

Biblical Principles for Christian Giving

2 Corinthians 8

2 Corinthians 8: Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia: 2 that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality. 3 For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing, 4 imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints. 5 And not only as we had hoped, but they first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God. 6 So we urged Titus, that as he had begun, so he would also complete this grace in you as well. 7 But as you abound in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all diligence, and in your love for us—see that you abound in this grace also. 8 I speak not by commandment, but I am testing the sincerity of your love by the diligence of others. 9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich. 10 And in this I give advice: It is to your advantage not only to be doing what you began and were desiring to do a year ago; 11 but now you also must complete the doing of it; that as there was a readiness to desire it, so there also may be a completion out of what you have. 12 For if there is first a willing mind, it is accepted according to what one has, and not according to what he does not have. 13 For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened; 14 but by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may supply their lack, that their abundance also may supply your lack—that there may be equality. 15 As it is written, “He who gathered much had nothing left over, and he who gathered little had no lack.” 16 But thanks be to God who puts the same earnest care for you into the heart of Titus. 17 For he not only accepted the exhortation, but being more diligent, he went to you of his own accord. 18 And we have sent with him the brother whose praise is in the gospel throughout all the churches, 19 and not only that, but who was also chosen by the churches to travel with us with this gift, which is administered by us to the glory of the Lord Himself and to show your ready mind, 20 avoiding this: that anyone should blame us in this lavish gift which is administered by us— 21 providing honorable things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men. 22 And we have sent with them our brother whom we have often proved diligent in many things, but now much more diligent, because of the great confidence which we have in you. 23 If anyone inquires about Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker concerning you. Or if our brethren are inquired about, they are messengers of the churches, the glory of Christ. 24 Therefore show to them, and before the churches, the proof of your love and of our boasting on your behalf.”

Background Notes

In 2 Corinthians 7, Titus had returned from Corinth and met Paul in Macedonia with the good news that the Corinthian Christians had responded to Paul's written rebukes with the right attitude. They had repented and dealt properly with a number of problems in the church.

However, there were still some matters that needed to be resolved. One remaining problem was the false apostles who were undermining the apostle Paul's authority. Paul will return to this problem in chapters 10-13.

In chapters 8-9, Paul's subject was the fund that was being raised to help needy saints in Jerusalem. The Corinthians had begun to collect this fund a year before the writing of this letter (v10-11), in response to Paul's exhortation at the end of his letter, 1 Corinthians.

The Corinthians had started off well at getting this fund together, but then they had tapered off. Paul urged them to complete the worthy service of Christian giving. Titus had been put in charge of overseeing this work, and when Titus returned from Corinth he informed Paul of the status of this fund for the poor saints in Jerusalem.

Titus was concerned about the spiritual well being of the Corinthians, and about this important collection as well. Verses 16 and 17: "But thanks be to God who puts the same earnest care for you into the heart of Titus. For he not only accepted the exhortation, but being more diligent, he went to you of his own accord."

In verses 18-24, Titus had returned to Corinth with a couple of other brethren - not only to carry this epistle, but also with the responsibility to get this fund collected so it could be delivered to their poor and needy fellow-believers in Jerusalem (v18-24).

We don't know the names of the two Christian brothers who traveled with Titus, but clearly they were men of unimpeachable character. Having several trustworthy believers handle church or ministry funds is an important practice to follow today. It safeguards against the improper use of the Lord's money and prevents questions and rumors (v20). It is the honorable thing to do in the sight of God and man (v21).

Doctrinal Points

Believers should follow the biblical principles of giving.

a. Give yourself first (v5).

In the first five verses of this chapter, Paul used the churches of Macedonia as a good example of giving, to motivate the Corinthian Christians to give. The Macedonian churches would have included Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea.

Notice what Paul said about the Macedonians: "*They first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God*"(v5). The Macedonians first surrendered themselves to the Lord, and then gave of their own substance. If we don't really give ourselves to the Lord, just dropping some money into the collection is not true Christian giving. After all, the

Lord doesn't really need our substance or our service. He could have money grow on trees and have angels do all the work. He wants **us!** This is primary.

b. Give to the point of sacrifice (v3).

The Macedonians were not wealthy and giving of their surplus, and they didn't give only whatever amount happened to be left over at the end of the month. No! Verse 2 tells us that these Christians were poor and undergoing persecution, yet they gave - in the midst of their problems and in spite of their poverty. They gave to the point of real hurt.

Our measly contributions of a few dollars or an hour a week fall far short of this divine principle of giving to the point of sacrifice. How far should we carry out this principle of sacrifice? The next two principles of Christian giving give us guidelines.

c. Give after the example of Christ (v9).

How much did the Lord Jesus give? He gave **all**. And it wasn't just for His friends. He gave His whole life for His enemies, and for the likes of you and me. Why? So that *"through His poverty we might become rich."*

But how do we give **"all"**? Should we sell everything we own, go around in a pair of old jeans and t-shirt, and live in a cheap studio apartment? Well, that wouldn't be the worst reaction to this principle - and some of us may be called upon to live very much like this. However, Scripture is always balanced. The balancing principle here is found in verses 13 through 15, which is the next sub-point.

d. Give towards equality (v13).

Although the Macedonians were not wealthy, they had more than the believers in Jerusalem at that time, and so Paul taught that the right thing was to aim for equality. The intent was not that the Christians in Jerusalem would receive more than they needed while the Corinthians became poverty-stricken (v13). No, the aim was for equality. When we see others in need, who have much less than we do, we should at least make a start toward equality. Something is wrong if we are too comfortable while others are in need.

e. Give willingly (v3, 4, 8 & 12).

This principle of giving willingly is emphasized in verses 3, 4, 8 & 12. From these verses, we see that Paul was not *commanding* the Corinthians to give. Their giving was to be totally voluntary, as a proof that their Christian love was sincere (v8). The Macedonians had been very willing to give. In fact, they actually begged Paul for the privilege of being able to share in meeting the needs of their brothers and sisters in Jerusalem! What an example to the Corinthians. And what a message to us!

f. Give what you have (v12).

“For if there is first a willing mind, it is accepted according to what one has, and not according to what he does not have.”

The point here is that the Lord does not expect us to give what we don't have - but He does expect us to give on the basis of what we do have. Maybe another way of stating this principle is: the Lord does not look so much on what we give as on what we have left.

g. Give according to plan (v11).

Desire is not enough in Christian giving. There must be a deliberate setting aside of time, talent, and treasure - and then actually giving in accordance with that plan. The Corinthians were not just to have good intentions - they were to complete what they had purposed.

Many of us have good intentions, and we desire to give to the Lord, but we never get out the pencil and paper and make deliberate plans for our financial giving. And we don't plan how much TV and magazine or hobby time we'll sacrifice each week so we can give of our time to serve the Lord. Christian giving just “doesn't come off” with desire alone. We must give according to a *deliberate and steady plan*.

These seven biblical principles for Christian giving come to us from 2 Corinthians 8. Believers should follow the biblical principles of giving.

Practical Application

Let's be well-rounded Christians!

Verse 7: *“But as you abound in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all diligence, and in your love for us—see that you abound in this grace also.”* When Titus returned with the good news from Corinth, Paul could say that the Corinthian Christians abounded in faith, and spiritual gifts, and knowledge, and earnestness, and love - but not yet in financial giving. Paul wanted them to be well-rounded Christians by abounding in the area of financial giving as well.

Do you know Christians who are like that? They're wonderful Christians who love the Lord and their fellow-believers. They're always willing to help out and give of their time, their talents and their abilities. They're faithful, and knowledgeable, and mature, and earnest, and zealous, but they have a hard time giving *money* to the work of the Lord.

2 Corinthians 8:7 indicates that until we abound in the area of giving as well, we will not be well-rounded Christians.

Let's be well-rounded Christians!