

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).**

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

What is Economics?

PRODUCTIVITY

Economics is the study of the use of scarce resources which have alternative uses.

What does “scarce” mean? It means that what everybody wants adds up to more than there is. This may seem like a simple thing, but its implications are often grossly misunderstood, even by highly educated people.

Economics is not just about dealing with the existing output of goods and services as consumers. It is also, and more fundamentally, about producing that output from scarce resources in the first place---turning inputs into output.

In other words, economics studies the consequences of decisions that are made about the use of land, labor, capital and other resources that go into producing the volume of output which determines a country's standard of living. Those decisions and their consequences can be more important than the resources themselves, for there are poor countries with rich natural resources and countries like Japan and Switzerland with relatively few natural resources but high standards of living.

The values of natural resources per capita in Uruguay and Venezuela are several times what they are in Japan and Switzerland, but real income per capita in Japan and Switzerland is more than double that of Uruguay and several times that of Venezuela.

Not only scarcity but also "alternative uses" are at the heart of economics. If each resource had only one use, economics would be much simpler. But water can be used to produce ice or steam by itself or innumerable mixtures and compounds in combination with other things. Similarly, from petroleum comes not only gasoline and heating oil, but also plastics, asphalt and Vaseline. Iron ore can be used to produce steel products ranging from paper clips to automobiles to the frameworks of skyscrapers.

How much of each resource should be allocated to each of its many uses? Every economy has to answer that question, and each one does, in one way or another, efficiently or inefficiently. Doing so efficiently is what economics is about. Different kinds of economies are essentially different ways of making decisions about the allocation of scarce resources---and those decisions have repercussions on the life of the whole society.

During the days of the Soviet Union, for example, that country's industries used more electricity than American industries used, even though Soviet industries produced a smaller amount of output than American industries produced. Such inefficiencies in turning inputs into outputs translated into a lower standard of living, in a country richly endowed than any other country in the world. Russia is, for example, one of the few industrial nations that produces more oil than it consumes. But an abundance of resources does not automatically create an abundance of goods.

Efficiency in production---the rate at which inputs are turned into output---is not just some technicality that economists talk about. It affects the standard of living of whole societies. When visualizing this process, it helps to think about the real things---the iron ore, petroleum, wood and other inputs that go into the production process and the furniture, food and automobiles that come out the other end---rather than think of economic decisions as being simply decisions about money.

Although the word "economics" suggests money to some people, for a society as a whole money is just an artificial device to get real things done. Otherwise, the

government could make us all rich by simply printing more money. It is not money but the volume of goods and services which determines whether a country is poverty stricken or prosperous.

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

THE EXHORTATION TO FINISH WHAT HAS BEEN STARTED— 2 Corinthians 8:10-11

2 Corinthians 8:10-11 (NASB)

¹⁰“I give *my* opinion in this matter, for this is to your advantage, who were the “**first**” [**thelō**] to begin a year ago not only to do *this*, but also to desire *to do it*.

¹¹But now finish doing it also, so that just as *there was* the readiness to desire it, so *there may be* also the completion of it by your ability.”

Paul exhorts the Corinthians to finish what they have started. This is the advice or opinion he gives to them for it was expedient, profitable, or to their advantage to complete what they started a year earlier. The Corinthians had a “**first**” or “**forward**” [**thelō**] attitude a year earlier which means “**they were willing and had a great desire.**” They were eager to give to the Jerusalem believers.

Paul exhorts them in verse eleven to “**finish**” what they desired to do. This is the only command in Paul’s teaching on giving in chapters eight and nine of 2 Corinthians. The word “**finish**” or “**complete**” is from the Greek word *epiteleo* {epi-tel-e-o} which means “**to finish, successfully complete what has been begun; to accomplish.**”

They were to finish what they started. The readiness or desire of their will should be translated into action. Beloved, it is one thing to want or talk about doing something, but it is an entirely different matter to actually do it. Their eagerness needed to be matched by their giving based on their ability to do so.

A year earlier, the Corinthians’ initial giving to help the Jerusalem church was an encouraging sign to Paul that they had been truly converted. Thus, if again they now went back to taking an offering for the Jerusalem church, it would confirm that they were for real and had truly changed their attitude. However, if the Corinthians refused to complete their commitment, it would demonstrate that their repentance was not genuine and their devotion to the Lord was weak.

At this point, let me ask, “**Have you completed what you have started, whether it is in the area of business, work, school, your marriage, promises to family or friends, or your promises to God?**”

By the grace of God, try to finish what you have started. The life of a Christian can be described in one of **four ways: as a journey, as a battle, as a pilgrimage, and as a race.** Select your own metaphor, but the necessity to finish is always the same. For if life is a **journey**, it must be completed. If life is a **battle**, it must be finished. If life is a **pilgrimage**, it must be concluded, and if it is a **race**, it must be won.

Derek Redmond, a twenty-six-year-old Briton, was favored to win the four-hundred-meter race in the 1992 Barcelona Olympics. Halfway into his semifinal heat, a fiery pain seared through his right leg. He crumpled to the track with a torn hamstring. As the medical attendants were approaching, **Redmond** fought to his feet. "It was animal instinct," he would later say. He set out hopping, pushing away the coaches in a crazed attempt to finish the race.

When he reached the stretch, a big man pushed through the crowd. He was wearing a T-shirt that read "*Have you hugged your child today?*" and a hat that challenged, "*Just Do It.*" The man was **Jim Redmond**, Derek's father. "You don't have to do this," he told his weeping son. "Yes, I do," Derek declared. "Well, then," said Jim, "we're going to finish this together." And they did.

Jim wrapped Derek's arm around his shoulder and helped him hobble to the finish line. Fighting off security men, the son's head sometimes buried in the father's shoulder, they stayed in Derek's lane to the end. The crowd clapped, then stood, then cheered, and then wept as the father and the son finished the race.

What made the father do it? What made the father leave the stands to meet his son on the track? Was it the strength of his child? No, it was the pain of his child. His son was hurt and fighting to finish what he had started. So the father came to help him finish. Beloved, God does the same for the Christian. Our prayers may be awkward. Our attempts may be feeble sometimes, but the power of prayer is in the One who hears it and not the one who says it. However, our prayers, faith, trust, and obedience do make a difference. All you have to do is be humble enough to turn your cares over to the Lord, be surrendered to Him and His will, and He will help you to finish what you have started.

Stewardship with Integrity ([2 Corinthians 8:10-9:5](#))

There are few topics in the church more sensitive than that of money. Any mention of giving, contributions, or fund-raising campaigns is sure to be perceived by some as **inappropriate, intrusive**, and even **offensive**. Critics accuse church leaders of constantly appealing for money, and often of mishandling what they receive

Unfortunately, there is some truth to those accusations. Many leaders do seem to be preoccupied with raising money. Some are sincere but misguided individuals, who in their zeal (or desperation) resort to questionable fund-raising techniques. But some are outright hucksters, willfully, cynically, and unethically bilking even the poor and desperate to pad their own pockets and build their own empires. As a result of their

aggressive, high-pressure tactics and slick campaigns, millions of dollars are siphoned off in schemes that do not advance God's kingdom.

In the face of those abuses, some might think it wise to avoid the issue altogether. This cannot be the right solution. **Every church and each believer must understand the divine will with regard to money, its use by believers and in the church.** Giving in particular is a significant element in God's design for the Christian life. Giving advances His kingdom, glorifies His name, meets the needs of others, and lays up treasure in heaven, bringing God's blessing in this life and the next. It must be a regular feature of worship as the church comes together on the Lord's Day.

Christians are to be careful stewards of the resources God has entrusted to them. They must be wise about earning, saving, investing, and spending money. And just as they are careful in those areas, so they must also be in how they give their money. This passage is a rich contribution to Scripture's teaching about the privilege of giving. On the surface, the text appears to be nothing more than some passing notes about an event that took place two thousand years ago. Yet it contains timeless and practical principles that define stewardship for all believers.

Through these verses, stewardship with integrity is defined as calling for giving that is voluntary, faithfulness to complete the project, amounts that are proportionate to what one has, giving that balances resources in the body of Christ, is in submission to pastoral leadership, is handled with accountability, is an expression of love, sets an example, and overcomes the sin of covetousness.

Stewardship with Integrity Calls for Giving That Is Voluntary

2 Corinthians 8:10 (NASB)

¹⁰“I give my **opinion in this matter**, for this is to your **advantage**, who were the “**first**” [thelō] to begin a year ago not only to do *this*, but also to desire *to do it*.”

Giving does not involve a fixed amount or percentage but is entirely voluntary. (For a discussion of tithing, see early teaching on this subject) Paul did not pressure or even expect the Macedonians to give a specific percent but rather commended them because “for I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability, **they gave of their own accord**” (2 Corinthians 8:3).

Nor did he issue a command to the Corinthians in this text but instead gave them his **opinion in this matter** of giving.

It was, the apostle knew, to the Corinthians' **advantage** to give sacrificially and generously. In **2 Corinthians 9:6 NASB** he wrote, “**He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.**”

Jesus expressed the same principle in [Luke 6:38 NASB](#): “Give, and it will be given to you. They will pour into your lap a good measure—pressed down, shaken together, and running over. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return.”

When believers give generously, God will bless them generously in return. Convinced of that truth, the Corinthians gave such a large offering that Paul referred to it as a “generous gift” ([2 Corinthians 8:20](#)), capable of “fully supplying the needs of the saints” ([2 Corinthians 9:12](#)).

[2 Corinthians 8:20 \(NASB\)](#)

²⁰ “Taking precaution so that no one will discredit us in our administration of this generous gift.”

[2 Corinthians 9:12 \(NASB\)](#)

¹² “For the ministry of this service is not only fully supplying the needs of the saints, but is also overflowing through many thanksgivings to God.”

Stewardship programs with integrity do not pressure people to give. All too often, manipulative leaders coerce people into parting with their money—under wrong motivation from fear or selfishness. Any kind of compulsory giving to the Lord is not the biblical way. Stewardship with integrity involves people giving not from outward coercion, but from inward devotion.

[2 Corinthians 8:10 \(NASB\)](#)

¹⁰ “I give *my* opinion in this matter, for this is to your advantage, who were the “first” [thelō] to begin a year ago not only to do this, but also to desire to do it.”

Rather than demand a specific amount from the Corinthians, Paul motivated them by reminding them that they were the first to begin to give a year ago. The phrase a year ago could also be translated “last year,” allowing for more than twelve months to have passed. They were not only the first to begin to give, but also the first to desire to do it, which again reveals that they gave freely, not under compulsion.

The chronology of Paul’s dealings with the Corinthians concerning the collection for the Jerusalem church may be reconstructed as follows.

After founding the Corinthian church on his second missionary journey ([Acts 18:1-10](#)), Paul ministered there for about twenty months ([Acts 18:11, 18](#)).

He then left Corinth and went to Ephesus, from where he wrote a corrective letter to the Corinthians ([1 Corinthians 5:9](#)), probably carried to Corinth by Titus. By that time, Paul had formulated his plan for the offering to give to the poor Christians in Jerusalem, and Titus told the Corinthians about it. The church responded positively but had some questions, which Paul answered in [1 Corinthians 16:1-4](#).

After false teachers arrived in Corinth and led a rebellion against Paul, the Corinthians temporarily halted their giving. Paul dealt sternly with this rebellion in his third letter, known as the severe letter ([2 Corinthians 2:3-4](#)), which he wrote between [1](#) and [2 Corinthians](#).

The apostle received the encouraging news from Titus (who had carried the severe letter to Corinth) that most of the Corinthians had repented of their disaffection toward him. Therefore, when he wrote [2 Corinthians](#), his fourth letter to them, Paul urged them to resume collecting the offering ([chaps. 8, 9](#)). He did so in keeping with the principle noted in [1 Corinthians 16:2](#), that all their giving was to be voluntary, i.e., “**as [each person] may prosper.**”

1 Corinthians 16:2 (NASB)

²“On 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.”