

How much Should I Give?

2 Corinthians 8:1-7

November 1, 2015

Summary

New Testament giving is not primarily about living under a law. It is about being enabled by grace to give as God wants. God desires for us to give ourselves away for the advance of the gospel in a way that expresses itself in joyful, generous, intentional giving. We are called to give with humility, looking for ways to meet the needs of others.

Getting Started

Who in your life comes to mind when you think about generous people? What did they give and how did their generosity inspire or impact you? In today's passage, we read that Paul appeals to the Corinthian believers to follow the leadership of Titus to complete a collection the church had begun earlier for suffering believers in Jerusalem. He cites believers in Macedonia as examples of generous giving to encourage the Corinthian believers to also give generously to meet the needs of fellow saints. Paul longs for the Corinthian believers to follow the example of their brothers and sisters in Macedonia so that they express the grace of God in their giving. We also receive encouragement from the Bible to express God's grace by giving generously.

Understanding the Passage

Read 2 Corinthians 8:1-7 and identify 2-3 key words or phrases in this passage.

To whom is Paul writing and why?

Who does Paul hold up as an example of generosity for the Corinthian believers to follow?

What impressed Paul about the generosity of the Macedonian believers?

Does God expect all believers to give beyond their means to meet the needs of others, as the Macedonians did? How is it possible to give beyond one's means?

How can abundant joy and extreme poverty overflow at the same time according to verse 2? What did the joining together of these two dynamics produce?

What did Paul mean in verse 5 when he said the Macedonian believers 'gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us'?

Who did he leave in charge to collect what the Corinthian church had started to give? What do we know about this young pastor?

In this passage Paul refers twice to generosity as 'an act of grace.' How is generosity an act of grace? What does that mean?

What qualities among the Corinthian believers did Paul notice and admire in verse 7? How might these qualities help them complete the offering they had committed to give?

Applying the Passage

How often would you say your giving is out of duty or obligation? How often is it an act of grace?

How is God leading you and your family to give to the work of Christ?

What oftentimes prevents you from giving to others the way you believe the Lord wants you to give?

Share Point

Read 2 Corinthians 8:1-7 and review the application questions. Share with someone in your life how God's Word is changing you into a growing disciple. Encourage that person to do the same. That person could be a family member, a friend, a co-worker or a neighbor.

Consider This!

This is a well-balanced and helpful word from Tim Keller in his book *Ministries of Mercy*: Often books and speakers tell Christians that they should help the needy because they have so much. That is, of course, quite true. Common sense tells us that, if human beings are to live together on the planet, there should be a constant sharing of resources. So when the statistics are brought out to show Americans how much of the world's resources we use, it creates (rightly) a sense of concern for those with less than ourselves. But this approach is very limited in its motivating power. Ultimately it produces guilt. It says, "How selfish you are to eat steak and drive two cars when the rest of the world is starving!" This creates great emotional conflicts in the hearts of Christians who hear such arguing. We feel guilty, but all sorts of defense mechanisms are engaged. "Can I help it if I was born in this country? How will it really help anyone if I stop driving two cars? Don't I have a right to enjoy the fruits of my labor?" Soon, with an anxious weariness, we turn away from books or speakers who simply make us feel guilty about the needy. The Bible does not use the guilt-producing motivation, yet it powerfully argues for the ministry of mercy. In 2 Corinthians 8:2-3, Paul tells us that the Macedonian Christians gave generously to the Jerusalem famine victims. He notes that "out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity" (v. 2). The Macedonians were not of a higher social class than the needy in Jerusalem. They apparently were going through terrible trials of their own. What, then, was the dynamic that moved them to give? "Their overflowing joy . . ." (v.

2) and “they gave themselves first to the Lord” (v. 5). It was the Macedonian’s response to the self-emptying Lord. Their gifts were a response, *not* to a ratio of income levels, but to the gift of Christ!

Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank you for emptying Yourself on the cross to redeem me from the penalty and power of sin. Without your generous sacrifice, I would have no hope, no assurance of heaven and no relationship with our Heavenly Father. Please lead me to give as you gave! By your grace and the power of the Holy Spirit, show me how you want me to give to your Kingdom work. I give myself wholly to you so I may give to others today as you lead.

Commentary Notes (adapted from the ESV and HCSB Study Bibles)

8:1 The churches of Macedonia were congregations in Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea (Acts 16-17). Here and throughout 2 Corinthians 8-9 Paul calls the collection an act of grace because contributing to the needs of others is made possible by God's undeserved gifts in their lives.

8:2-3 These churches had been born in affliction. Moreover, they were limited in financial resources; yet these factors had not impeded their giving.

8:5 Here is the key to understanding giving as ministry. When believers offer themselves wholly to the Lord, they have no difficulty offering their wallets to Him.

8:6 Paul's collection for the Jerusalem Christians had been a long-term project. He had evidently put Titus in charge of at least part of it. The Corinthians had 'bee prepared since last year (9:2) to give, but had not completed the task. The recent trouble in Corinth, causing Paul's sorrowful visit and the severe letter, had surely been the major factor. Now that the Corinthians were restored, it was time to finish the task, but it would only be done the right way if it was prompted by God's grace.

8:7 The Corinthian believers were more affluent than the Macedonians; therefore they could give more generously, and this is what Paul expected to happen.

Note on Titus from the NIV Study Bible: *Titus was a Greek believer. Taught and nurtured by Paul, he stood before the leaders of the church in Jerusalem as a living example of what Christ was doing among the Gentiles (Galatians 2:1-3). Like Timothy, he was one of Paul's trusted traveling companions and closest friends. Later he became Paul's special ambassador. Slowly and carefully, Paul developed Titus into a mature Christian and a responsible leader. As with Timothy, Paul told Titus how to organize and lead the churches.*

