

**2Cor. 8:1 ¶ Moreover, brethren, we do you to wit of the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia;**

**2Cor. 8:2 How that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality.**

I think the CJB translation for these two verses is much clearer: *“Now, brothers, we must tell you about the grace God has given the congregations in Macedonia. Despite severe trials, and even though they are desperately poor, their joy has overflowed in a wealth of generosity.”*

I couldn't help but think of Jesus' teaching of the widow and her mites in connection with Paul's words.

*Mark 12:41-44 “And Jesus sat over against the treasury, and beheld how the people cast money into the treasury: and many that were rich cast in much. And there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites, which make a farthing. And he called unto him his disciples, and saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That **this poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury:** For all they did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living.”*

It's always interesting to me how those who have the least from a material perspective are often the ones who have the most generous hearts. Could it be because they more readily identify with those in need?

Paul's emphasis is definitely on the generosity of heart of those in Macedonia and not the size of their gift. It is clear, however, that their gift far exceeded his expectations.

Paul is also placing great emphasis on the fact that the Macedonians were generous in the face of great affliction, which is a reference to trouble and persecution. They gave a beautiful testimony of experiencing *joy* in the midst of trial. I think of happiness as being a result of what one is experiencing, while joy is a result of recognizing what you possess in Jesus in spite of what you are experiencing.

One whose hope is rooted in the eternal is much more ready to not cling to, but share what is temporal. Those who most value the amazing gift of God to us through His Son are most likely to be willing to share with others with the same unconditional love.

**2Cor. 8:3 For to *their* power, I bear record, yea, and beyond *their* power they were willing of themselves;**

**2Cor. 8:4 Praying us with much intreaty that we would receive the gift, and take upon us the fellowship of the ministering to the saints.**

I liked the wording of the NLT for these verses: *“For I can testify that they gave not only what they could afford but far more. And they did it of their own free will. They begged us again and again for the gracious privilege of sharing in the gift for the Christians in Jerusalem.”*

These verses flow naturally with the thoughts expressed in the previous section. The Macedonians were definitely more focused on storing up treasure in heaven than on earth.

*Matthew 6:19-21 "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: **But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven**, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."*

How often in the church today do we hear of pastors being begged to accept the offerings of those in the church? Personally, I can't think of even once. However, I often hear pastors making a plea for donations.

It also stood out to me that these offerings were given with the intent of ministering to the body of believers. Very seldom in churches today is the focus on ministering to the body; the focus is more often than not on outreach to the lost. Outreach to the lost is important; but scripture is everywhere clear on the need to meet the needs of the body of believers.

*Galatians 6:10 "As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, **especially unto them who are of the household of faith.**"* – This is the verse that God used to clarify the area in which my ministry is to be focused.

*Romans 12:10 & 13 "Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another... **Distributing to the necessity of saints....**"*

*1 Corinthians 16:1 "Now **concerning the collection for the saints**, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye."*

*Galatians 5:13 "For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but **by love serve one another.**"*

*Ephesians 4:11-12 "And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; **For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:**"*

*Hebrews 6:10 "For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, **in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister.**"*

**2Cor. 8:5 And this they did, not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God.**

The CJB translation was most thought-provoking in its wording: *"Also, they didn't do this in the way we had expected, but first they gave themselves to the Lord, which means, by God's will, to us."*

The first thing I notice is that the Macedonians “gave” themselves to the Lord; they had a choice; they weren’t commandeered into service.

Yielding to the Lord should result in yielding to His chosen messengers. In biblical days, those messengers were more easily identified. The prophets of the Lord of old were recognized by all even when they weren’t in favor. With the birth of the “church” Satan increased his attack through the use of false teachers. Today, especially in America, I believe that great discernment is required to identify the true messengers of God and that discernment is directly dependent on personal knowledge of God’s word. Many claim to speak in the name of the Lord today that are actually speaking in the name of the enemy. This is as was prophesied by the apostles personally appointed by Jesus.

*2 Peter 2:1-3 “But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not.”*

*2 Timothy 4:2-4 “Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.”*

**2Cor. 8:6** **Insomuch that we desired Titus, that as he had begun, so he would also finish in you the same grace also.**

Evidently, Titus was the point person in establishing a like ministry of giving among the Corinthians. As such, it was deemed appropriate for him to take part in collection of their gift for delivery.

**2Cor. 8:7 ¶ Therefore, as ye abound in every thing, in faith, and utterance, and knowledge, and in all diligence, and in your love to us, see that ye abound in this grace also.**

In this verse Paul is expressing his hope that the Corinthians will prove to be as faithful and diligent in the area of giving to the needs of the saints as they have been in other areas of gifting. The Greek for the definition of “grace” always speaks to me: “...especially the divine influence upon the heart, and its reflection in the life...” God is always influencing our heart according to His will, but it is up to each believer to yield in faithful obedience.

**2Cor. 8:8** **I speak not by commandment, but by occasion of the forwardness of others, and to prove the sincerity of your love.**

Again, the CJB is quite clear: *“I am not issuing an order; rather, I am testing the genuineness of your love against the diligence of others.”*

Paul is very clear to identify when he is speaking “according to Paul.” He wasn’t beyond using a bit of peer pressure to produce desired results. It has to be recognized, however, that the Holy Spirit put His stamp of approval on Paul’s methodology. I think it is in recognition of the reality of human nature that man is motivated to do “better” in light of the lives of others; otherwise, we tend to get comfortable and content. We tend to thrive on the challenge of competition; that’s why competitive sports are so popular throughout the world.

Paul was utilizing the biblical principle so boldly declared by James—Our actions prove our faith.

*James 2:20 “But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?”*

I think the scripture is also clear in declaring that our actions in submission to God are a result of our love for Him based on the value we place on His love for us.

*Luke 7:44-47 “And he turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet. My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment. Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little.”*

**2Cor. 8:9 For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.**

What an amazing truth that it is so easy to take for granted! The “Lord Jesus Christ” gave up the grandeur of heaven and left the presence of His Father to be born a human child. He became *poor*; the Greek defines this as a “beggar...indigent.” A beggar is dependent on others for support. Jesus was dependent upon His human parents and the provision of His heavenly Father through the Holy Spirit. To be indigent is to lack in material possessions. Even today these terms are relative in their use; and in comparison to what He possessed in the presence of His Father, Jesus certainly became poor in humbling Himself to come to earth as a man.

Why did He make such a choice? To make it possible for you and me to enjoy the riches of heaven as part of His family. Any sacrifice we might make on behalf of others in the body is tiny in comparison.

**2Cor. 8:10 And herein I give *my* advice: for this is expedient for you, who have begun before, not only to do, but also to be forward a year ago.**

**2Cor. 8:11 Now therefore perform the doing of it; that as *there was* a readiness to will, so *there may be* a performance also out of that which ye have.**

In these verses Paul is basically cheering the Corinthians on to finish what they so eagerly started a year ago. They shouldn't let their perceived limitations hinder their giving; they should only feel compelled to give according to their ability to give.

For those of us who aren't rich (relatively speaking) the enemy is really good at getting us to think that the little we have to give cannot make a difference. In reality, when our "little" is combined with the gifts of others, it can make a big difference to those in need.

I liked this quote from David Guzik: "The Devil will let you resolve as much as you like; the more the better, just as long as you never carry it out. 'The tragedy of life so often is, not that we have no high impulses, but that we fail to turn them into actions.' (Barclay)"

**2Cor. 8:12 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.**

I think Paul is saying that the heart behind the gift is more important than the size of the gift; evidence of that heart attitude is how we give according to our ability. Again, that makes me think of the widow's mites as referenced in my comments on verses 1-2 above.

Scripture emphasizes the fact that God is pleased when we give willingly.

*1 Peter 5:2-4 "Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away."*

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

*Romans 12:6-8 "Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; Or ministry, let us wait on our ministering: or he that teacheth, on teaching; Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness."*

**2Cor. 8:13 For I mean not that other men be eased, and ye burdened:**

**2Cor. 8:14 But by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may be a supply for their want, that their abundance also may be a supply for your want: that there may be equality:**

**2Cor. 8:15 As it is written, He that had gathered much had nothing over; and he that had gathered little had no lack.**

I really liked the CJB translation for verses 13-14: *“It is not that relief for others should cause trouble for you, but that there should be a kind of reciprocity: at present your abundance can help those in need; so that when you are in need, their abundance can help you — thus there is reciprocity.”*

If all in the church had this mindset, there would be no need for outside help for those in the body of Christ. I am a slow learner, but I am learning. As I went through my closet again to donate to the needs in Haiti, I was reminded of how much I have—especially in comparison to those in need. There is very little left in my closet that isn’t being regularly used, and I plan on keeping it that way. I trust that if the need ever arises, my friends in the body of Christ will try to meet my needs in the same way.

It’s interesting that Paul makes his point using God’s provision of the manna during the wilderness wanderings. The emphasis is that God provided according to need. We aren’t to feel pressured to give beyond our ability. If we are just willing to give according to our ability, God will use it to meet the needs of the body.

**2Cor. 8:16 ¶ But thanks be to God, which put the same earnest care into the heart of Titus for you.**

**2Cor. 8:17 For indeed he accepted the exhortation; but being more forward, of his own accord he went unto you.**

Paul is saying that although Titus was being sent to complete the project he had spearheaded, it was for him a mission of love. Titus was eager to go back and have some fellowship with the Corinthian believers. As with all true love, Titus’ love for the people was an expression of God’s love for them being expressed through him.

**2Cor. 8:18 And we have sent with him the brother, whose praise is in the gospel throughout all the churches;**

**2Cor. 8:19 And not *that* only, but who was also chosen of the churches to travel with us with this grace, which is administered by us to the glory of the same Lord, and *declaration of your ready mind*:**

Titus wasn’t coming to Corinth alone; another unnamed, but highly regarded minister of the gospel was coming with him. I think Paul was assuring the Corinthians that their gift would be in trustworthy hands en route with Paul to the church in Jerusalem.

I think there is an important application here—A good reputation among the body of believers opens the door of opportunity for more service. Also, a willing servant is not concerned about personal recognition; he is concerned about accomplishing the will of God to the glory of God.

**2Cor. 8:20 Avoiding this, that no man should blame us in this abundance which is administered by us:**

**2Cor. 8:21** Providing for honest things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men.

I really liked the wording of the NLT for these verses: *“By traveling together we will guard against any suspicion, for we are anxious that no one should find fault with the way we are handling this generous gift. We are careful to be honorable before the Lord, but we also want everyone else to know we are honorable.”*

This is important counsel for every ministry that claims to be serving in the name of the Lord. Not only should they recognize that they are accountable to God, but they are accountable to the people. Financial transparency should not be an issue in church ministry.

This connects back with the thoughts expressed in chapter 6: *“Giving no offence in any thing, that the ministry be not blamed....”*

**2Cor. 8:22** And we have sent with them our brother, whom we have oftentimes proved diligent in many things, but now much more diligent, upon the great confidence which *I have* in you.

Paul now identifies yet another trusted servant that will be traveling with Titus, though again not by name. Again, this man has proven himself to be conscientious and careful in ministry before the Lord many times in many different circumstances; his testimony is without reproach.

**2Cor. 8:23** Whether *any do enquire* of Titus, *he is my partner and fellowhelper concerning you: or our brethren be enquired of, they are the messengers of the churches, and the glory of Christ.*

**2Cor. 8:24** Wherefore shew ye to them, and before the churches, the proof of your love, and of our boasting on your behalf.

These verses seem to be declaring Titus as Paul’s personal representative and the two companions as representatives of other churches that were part of providing this special gift for the church at Jerusalem. Paul is encouraging the Corinthians to show them love in accordance with his expectations of them. He has very openly bragged about the Corinthian church to other churches and is encouraging them to live up to their reputation in the body of Christ. Paul is reminding them that their expression of love should be a direct expression of their love for the Christ they serve.