

The Book of 2nd Corinthians

Chapter 8:1-24

February 7, 1999

- **Outline of 2nd Corinthians:**

- Chapter 1 God equips His people through trial, comfort and perseverance.
- Chapter 2 Restore fellowship to the repentant; One aroma, two response.
- Chapter 3 The glorious covenants
- Chapter 4 The Light of the Glory of Christ
- Chapter 5 Longing to be further clothed; Christ died for the world
- Chapter 6 Faithfulness in persecution; Separation from the World
- Chapter 7 Godly sorrow leads to repentance.
- Chapter 8 Gracious giving abounds from grace received.

- **Review & Introduction**

Having returned to the report given to him by Titus, Paul moves on to the issue of famine relief for the church in Jerusalem. In this chapter and the next, Paul develops for the church at Corinth the theology of benevolent giving and admonishes them to complete the work that they had begun a year earlier.

Note here that in these two chapters Paul is not teaching on tithing or on the support of widows. There are two primary reasons why we may assume this, first it appears that the context of this instruction is for relief of brothers and sisters who are stricken with poverty. Whereas tithing is directed toward the support of those who minister to the church and subsequently the church supports true widows. Secondly, we know that Paul is not teaching on tithing or the support of widows because here Paul says that he is not commanding this kind of giving but is testing the sincerity of their love. For both the support of widows and tithing we have explicit biblical commands for giving, 1 Cor. 9:14, 1 Timothy 5:3-10. Therefore, given the context of this instruction, we should receive it as the theology of free will offerings given to aid afflicted brothers and sisters.

- **Exposition of 2nd Corinthians 8:1 - 24**

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.

- In the previous chapter, Paul had concluded his discussion of the joy he had when he heard the good report from Titus regarding their faithful response to the severe instruction Paul had given them in his earlier letter. Now he moves on to another detail of the report from Titus regarding their collection for the support of the famine-stricken brothers in Jerusalem. In teaching on this subject, Paul will give two examples as patterns for giving, the churches in Macedonia and the Lord Jesus Christ.
- In using the churches in Macedonia as a pattern of giving, Paul reveals a profound aspect of the theology of giving—notice that it was God who first worked in the churches His grace. These churches are not only used by Paul as a pattern for giving, they are also used as a pattern for receiving. God had been working in the hearts of the Saints in these churches and as a result of that working in, great benevolent, sacrificial giving abounded. Learning how to give begins by learning how to receive—receiving the grace of God worked into our hearts becomes manifest by voluntary benevolent giving.
- Notice that the grace worked into these churches resulted in their generosity for the afflicted in Jerusalem despite their suffering from their own afflictions. Worldly wisdom would say that these churches should have been excluded from Paul's fundraising efforts. Although it may be that Paul was reluctant to receive from them, the churches insisted on Paul receiving their gifts. These churches did not wonder why a relief fund had not been started for their needs, they were more eager to give as they could to the work in Jerusalem.
- It is a grand thing to see the sovereignty of God in these verses. Notice that it was God who worked His grace into the churches and that the churches gave themselves to Him first and then to the famine relief according to the will of God. So who did the giving? The eagerness belonged to the church but it was the fruit of sanctification worked in by God.
- As God worked in them His glorious grace, the first response of the churches was dedication to Him. They submitted themselves to Him in all things and as evidence of this submission, their generosity abounded to His glory. Therefore, if our church desires faithfulness in this area, we should give ourselves to prayer seeking God to work in us His grace so that our body may be prepared to abound in love for brothers and sisters afflicted by various trials.

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.

- In addition to seeing the response of the church in Corinth to his severe instructions, Paul instructed Titus to have them complete the work of grace that they had begun. Generous giving is both an act of receiving grace and giving grace.

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.

- Paul is not establishing a contest between churches, rather, he is using the grace of God working in and out of the Macedonian churches to spur on the church in Corinth to love and good works. He is comparing the sincerity of the love of the Corinthians with the love which has been proven to be manifestly sincere.
- Paul gives the second example as a pattern for giving—the Lord Jesus Christ. We learn what generosity is by looking at our Lord. We learn what sacrificial giving is by looking at our Lord. As we learn these things, God furthers our sanctification and fruitful giving abounds.

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."

- First, God graciously works in us an understanding of giving. As an outworking of that understanding, we desire to joyfully give. That generosity is accepted by God when given in proportion to how He has given ability. For those who have little, little is required. For those who have much, much is required. Paul is not pushing for a Marxist, egalitarian model where economic distinctions are obliterated. The burden of supporting the afflicted belongs to all the Saints in proportion to how God has blessed them. The context of the quotation is God's provision of manna in the wilderness. God provided amply for all yet some gathered in more than others.

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.

- God worked in Titus a love for the Corinthians and the outworking of this love was a diligent desire to go to them with these instructions and see their sanctification.

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. NKJV

- We see here a prudent pattern for accountability in fundraising. Paul sent another unnamed brother (traditionally Luke) to accompany Titus in the collection of support. Paul did this to ensure that the fundraising was done with accountability to God and to man. Paul did not want to open himself to accusations of being secretive or careless with the funds and discredit his ministry. Instead he sent faithful men in view of everybody and was ready to give an account of the use of the gift.

- **Applications**

- First, we should begin praying that God would work His grace in us to further produce these kinds of good works in our body. Subsequently, we should give ourselves to the Lord and then prepare ourselves as families to assist other families when afflicted. Although the church does not take on the support of the afflicted (like it does the support of true widows), the leaders in the church should help to coordinate the matching of gifts with needs. As people have genuine need they should inform the leaders. As people have prepared themselves to graciously give, they should inform the leaders.