

BIBLICAL ECONOMICS

THE MINISTRY AND ITS FINANCIAL INTEGRITY, [2 Corinthians 8:1-9:15](#)

Begging to Be a Blessing

[2 Corinthians 8:1-24 \(NASB\)](#)

¹“Now, brethren, we *wish to* make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia,

²that in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality.

³For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability, *they gave* of their own accord,

⁴begging us with much urging for the favor of participation in the support of the saints,

⁵and *this*, not as we had expected, but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God.”

To Timothy he wrote: “The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching” ([1 Timothy 5:17](#)).

Second, the early church gave to meet the needs of the poor. Most of its members were from the lower classes (cf. [1 Corinthians 1:26](#)), and many were unable to meet their own financial needs.

[1 Corinthians 1:26 \(NASB\)](#)

²⁶“For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble.”

As Paul penned [chapters 8](#) and [9](#) of this epistle, he had in mind this second aspect of giving. He did not write about the poor in the Corinthian assembly; the Corinthians were apparently faithful in caring for them. Nor was the apostle’s focus on giving to the poor in general. He was concerned specifically about the many needy saints in the Jerusalem church.

From its birth on the Day of Pentecost, the Jerusalem church had had to cope with the extreme poverty of many of its members. There were **three main reasons** for that situation.

First, the Jerusalem church consisted largely of pilgrims. Many, if not most, of the first converts were visiting Jerusalem to celebrate the Day of Pentecost, when the church

was born. They were Hellenistic Jews, who lived in the Gentile lands to which the Jewish people had been scattered in the Diaspora.

Acts 2:9-11 describes them as “**Parthians and Medes and Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the districts of Libya around Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs.**”

On that Day of Pentecost, three thousand people were added to the church (**Acts 2:41**).

Acts 2:41 (NASB)

⁴¹ “**So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls.**”

Soon afterward, the number of men in the church reached five thousand (**Acts 4:4**), not counting the women.

Acts 4:4 (NASB)

⁴ “**But many of those who had heard the message believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand.**”

Since there were no churches or Christians anywhere else in the world, the converted pilgrims remained in Jerusalem. Only there could they sit under the apostles’ teaching and find fellowship with other believers. Most of them were not wealthy and could not afford to stay indefinitely in Jerusalem’s inns, nor would they wish to, given the condition of the typical inn. And many of those staying with Jewish relatives were alienated from family after becoming Christians and had to leave. They would have had no option but to move in with the Jewish believers who lived in Jerusalem.

Many of them were also poor, so housing thousands of converted pilgrims would have been a great hardship for them.

The second reason for the Jerusalem church’s poverty was persecution. New converts lost their jobs or businesses and were ostracized by their families and friends. Just as Jesus had predicted, they became the outcasts of Jewish society (**John 16:2**).

John 16:2 (NASB)

² “**They will make you outcasts from the synagogue, but an hour is coming for everyone who kills you to think that he is offering service to God.**”

A third reason for the Jerusalem church’s poverty was the generally poor economic climate of the region. The Romans extracted all they could from their conquered territories, seizing their resources and imposing a heavy burden of taxation. The result was rampant poverty in Israel. Adding to the region’s economic woes was the worldwide famine predicted in **Acts 11:27-29**.

Acts 11:27-29 (NASB)

²⁷ “**Now at this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch.**”

²⁸ One of them named Agabus stood up and *began* to indicate by the Spirit that there would certainly be a great famine all over the world. And this took place in the *reign* of Claudius.

²⁹ And in the proportion that any of the disciples had means, each of them determined to send *a contribution* for the relief of the brethren living in Judea.”

The Jerusalem church made a noble effort to meet the needs of its poor members. [Acts 2:44-45](#) records that “**all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need,**” while [Acts 4:32](#) adds, “The congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul; and not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own, but all things were common property to them.”

Because of their selfless dedication to meeting one another’s needs, in the early days of the church “**there was not a needy person among them**” ([Acts 4:34](#)).

[Acts 4:34 \(NASB\)](#)

³⁴ “For there was not a needy person among them, for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales.”

But eventually, as the needs grew and persecution mounted (cf. [Acts 8:1](#)), the Jerusalem church was overwhelmed with needs and undersupplied with money.

[Acts 8:1 \(NASB\)](#)

¹ “Saul was in hearty agreement with putting him to death. And on that day a great persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.”

Paul recognized their need and determined to take up a collection for the Jerusalem church from the churches of Asia Minor and Europe ([Romans 15:25-27](#)).

[Romans 15:25-27 \(NASB\)](#)

²⁵ “But now, I am going to Jerusalem serving the saints.

²⁶ For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem.

²⁷ Yes, they were pleased *to do so*, and they are indebted to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in their spiritual things, they are indebted to minister to them also in material things.”

He also sought by doing that to strengthen the spiritual bond between those largely Gentile congregations and the Jewish church in Jerusalem. The apostle knew that the love offering would help ease the suspicion, bitterness, and hostility with which Jews and Gentiles generally regarded each other. It would tangibly express the spiritual reality that through His death, Jesus Christ “**broke down the barrier of the dividing wall**” between Jews and Gentiles, making them one ([Ephesians 2:14](#)).

Ephesians 2:14 (NASB)

¹⁴“For He Himself is our peace, who made both *groups into one* and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall.”

Paul first wrote to the Corinthians about this collection at the end of his first inspired letter to them (**1 Corinthians 16:1-4**).

1 Corinthians 16:1-4 (NASB)

¹“Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so do you also.

²On the first day of every week each one of you is to put aside and save, as he may prosper, so that no collections be made when I come.

³When I arrive, whomever you may approve, I will send them with letters to carry your gift to Jerusalem;

⁴and if it is fitting for me to go also, they will go with me.”

But he had asked them to participate earlier, during his ministry in Corinth. Their rebellion against Paul had temporarily halted the collection, and since the relationship was restored, Paul instructed them to pick up where they left off. Paul had Titus encourage the Corinthians to begin the collection when he brought the severe letter to Corinth (**2 Corinthians 8:6**).

2 Corinthians 8:6 (NASB)

⁶“So we urged Titus that as he had previously made a beginning, so he would also complete in you this gracious work as well.”

In **chapter 8**, Paul listed several motives for giving. The first, because giving is the behavior of devout Christians (**2 Corinthians 8:1-8**), derives from the example of the Macedonian churches (Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea). This passage reveals that giving is motivated by God’s grace, transcends difficult circumstances, is with joy, not hindered by poverty, generous, proportionate, sacrificial, voluntary, a privilege, an act of worship, in submission to pastors, in concert with other Christian virtues, and evidence of love.

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.

2 Corinthians 8:1-5 (NASB)

¹“Now, brethren, we *wish to* make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia,
²that in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality.
³For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability, *they gave* of their own accord,
⁴begging us with much urging for the favor of participation in the support of the saints,
⁵and *this*, not as we had expected, but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God.

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.

- ⇒ 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.

1 Thessalonians 1:6 (NASB)

⁶“You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit.”

1 Thessalonians 2:14 (NASB)

¹⁴“For you, brethren, became imitators [followers] of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea, for you also endured the same sufferings at the hands of your own countrymen, even as they *did* from the Jews.”

2 Thessalonians 1:4 (NASB)

⁴“Therefore, we ourselves speak proudly of you among the churches of God for your perseverance and faith in the midst of all your persecutions and afflictions which you endure.”

- ⇒ 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.

2 Corinthians 8:2 (NASB)

²“That in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality.”

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**:

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

2 Corinthians 8:5 (NASB)

⁵“**And this, not as we had expected, but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God.**”

Paul distinctly says that they gave “gave themselves to the Lord and to 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.

Matthew 25:35-36 (NASB)

³⁵“For I was hungry, and you gave Me *something* to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me *something* to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in;

³⁶naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.”

Acts 20:35 (NASB)

³⁵“In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”

Romans 15:1 (NASB)

¹“Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength and not *just* please ourselves.”

Galatians 6:2 (NASB)

²“Bear one another’s burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ.”

1 Thessalonians 5:14 (NASB)

¹⁴“We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone.”

Hebrews 13:3 (NASB)

³“Remember the prisoners, as though in prison with them, *and* those who are ill-treated, since you yourselves also are in the body.”

James 1:27 (NASB)

²⁷“Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of *our* God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, *and* to keep oneself unstained by the world.”

Isaiah 58:7 (NASB)

⁷“Is it [the fast that pleases God] not to divide your bread with the hungry And bring the homeless poor into the house; When you see the naked, to cover him; And not to hide yourself from your own flesh?”

Let us pray,

Father, again we're so blessed. You have already poured out such abundant blessing on us. We have so much and more. And, Lord, yet there is blessing we haven't received, riches we haven't experienced because we haven't given. We think of these poor Macedonians who had so little and gave the little they had, and thus were always replenished to give again and give again.

Father, we pray that You might teach us that if there was nothing else said we would give if we believed the promise, "Give and it shall be given to you." We would give if we obeyed the command, "Give." We would give if we believed that it was more blessed to do that because we crave so much to be blessed.

Father, You have shown us a path to blessing, a path to abundance, a path to obedience, and You ask us to trust You and obey You and walk it. May we do that. And teach us, continue to teach us that we might know the fullness of Your blessing and eternal glory for that treasure in heaven which can never be corrupted and never rusted and never stolen, but which we shall enjoy forever and ever in Your presence. Thank You, Lord, for Your Word to us. In Christ's name, amen.