

# **BIBLICAL ECONOMICS**

## **THE MINISTRY AND ITS FINANCIAL INTEGRITY, 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).

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

**2 Corinthians 8:9 (NASB)**

<sup>9</sup>“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 through His poverty might become rich.”

The many facets of truth contained in this verse may be categorized under three headings: **the riches of Christ**, **the poverty of Christ**, and **the gift of Christ**.

## The Poverty of Christ

### 2 Corinthians 8:9 (NASB)

<sup>9</sup>“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 through His poverty might become rich.”

Though Jesus possessed all the riches of God from all eternity, yet for believers’ **sake He became poor**. Some have understood that statement as a reference to Christ’s financial poverty during His earthly life.

**Augustine** challenged his readers to imitate Christ’s virtues, including poverty, citing this verse as proof of Christ’s poverty (*Of Holy Virginit*y, para. 28). In his sermon, *On the Words of the Gospel, Luke 14:16*, “A Certain Man Made a Great Supper,” Etc.

**Augustine said**, “Let the beggars come, for He inviteth them, ‘who, though He was rich, for our sakes became poor, that we beggars through His poverty might be enriched’” (para. 8).

**John Calvin**, commenting on this verse, wrote

“We see what destitution and lack of all things awaited Him right from His mother’s womb and we hear what He Himself says, “**The foxes have holes and the birds of the heaven have nests; but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head**” ([Luke 9:58](#)). Thus He sanctified poverty in His own person, so that believers should no longer shrink from it, and by His poverty He has enriched us so that we should not find it hard to take from our abundance what we may expend on behalf of our brethren. (*The Second Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians and the Epistles to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon* [Reprint; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973], 111)

Many connect this alleged reference to Jesus’ poverty with the gospel, as if eliciting sympathy for Jesus’ poverty has some redemptive value. But this verse is not a commentary on Jesus’ economic status or the material circumstances of His life.

**Fred B. Craddock** notes,

“The gospel can no more be equated with the financial poverty of Jesus than it can be equated with the pain he endured on the cross” (“**The Poverty of Christ**,” *Interpretation* 22 [Apr. 1968], 162).

The Lord’s true impoverishment did not consist in the lowly circumstances in which He lived but in the reality that “**although He existed in the form of God, [He] did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, <sup>7</sup>but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men**” ([Philippians 2:6-7 NASB](#)).

In reality, Jesus did not live His life in abject poverty:

“As far as Jesus' experience is concerned, it is true that Luke highlights the lowly circumstances of his birth, but this is not an indication of the poverty of the holy family, but rather of the overcrowded conditions in Bethlehem at the time of the census ([Luke 2:7](#)). The offering that Mary made for her purification was that permitted to those who could not afford a lamb ([Luke 2:24](#); cf. [Leviticus 12:6-8](#)), and this indicates the family were not well off. Jesus was known as “**the carpenter, the son of Mary**” ([Mark 6:3](#)), and as a craftsman he would not be numbered among the abject poor. During his Galilean ministry he did remind a would-be disciple that “**Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head**” ([Luke 9:58](#)). However, this must not be taken to mean that as an itinerant preacher Jesus was continually in dire economic circumstances. The indications are that the costs of Jesus' itinerant ministry and the support for his followers were provided by a number of well-off sympathizers who had been the recipients of his healing ministry ([Luke 8:1-3](#)). In addition it was a custom among the Jews to provide hospitality for travelling preachers (cf. [Matthew 10:9-13](#)) and Jesus enjoyed such hospitality at a number of homes, and especially at that of Mary and Martha ([Luke 10:38-42](#); [John 12:1-3](#)). On the evidence, then, Jesus was no poorer than most first-century Palestinian Jews, and better off than some (e.g., those reduced to beggary). Indeed Jesus and his band of disciples had sufficient money to be able to provide help for those worse off than themselves (cf. [John 12:3-6](#); [John 13:27-29](#)).” (Colin Kruse, *The Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995], 154)

The Lord did not make believers spiritually rich by becoming economically poor. Paul used the terms “**rich**” and “**poor**” in this verse in a spiritual sense, as he did when he described himself as “**poor yet making many rich**” ([2 Corinthians 6:10](#)).

[2 Corinthians 6:10 \(NASB\)](#)

<sup>10</sup>“As sorrowful yet always rejoicing, as poor yet making many rich, as having nothing yet possessing all things.”

[2 Corinthians 8:9 \(NASB\)](#)

<sup>9</sup>“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 through His poverty might become rich.”

The Lord Jesus Christ **became poor** in His incarnation, when He was “**born of a woman**” ([Galatians 4:4](#)); “**in the likeness of sinful flesh**” ([Romans 8:3](#)); “**a descendant of David according to the flesh**” ([Romans 1:3](#)); and “**made... for a little while lower than the angels**” ([Hebrews 2:7, 9](#)). He left heaven's glory ([John 17:5](#)) and laid aside the free use of His divine prerogatives. In the most profound theological description of the Incarnation in Scripture

Paul wrote that,

**“<sup>6</sup>who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, <sup>7</sup>but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, *and* being made in the likeness of men. <sup>8</sup>Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. <sup>9</sup>For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, <sup>10</sup>so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, <sup>11</sup>and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father”** ([Philippians 2:6-11 NASB](#)).

Though He existed eternally **“in the form of God,”** possessing all the riches of deity, Jesus **“emptied Himself,”** becoming poor by **“taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men.”** He suffered human weaknesses and limitations, becoming hungry ([Matthew 4:2](#); [Matthew 21:18](#)), thirsty ([John 4:7](#); [John 19:28](#)), and tired ([Mark 4:38](#); [John 4:6](#)).

In addition, He was **“tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin”** ([Hebrews 4:15](#)). So completely did Jesus identify with His people as their faithful high priest that **“He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death.”**

[Ephesians 4:8-10 NASB](#) gives another view of Christ’s impoverishing Himself in the Incarnation:

**<sup>8</sup>“Therefore it says, “WHEN HE ASCENDED ON HIGH, HE LED CAPTIVE A HOST OF CAPTIVES, AND HE GAVE GIFTS TO MEN.”**

**<sup>9</sup>(Now this *expression*, “He ascended,” what does it mean except that He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth?**

**<sup>10</sup>He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, so that He might fill all things.)”**

Paul’s quote from [Psalm 68:18](#), **“When He ascended on high, He led captive a host of captives, and He gave gifts to men,”** describes Christ’s triumphant return to heaven after His victory over the forces of hell on Calvary. Through His sacrificial death, He freed sinners who had been captives to sin and Satan. After His ascension, He dispensed the spoils won by His death and resurrection and **“gave gifts to men.”**

But Christ’s triumph on Calvary was only possible because He had first **“descended into the lower parts of the earth.”** He left the glory of heaven and entered a world of suffering and death. Jesus’ descent reached its deepest point when He went between His death and resurrection to the prison where the most wicked of the fallen angels are incarcerated. There he proclaimed to them His triumph over the forces of hell (cf. [Colossians 2:15](#); [1 Peter 3:18-19](#)).

**Colossians 2:15 (NASB)**

<sup>15</sup> “When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him.”

**1 Peter 3:18-19 (NASB)**

<sup>18</sup> “For Christ also died for sins once for all, *the* just for *the* unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit;

<sup>19</sup> in which also He went and made proclamation to the spirits *now* in prison.”

**2 Corinthians 8:9 (NASB)**

<sup>9</sup> “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 through His poverty might become rich.”

In the incarnation of Christ, the eternal God **became poor** by taking on human flesh and humbling Himself even to the point of death on the cross. By doing so, He defeated the powers of hell, accomplished the work of redemption God assigned Him, and gave His people the priceless riches of salvation.

## The Gift of Christ

**2 Corinthians 8:9 (NASB)**

<sup>9</sup> “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 through His poverty might become rich.**”

The purpose of Christ’s condescension was that **through His poverty** poor sinners **might become rich**. He did not make them materially rich but gave them all the blessings of salvation—forgiveness, joy, peace, eternal life, light, and glory. Peter described those riches as “*to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you (believers)*”

(**1 Peter 1:4 NASB**).

Sinners desperately need the riches of Christ because they are spiritually destitute. They are the “**poor in spirit**” (**Matthew 5:3**), beggars with nothing to commend themselves. But through salvation, believers are made “**heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ**” (**Romans 8:17**), sharing His riches because they are made “**partakers of the divine nature**” (**2 Peter 1:4**).

The ultimate goal of their salvation is to be made like Him (**1 John 3:2**), to reflect His glory in heaven, “**so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus**” (**Ephesians 2:7 NASB**).

**1 John 3:2 (NASB)**

**<sup>2</sup>“Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is.”**

This was not the first time Paul described their riches in Christ to the Corinthians. In **1 Corinthians 1:4-5 NASB** he wrote, **“I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus, <sup>5</sup>that in everything you were enriched in Him, in all speech and all knowledge.”** while in **1 Corinthians 3:22** he added, **“Whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or things present or things to come; all things belong to you.”**

The glorious truth that Christians have been **“blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ” (Ephesians 1:3)** through His self-emptying, self-sacrificial love should elicit gratitude from them. More than that, however, it should also motivate them to give freely, sacrificially, and generously to others. They must follow the example of the Lord Jesus Christ, who became poor to make others rich.

How can Christians receive all the riches Christ impoverished Himself to give them, yet be unwilling to meet the needs of others? James wrote, **“<sup>15</sup>If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, <sup>16</sup>and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,’ and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that?” (James 2:15-16 NASB)**. The apostle John added, **“But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?” (1 John 3:17 NASB)**.

Some may view Paul's inclusion of this verse, with its profound theological truth, in the context of giving as incongruous. But that loses sight of the fact that theological truth does not exist in isolation from everyday life, as **Fred B. Craddock** notes:

“There is nothing mundane and outside the concern and responsibility of the Christian. There are not two worlds; there is but one. Money for the relief of the poor is as “spiritual” as prayer... The offering for the saints in Judea was for Paul a definite implication of the Incarnation. It is no surprise that the discussion of the one should bring to mind the other. The offering, in fact, provided an occasion for teaching the meaning of Christology, and Christology informed and elicited the offering.” (**“The Poverty of Christ,” Interpretation 22 [Apr. 1968] 169**)

The seemingly mundane issue of the offering was in reality connected to the central truth of Christianity, namely, that Christ's voluntary poverty makes the spiritually destitute rich.