

LIVING THE CHRISTLIFE
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Studies from 2 Corinthians
Pt. 12
2 Corinthians 8

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 accord, 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.

⁸ I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine. ⁹ For 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. 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. 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 For 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.”

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.

—2 Corinthians 8 (ESV)

Background

The offering being collected for the impoverished Christians in Jerusalem
Such an offering, such a type of giving, was, itself, a new concept
One could say that “giving” itself—certainly in the many ways that we envision it—was
an unknown concept—and not an easy one to instill
One could not simply announce that we are going to “take up an offering.”

v 1 – “the grace of God”

The giving of the Macedonian churches is presented—rightfully—as an outpouring of the
grace of God
Giving is an opportunity from God to participate in His work

v 2 – “for in a severe test of affliction”

more lit. “in much proof of tribulation”—meaning, being proven by tribulation

an irony: “their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of
generosity”!

Paul did not say “has resulted in a huge amount”
The source of the giving: abundance of joy and extreme poverty
The result: a wealth of generosity

v 3 – “for they gave according to their means [power, ability]”

This principle is supported over and over in the Bible
Paul’s witness to them: they really gave beyond their means
A generosity I have often witnessed in Hungary

“of their own accord”

This was part of the new concept of giving
Not ordered, not coerced as to a certain amount
Free, themselves, to decide what to do

“begging us earnestly for the favor...”

For the grace—*charis*—same word used above
The opportunity is a gift

“of taking part in the relief”

Lit is much stronger: for the fellowship (*koinonia*) of the service (*diakonia*)

“begging us for the grace of the fellowship of the service among the saints”

v 5 – the response was more than they had hoped for

the Christians first offered themselves to the Lord—to know His will and to do it
and then “by [*dia*] the will of God to” the apostles

v 6 – “Accordingly, we urged Titus...”

Titus had been to see Paul and others, and was probably the letter-bearer, returning to Corinth

Paul was supporting Titus' efforts to continue with the offering—to “complete among you this act of grace.”

vv 7-8 – Interesting verses...

Paul is not being insincere or flattering, but he does highlight that excellence in faith, speech, knowledge, and sincerity should be accompanied by excellence in giving! He also tells the Corinthians that they “excel” in “the love from us to you”!

“I say this not as command...”

“but through the earnestness of others...”

What “others”?

Perhaps from the point of view of the recipients, that these gifts are being received from “others” who do not even know them

Perhaps meaning “others” as in additional contributors, as Titus completes the work.

v 9 – Principles of giving—and an urging to completion

The Lord Jesus Christ – the supreme giver – was rich and gave all for us

Through his poverty—His giving—we have now become rich

He is our model

v 10 – “In this matter I give my judgment”

“This benefits you.”

And this remains a principle of giving that we need to keep ever most in our minds

We are blessed by our own giving.

Paul to the Corinthians: This is something you started, you desire to do it, now finish well—so that your desire is matched by your finished result.

Something had interrupted the collection.

“For if the readiness is there...”

Again, the “readiness” had to be taught and accepted

“It is acceptable according to what a person has...”

There may have been suggestions to the contrary

Paul is reinforcing the teachings (now known) of other Scripture—including Jesus' parables

vv 13-15 – *isotés*

Here translated “fairness”—meaning more literally “equality”

This was not an effort to make every single Christian's material situation exactly the same

The principle is one of sharing from abundance to meet the needs of those who are in need. The even more basic principle was to care about the needs of other Christians and be willing to help them out.

Paul makes the point that currently, it is you who can help and they are in need. In the future, this might be reversed. The principle is one of mutual care—like a family.
(v15) “As it is written...”—Ex.16:18. Having to do with the daily portions of manna—which were the same for each person (an omer).

vv 16-24 – Titus, the “brother who is famous,” and accountability.
Paul commends Titus, who is returning to minister “of his own accord.”

“the brother who is famous”

Much speculation down through the years
Some early church historians thought it was Luke, but there are many other candidates!
The Scripture says that this person was praised “in the Gospel”—it does not say, although it could be, that he was praised as a preacher.
He could have been a person who was praised for his labor in the Gospel effort, for his integrity and sacrifice—that is clearly the more important role that he is playing as per this passage.
Paul does not mention his preaching—he highlights that this brother as one who is appointed to come with them so that “no one should blame us about this generous gift that is being administered by us.”

(v22) “And with them we are sending our brother whom we have often tested...” Yet another person was being sent in order to ensure complete trust and accountability.

“for we aim at what is honorable not only in the Lord's sight but also in the sight of man.” (v 21)
Another guiding principle re: offerings