christians, we are under no obligation to help lazy people who can work, have opportunity to work, but refuse to do so. What does God say in 2 Thessalonians 3:10c?

God also told the Israelites to gather only enough for one day and to not keep any until the next morning. However, some people were greedy and didn't trust God. They gathered more than they needed and kept extra. God doesn't want us to be greedy. As a result of the Israelites' greediness, what do we read in Exodus 16:20b-c?

As Christians, we are under no obligation to help lazy people who can work, have opportunity to work, but refuse to do so.

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