

The Challenge to Give



2 CORINTHIANS 8:1-15

TEXT, EXPOSITION AND PRACTICAL HELPS

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THE MINISTRY AND ITS FINANCIAL COLLECTIONS, 2 Corinthians 8:1-9:15

A. The Challenge to Give, 2 Corinthians 8:1-15

(2 Corinthians 8:1-15) Introduction: the churches throughout Judea were suffering great poverty and needed help badly. This is what this passage is about: meeting the desperate need of fellow believers and human beings who were being threatened with starvation and death, many of whom were without Christ and doomed to an eternity apart from Christ.

The need of missions is an unending call, a call that never ends. The desperate needs of the world must always confront man. Why? Because the world is sinful and corruptible, full of greed and covetousness, banking and hoarding. People who *have* more than they need should be helping and giving, serving and ministering. Instead they are banking and hoarding. The result is a world reeling in desperate need. The challenge to the church is clear! Give—give all you are and have to reach and help the desperate of the world.

1. **Know the spirit of the Macedonians: they gave because of the grace and favor of God (v.1-5).**
2. **Excel in the same spirit of giving (v.6-7).**
3. **Prove the sincerity of your love (v.8).**
4. **Know the example of Christ—He gave (v.9).**
5. **Remember your own past record (v.10).**
6. **Give readily and willingly (v.11-12).**
7. **Meet the needs of one another—equally (v.13-15).**

1. (2 Corinthians 8:1-5) Stewardship— Giving— Offerings: the first challenge is to know the spirit of the Macedonians.

The Roman province of Macedonia included all of northern Greece. The known churches of the region were **Philippi**, **Thessalonica**, and **Berea**. The first two are well known by every generation of Christians because of the two letters addressed to them in the New Testament. At one time, the Macedonian province had been known for its natural resources. But down through the centuries the area had been ravaged by war, and Rome had stripped it of its wealth. Because of this the churches of the area were somewhat poor in material wealth.

But note a glorious fact: they were extremely wealthy in the grace of God. God had bestowed an *abundance of grace* upon the churches—so much grace that Paul is able to use them as a dynamic example of God's grace. Remember that grace *means* the favor and blessings of God, all the good things of life which God gives us—the greatest of which is salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.

God's blessings were "**bestowed on**" the churches. The idea is that God just poured or laid blessing after blessing upon the churches. They knew the grace, the favor, and the blessings of God in a very, very special way.

Note four dynamic facts about their testimony.

1. They gave to help others, and gave liberally. They gave despite terrible trial and deep poverty. There was great suffering among the believers and churches of Macedonia.

a. Believers suffered afflictions and persecutions, and the afflictions were a "**great trial**" for them to bear. When they accepted Christ and took their stand for Him, they were heavily persecuted.

"And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost" (1 Thes. 1:6).

"For ye, brethren, became followers of the churches of God which in Judaea are in Christ Jesus: for ye also have suffered like things of your own countrymen, even as they have of the Jews" (1 Thes. 2:14).

"So that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure" (2 Thes. 1:4).

b. Believers suffered "**deep poverty**," which *means* utter poverty, poverty down to the depths. As mentioned, this was due to the ravages of war and the battles which were fought on their own soil and to the heavy taxation and stripping of resources by the Roman government.

However, note that the believers were filled with an "**abundance of joy**." They had come to know Christ: their sins had been forgiven and the Spirit of God was living in their hearts and lives, strengthening and guiding them through all. God was now looking after their lives and taking care of them. God was giving them the absolute assurance of His care and provision day by day and of eternal life when they departed this world. They joyed and rejoiced in all that God was doing for them and was going to do for them.

The point is this: they knew the Lord—really knew Him—and they were committed to living for the Lord. Therefore, when someone needed help, they were ready to help. They gave liberally. The word "**liberality**" (*haplotētos*) *means singleness of mind, sincerely, with an open and free heart.*" The churches of Macedonia determined to give, to open their hearts and give all they could.

2. They gave beyond their ability. **They willingly gave: no special appeal had to be made; no pressure had to be executed.** They gave freely and readily. **And note:** they did not give according to their ability, but they *went beyond* what they were able to give.

3. They gave insistently, begging for the privilege to share. Apparently, they were giving so much that Paul felt it was just beyond their means. However they insisted, and note why: they wanted to share in the *fellowship of ministering to the saints*. Some fellow believers were in need, and they wanted the privilege of fellowshiping with them *by giving to them*. Note how *giving* is said to be a means of *fellowshipping with others*.

4. They gave themselves to the Lord first. This is a most striking verse and point. What it means is this: these dear believers gave all they were and had to the Lord. They used this occasion, the occasion of an offering—the occasion when they were asked to help others—to *rededicate* their lives and possessions to Christ.

Note that this involved three steps:

- a. the dedication of their lives to Christ: all they were.
- b. the dedication of their possessions to Christ: all they had.
- c. the dedication of themselves to the minister, Paul, in order to serve by his side and to allow them all to serve Christ together.

Paul distinctly says that they gave "**their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God.**" This is essential if the needs of a world reeling in desperate needs are to ever be reached: believers must join hand in hand with the ministers of God.

Thought 1. The dynamic example of the Macedonian church needs to be studied by the churches of every generation. They clearly demonstrate the spirit that is absolutely essential for meeting the desperate needs of the world, a world that is lost and doomed unless it is reached with the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

"For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me" ([Matthew 25:35-36](#)).

"We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves" ([Romans 15:1](#)).

"I have showed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive" ([Acts 20:35](#)).

"Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ" ([Galatians 6:2](#)).

"Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feebleminded, support the weak, be patient toward all men" ([1 Thes. 5:14](#)).

"Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; and them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body" ([Hebrews 13:3](#)).

"Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world" ([James 1:27](#)).

"Is it [the fast that pleases God] not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?" ([Isaiah 58:7](#)).

2. ([2 Corinthians 8:6-7](#)) Stewardship— Giving: the second challenge is to excel in the same spirit of giving as the Macedonians.

Sometime earlier the Corinthian church had begun to take up an offering for the poor churches of Judea, but something had happened that caused the church to stop the project. Just what is not actually known, but it was probably all the trouble and problems covered in the letters of **1** and **2 Corinthians**. Since the church had experienced revival, it was now time for the offering project to be completed.

Very simply, Paul says two things that apply to every church.

1. The grace of giving is to be completed in you. The Corinthians were to financially support the Lord's work, the very ministry of God Himself. They were to support the ministry of meeting the needs of desperate people and of proclaiming the gospel to a lost and dying world. This glorious privilege is clearly seen when it is remembered that God has not given to angels the privilege of supporting His work; God has committed this grace, this privilege only to men.

2. The other graces abound in you; therefore, the grace of giving is to abound in you. The Corinthians had an abundance of spiritual resources, especially the gifts that involved.....

- a.** faith: the trust in God that enabled them to walk through life victoriously and to serve God faithfully.
- b.** utterance: the ability to share the gospel and the doctrines of God's Word.
- c.** knowledge: the understanding of God's Word.
- d.** diligence: the energy and zeal to carry on the ministry of the Lord Jesus.
- e.** love to us: the care for the minister of God who serves Christ so faithfully.

Because the church was so strong in these gifts, they needed to abound in the gift of giving as well. Giving and helping others in their desperate need was as much a duty as any other responsibility.

"Distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality" ([Romans 12:13](#)).

"As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith" ([Galatians 6:10](#)).

"That they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate" ([1 Tim. 6:18](#)).

"But to do good and to communicate [give] forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased" ([Hebrews 13:16](#)).

3. ([2 Corinthians 8:8](#)) Stewardship— Giving: the third exhortation is to prove the sincerity of your love.

Note that Paul does not command the Corinthians to give. If giving is forced or coerced, it benefits nothing; it does not please God. God is pleased only with gifts that are willingly and cheerfully given. He blesses only those who willingly help others.

Therefore, giving must be based upon two things.

1. Giving must be based upon love for those who are lost and needy. Giving must be based upon love for the Lord Jesus who has commanded us to go into all of the world to reach and help the people of the world.

2. Giving must be based upon the example of those who give sacrificially. In the case of the Corinthians, they had the dynamic example of the Macedonians. The Corinthians should have been stirred to follow the example of such sacrificial giving. In our case, we should be stirred to follow the dynamic example of all those who give willingly and sacrificially.

Note how love is proven by action. Love cannot be known unless it is demonstrated by deeds of compassion and giving. Love demands sacrificial giving. In fact, there is no love unless there is sacrificial giving.

"...Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" ([Matthew 22:39](#)).

"By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" ([John 13:35](#)).

"This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you" ([John 15:12](#)).

"And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour" ([Ephes. 5:2](#)).

"And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you" ([1 Thes. 3:12](#)).

4. (2 Corinthians 8:9) Stewardship— Giving— Jesus Christ, Humiliation; Condescension: the fourth challenge is to know the example of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Above all others, Jesus Christ demonstrates not only that we are to give, but how we are to give.

1. The Lord Jesus Christ was rich. He was the Son of God, possessing the very nature and being and fullness of God ([John 1:1-3](#); [Phil. 2:6](#)).

- a. He dwelt in the glory and majesty, dominion and power of the Godhead ([Jude 24-25](#)).
- b. He dwelt in light which no man can approach, in all the splendor and brilliance of the Godhead ([1 Tim. 6:16](#)).
- c. He possessed every good and perfect thing that can be possessed ([James 1:17](#)).
- d. He had all the worship and adoration of heavenly beings ([Rev. 4:6](#); [Rev. 5:11f](#)).

2. The Lord Jesus Christ became poor. This refers to the incarnation of Jesus Christ, that is, to His condescension or humiliation. It refers to the great gulf He had to span in coming to earth. The Lord Jesus Christ, who was King of kings and Lord of lords, who was God of very God, left all the glory and worship of heaven to become a man.

He who was.....

- a. God became an humble man.
- b. the Lord took on flesh and blood.
- c. the Holy God took the place of the lowest.
- d. the Sovereign Lord became the subject.
- e. the Beloved became the rejected.
- f. the Perfect One became the Sacrifice for sin.
- g. the Life became the Substitute for death.

As Scripture declares so aptly, "**He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor.**" Because He became poor, we can become rich. We can receive the adoption of sons, actually become sons and daughters of God and live with Him forever and ever in the new heavens and earth ([2 Cor. 6:17-18](#)).

The point is this: since Christ willingly sacrificed so much to help us, we ought to sacrifice to help those in need. Just as Christ gave everything for us when we were in desperate need, so we are to give everything to meet the needs of those who are desperately lost in this world.

"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form

of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" ([Phil. 2:5-8](#)).

"Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage" ([Hebrews 2:14-15](#)).

"I have showed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive" ([Acts 20:35](#)).

5. ([2 Corinthians 8:10](#)) Stewardship— Giving: the fifth challenge is to remember your own past record.

As mentioned above, the Corinthians had undertaken the mission project of meeting the needs of the poor churches in Judea, but they had backed off the project when divisiveness had reared its ugly head in the church (see note 2—"[2 Cor. 8:6-7](#)"). Now that they had experienced revival, Paul gives his advice: pick up the mission project again. "This is expedient for you": expedient and beneficial for you personally and for your ministry. Recommitting yourselves to missions will stir God to bless the church.

Note that the church had been forward, that is, *zealous* in undertaking the mission project about a year before. Since the revival of recommitment, they should be *even more zealous* to launch a ministry of missions for the Lord.

"Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" ([Matthew 20:28](#)).

"Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves? And he said, He that showed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise" ([Luke 10:36-37](#)).

"He saith to him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my sheep" ([John 21:16](#)).

"Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ" ([Galatians 6:2](#)).

"As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith" ([Galatians 6:10](#)).

"With good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men" ([Ephes. 6:7](#)).

6. ([2 Corinthians 8:11-12](#)) Stewardship— Giving: the sixth challenge is to give readily and willingly.

Four quick points are made in these two verses, points that give clear directions on missions to any church that is willing to listen. **Note:** Paul is no longer giving advice; he is now charging the church to give itself to missions and to undertake this particular mission project.

1. Give yourselves to missions. This is implied, understood. Paul is dealing with one mission project, but underlying the whole discussion is the absolute necessity for a permanent commitment to missions. After a mission need has been met, there is always another need to meet—a need just as critical. The world reels under the weight of sin and disease, corruption and death, hunger and thirst, poverty and ignorance, homelessness and exposure to the elements. Literally thousands die prematurely and without Christ every day—die because no one cared enough to help them. The call of missions is the constant call of Christ:

"Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" ([Matthew 20:28](#)).

"For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost" ([Luke 19:10](#)).

"Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world" ([Matthew 28:19-20](#)).

2. Finish the mission. The Corinthian church had begun the project; they needed to finish it. The church is to reach out in mission projects all over the world, and it is to finish the projects. Remember that Jerusalem was a foreign field to the Corinthians.

3. Give readily and willingly—lay hold of "a willing mind." Note that this is the first requirement when a person gives. Above all else, he is to give willingly.

4. The reason is simply stated: God is going to judge us for what we give. The idea is this: in the day of judgment God is going to look at what we gave and at what we kept back. If we have banked, hoarded, and lived extravagantly, He is going to reject us. But if we gave all that we had beyond our needs, then we will be "accepted," that is, approved to live in the presence of Christ who sacrificed all He had for us. (See [Matthew 19:16-30](#)).

"But rather give alms of such things as ye have; and behold, all things are clean unto you" ([Luke 11:41](#)).

"Sell that ye have, and give alms; provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth" ([Luke 12:33](#)).

"Now when Jesus heard these things, he said unto him, Yet lackest thou one thing: sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me" ([Luke 18:22](#)).

"Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judaea" ([Act 11:29](#)).

"Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come" ([1 Cor. 16:2](#)).

"For if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not" ([2 Cor. 8:12](#)).

"Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver" ([2 Cor. 9:7](#)).

"Every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the Lord thy God which he hath given thee" ([Deut. 16:17](#)).

7. ([2 Corinthians 8:13-15](#)) Stewardship— Giving: the seventh challenge is to meet the needs of one another—equally. It is critical to note that these verses are not dealing with possessions or property, not with what a person has, but with *needs*.

1. One person's need is not to be eased while another person has a need.

2. Each need is to be equally met. This is an explosive principle, for it goes contrary to what society practices. It eliminates the hoarding and keeping of goods beyond our needs. God wants the needs of the starving and lost masses met. The only way they can be met is by giving all we are and have *beyond what is needed* to take care of our own families.

3. The Old Testament Scripture supports this principle ([Exodus 16:18](#)). When God miraculously fed Israel with the manna from the sky, the people were to gather only what they needed. If they gathered too much and attempted to hoard and put it back, it spoiled overnight. If a person was unable to gather enough due to some illness or inability, his need was either met by the help of others or by God Himself.

The point is striking: every believer is to use all he has and give it to meet the needs of a desperate world. He is to particularly meet the needs of fellow believers. (See [Matthew 19:16-30](#)).

"Sell that ye have, and give alms; provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth" ([Luke 12:33](#)).

"I have showed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive" ([Acts 20:35](#)).

"Distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality" ([Romans 12:13](#)).

"As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith" ([Galatians 6:10](#)).

"Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth" ([Ephes. 4:28](#)).

"Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life" ([1 Tim. 6:17-19](#)).

"But to do good and to communicate [give] forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased" ([Hebrews 13:16](#)).