

Know the Word

The Book of Second Corinthians

Lesson 4 – The Collection for Jerusalem (Chapters 8-9)

In these two chapters, Paul writes about the collection of money for the Christian poor in Jerusalem, which the Corinthians had started but not completed.

Background to the Collection for Jerusalem

One of the major ministries of Paul's third missionary journey was the taking up of a special 'relief offering' for the poor Christians in Judea. Once before Paul had assisted in this way (Acts 11:27-30), and he was happy to do it again.

The collection had been started in Corinth under the direction of Titus during the previous year (see 8:10; 9:2), but because of all the troubles in the Corinthian church, it had slowed down or come to a standstill. Paul is now sending Titus back to them, taking with him this present letter, for the purpose of completing this good work, which he describes as an 'act of grace'.

The central teaching in these two chapters is that giving is an act of grace. Paul used nine different words to refer to the offering, but the one he used the most was *grace*. Giving is truly a *ministry or service* and *fellowship or sharing* (8:4) that helps others, but the motivation must be from the grace of God in the heart. Paul knew that this collection was a *debt* owed by the Gentiles (Romans 15:27) and *fruit* from their Christian lives (Romans 15:28) but it was even more: it was the working of the *grace* of God in human hearts.

The Grace of Giving (Part 1 – Chapter 8)

Essential characteristics of Grace Giving:

1. *Give in spite of circumstances* (8:1-2)
 - a. The Macedonian churches experienced 'the most severe trial.' This was probably a test of their Christian faith. They may have lost their jobs or been excluded from the trade guilds because they refused to have anything to do with idolatry.
 - b. They were in 'extreme poverty.' The word extreme means 'rock-bottom'. It describes a beggar who has absolutely nothing and has no hope of getting anything.
2. *Give enthusiastically* (8:3-4)

The enthusiasm of the Macedonians, as contrasted with that of the Corinthians, is evident.

 - a. They needed no prompting or reminding, as did the church at Corinth.
 - b. They were more than willing to share in the collection. In fact they 'urgently pleaded' to be included!

c. They gave as much as they were able, even beyond their ability.

3. *Give as Jesus gave (8:5-9)*

Jesus Christ is always the supreme example for the believer to follow, whether in service, suffering, or sacrifice.

- a. Like Jesus Christ, the Macedonian Christians *gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us, in keeping with God's will (8:5)*.
- b. The Macedonians' giving was, like Christ's, *motivated by love (8:7-8)*. In contrast, the Corinthian Christians had so many spiritual gifts, yet they were lax in keeping their promise and sharing in the collection.
- c. Their giving was *sacrificial (8:9)*
Paul describes the grace of Jesus Christ in the following terms: "though he was rich, yet for your sakes, he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich." (Compare Phil. 2:7)

Jesus was rich because He is God. He became poor when he became Man. He did this so that we might become rich.

4. *Give willingly (8:10-12)*

- grace giving must come from a willing heart – not coerced or forced.
- promise must be matched by performance (v. 10)
- willingness must be followed by doing (v. 11)
- God sees not the portion, but the proportion (v. 12)

5. *Give by faith (8:13-24)*

- It does not mean that the rich become poor so that the poor might become rich (v. 13).
- 'Equality' in the whole procedure: the Gentiles were enriched spiritually by the Jews, so the Jews should be enriched by the Gentiles materially (Romans 15:25-28); at that time, the Gentile churches were materially rich, while the believers in Judea were poor. The situation could one day be reversed.
- God does the 'equalizing': example of manna (Ex.16:18-20).

Qualifications of those handling God's money

1. A God-given desire to serve (8:16-17): example of Titus.
2. A burden for lost souls (8:18): the unnamed brother who shared Gospel.
3. A desire to honour God (8:19)
4. A reputation for honesty and zeal (8:20-22)
5. A co-operative spirit (8:23): Titus- partner, fellow worker

The Grace of Giving (Part 2 – Chapter 9)

Why practice grace giving?

1. Your giving will provoke others to give (9:1-5)

- the Corinthians' eagerness stirred the Macedonians to action (9:1-2).
- the Macedonians' grace in actually giving is now used by Paul to remind the Corinthians to get ready the promised collection. (9:3-5).

2. Your giving will bless you (9:6-11)

In grace giving, our motive is not 'to get something,' but receiving God's blessings is one of the fringe benefits. If our giving is to bless us and build us up, we must follow the principles below:

a. The principle of *increase*: we reap proportionately to what we sow (9:6)

b. The principle of *intent*: we reap as we sow with right motives (9:7)
We must not be 'sad givers' who give grudgingly, or 'mad givers' who give because we have to ('of necessity'); but we should be 'glad givers' who cheerfully share what we have because we have experienced the grace of God.

c.. The principle of *immediacy*: we reap even while we are sowing (9:8-11)
We start to share God's abundant grace; note the use of *all* and *every* (9:8). The Christian who practises grace giving will always have what he needs when he needs it. Furthermore, the grace of God enriches him morally and spiritually so that he grows in Christian character. In his walk and his work, he depends wholly on the sufficiency of God.

3. Your giving will meet needs (9:12)

Our giving ought to provide for necessities, not subsidize luxuries. There are needs to be met and our limited resources must not be squandered. There are always more needs than any one Christian or church can meet; but the need is important. Some needs are greater than others, and some needs are more strategic than others. We need accurate information as well as spiritual illumination as we seek to meet the many needs that are pressing upon us today.

4. Your giving will glorify God (9:13)

The grateful Jewish believers would praise God not only for the generosity of the Gentile churches in meeting their physical and material needs. They would also praise God for the spiritual submission of the Gentiles, their obedience to the Spirit of God who gave them the desire to give. They would also give thanks that *everyone else* was also being helped by the Gentile churches.

5. Your giving will unite God's people (9:14-15)
The offering would bind the Jewish and Gentile congregations because
 - a. It was an expression of love – Gentiles not obligated to share.
 - b. The Jewish believers would pray for the Gentiles, and vice versa.
 - c. Both the Gentile and Jewish churches would be drawn closer to Christ.

References

1. Warren W. Wiersbe. 2 Corinthians: Be Encouraged.
2. R.V.G. Tasker. 2 Corinthians. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries.
3. NIV Study Bible.
4. ESV Study Bible.
5. IVP Press

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Discussion Question

2 Corinthians 8:1-9:15: The Need to Give

The privacy of the purse makes it extremely difficult for Christians to talk about their money. The problem is compounded by hard-sell media evangelists raising funds for their personal empire. But Paul devotes two whole chapters to the grace of giving, because both he and the Corinthians have a problem in this area. We too may have problems. So let's talk about it in our discussion groups and allow the Holy Spirit to teach and guide us.

Warming Up to God (Suggested time: 5 mins)

Reflect on your own pattern of giving. When is it hard for you and why?

Discovering the Word (Suggested time: 15 mins)

1. In what ways are the Macedonians excellent examples of generosity (8:1-5)?
2. In both chapters Paul refrains from using the word *money*. Instead he speaks of *sharing* (8:4; 9:13), *service* (8:4, 18; 9:1, 12-13), *offering* (8:19), *grace* (8:6-7) and *gift* (8:12, 20; 9:5). What insights do these words give us into the nature of giving?

Applying the Word (Suggested time: 10 mins)

If you were to obey fully the teaching about giving in Chapters 8 and 9, what would need to change in your motivation and practice of giving?

Guided Answers to Discussion Question

2 Corinthians 8:1-9:15: The Need to Give

The privacy of the purse makes it extremely difficult for Christians to talk about their money. The problem is made worse by media evangelists raising funds for their personal empire. But Paul devotes two whole chapters to the grace of giving, because both he and the Corinthians have a problem in this area. We too may have problems. So let's talk about it in our discussion groups and allow the Holy Spirit to teach and guide us.

Warming Up to God (Suggested time: 5 mins)

Reflect on your own pattern of giving. When is it hard for you and why?

If your group is not very open to sharing about this topic, do not make it difficult for them, but try to encourage them to open up by sharing openly about YOUR own struggles or that of someone you know without embarrassing them. Warming up to God is very important for the success of any discussion on this sensitive topic. Pray for openness to the Spirit.

Discovering the Word (Suggested time: 15 mins)

1. In what ways are the Macedonians excellent examples of generosity (8:1-5)?

- Their generosity is described as a 'grace' that God has given them. In other words, the root of all generosity is receiving from God what we do not deserve (v. 1) and giving the same.
- Their generosity was rooted in 'the most severe trial' (test of faith, persecution?), 'their overflowing joy' and 'their extreme poverty' (v. 2). Circumstances are never an excuse for lack of generosity.
- They gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability (v 3a). Generosity is determined not by how much you give but how much you have left over for yourself.
- They gave 'entirely on their own' (v. 3b). Generosity is purely voluntary. It can never be forced.
- They saw their giving as a 'privilege', not an obligation or burden (v. 4a).
- They saw their giving as a 'sharing' and as a 'service to the saints' (v. 4b).
- They 'gave themselves' first to the Lord and then to Paul and his co-workers in keeping with God's will (v. 5).

2. In both chapters Paul refrains from using the word *money*. Instead he speaks of *sharing* (8:4; 9:13), *service* (8:4, 18; 9:1, 12-13), *offering* (8:19), *grace* (8:6-7) and *gift* (8:12, 20; 9:5). What insights do these words give us into the nature of giving?

If time permits, please look at some other translation apart from NIV, e.g. the ESV, NKJ or a translation in another language you can read, e.g. Chinese. The NIV translation is not accurate in parts.

1. Sharing (8:4, 9:13). The Greek word used here *koinonia* is the same as that used for fellowship and communion. Giving is not about 'what I can get out of it' but about 'how can I best share what God has given me.'
2. Service (8:4,18; 9:1, 12-13). The Greek word used here is *daikonia*, the word that is translated 'deacon' in English. Giving is a ministry, as important as preaching, teaching, evangelism. There is no room in the Bible for the divide between the 'secular' and the 'spiritual'. Giving money is as spiritual as preaching and teaching.
3. Offering (8:19). This translation in the NIV originally carried the meaning of 'this act of grace'. See 4 below.
4. Grace (8:6-7). Grace is always undeserved. We need to give as Christ gives – to the totally undeserving.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ enabled Him to give Himself *totally*. Our giving must be total, complete, not just a part of us.
5. Gift (8:12, 20; 9:5). This is better translated as blessing, blessedness, eulogy. Giving results in blessings, praise and thanksgiving.

Applying the Word (Suggested time: 10 mins)

If you were to obey fully the teaching about giving in Chapters 8 and 9, what would need to change in your motivation and practice of giving?