

International Sunday School Lesson
Study Notes
August 31, 2014

Lesson Text: 2 Corinthians 8:1-14
Lesson Title: Sacrificial, Joyful Giving

Introduction

Second Corinthians 8 and 9 focus on the grace of giving. These chapters were written by the Apostle Paul on his third missionary journey and reflect his concern over a financial collection for the needy saints in the Jerusalem church. From its beginning on the day of Pentecost the Jerusalem church faced the problem of poverty among its people. Identifying publicly with Christ would often cause the believer to be rejected by family and alienated by those who still embraced Judaism. This often affected their business and livelihood which contributed to their poverty (John 15:20).

In addition to being rejected by family and alienated by the unbelieving world, believers were subject to the Roman economy. The Roman economy in the area of Jerusalem was as poor as any part of the Roman Empire. People were overtaxed and the products they produced was often used to advance the cause of Rome instead of helping individuals and families.

The example of the sacrificial gifts of the Macedonians to the poor saints of Jerusalem proves that the early church took the financial situation of their fellow believers seriously. Their example should also encourage us to excel in our concern for fellow believers. As we study the subject of sacrificial and joyful giving, there are several questions we should ask ourselves. Were the Corinthian believers just generous by nature? What was it that touched the hearts of these believers? Can loving generosity just be commanded? Indeed it cannot. It has to flow from a heart that understands the concept of grace. That's why Paul wrote these words on sacrificial and joyful giving.

Sacrificial, Joyful Giving is Motivated by God's Grace (2 Corinthians 8:1-8)

Verse 1

“Moreover, brethren, we do you to wit of the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia”

“Moreover” or “now” that things are better between Paul and the Corinthians, he wants to talk to them about the blessing of giving. Back in 1 Corinthians 16:1-3, Paul had given plain instructions for the Corinthians to receive an offering for the Christians in the Jerusalem church. Paul had also asked for contributions to this offering from the churches of Galatia. Because of the

strained relationship between Paul and the Corinthians this offering had not been completed. It is now time to complete the offering.

Paul begins by telling the “brethren” or brothers and sisters in Christ at Corinth about “the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia.” Although Paul is calling upon the Corinthians to complete their offering to the Jerusalem believers, he begins by telling them about the “grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia.” “Grace” is the Greek word *charis*. “Grace” is used throughout this section in its usual meaning of “divine favor to those who do not deserve it.”

“We do you to wit” means “we make known to you.” The “grace of God” is a reference to the “merciful loving kindness of the Lord.” The “churches of Macedonia” is a reference to Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea (Acts 16-17). Paul wanted the Corinthians to know that through the generosity of “the churches of Macedonia” God had blessed them and those to whom they gave. Paul’s emphasis is not on what the “churches of Macedonia gave” but rather that they were recipients of “the grace of God” which was the basis for their giving.

Verse 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.”

Paul makes it clear that it was not out of their prosperity that the churches of Macedonia gave their generous offering. Some “great trial of affliction” or severe test had come on these churches and they had been reduced to “deep poverty.” But in the midst of their “affliction” they found “joy” and “liberality.” Paul is saying if the believers in the churches of Macedonia can give so joyfully and liberally while in the midst of affliction, surely the Corinthians can do equally as well.

The churches of Macedonia were giving sacrificially. In other words, it cost them something. Doctor J.H. Jowett, British preacher and author has said, “Ministry that costs nothing accomplishes nothing.” Most of what Christians give today is far from sacrificial. Sacrificial giving is giving when it affects the way you live. Sacrificial giving is the only giving that comes from the joy of knowing Jesus and results in more joy in giving because we know Jesus.

Verse 3-4

“For to their power, I bear record, yea, and beyond their power they were willing of themselves; Praying us with much intreaty that we would receive the gift, and take upon us the fellowship of the ministering to the saints.”

Paul's words in these verses make it clear that the giving of the churches of Macedonia came from what was *within* rather than *outward* compulsion. "For to the power" or to their credit, "I bear record," or testify, that they gave "willing of themselves." They gave beyond their "power" or ability. In addition to their giving willingly of themselves, they took the initiative in pleading with Paul to take their offering as a token of their fellowship and love for the saints in Jerusalem. Their giving was not only *sacrificial*, it was *spontaneous*. Paul did not beg them or promise them if they would plant a "seed" in the church of Jerusalem that God would double their money! They wanted to give and they urged Paul to take it to the "saints" in Jerusalem.

What a powerful example the churches of Macedonia were to the Corinthians and to the church today! Oh how desperately we need a revival and a renewal of purpose and passion in this matter of giving.

Verse 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."

This story just gets more wonderful. Before the churches of Macedonia gave a dime, they "first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God." Please don't miss this truth! What they gave *outwardly* was directly a result of their complete self-surrender to the "Lord." Give is not about what you have. Giving is about WHO you have within!

There is a kind of giving in this world that has nothing to do with Jesus. It is just social giving because you feel sympathetic towards a cause. Christian giving is giving that comes from a commitment to Jesus Christ. The word "first" is the Greek word *proton*, meaning "first in time or place." It means that the Lord had prior claim on them *personally* before He had claim on them *financially*.

"And unto us by the will of God" means the believers in the churches of Macedonia had not only dedicated themselves to the Lord, they had also placed themselves completely in the Apostle Paul's hands for service to the Lord. Giving would be so much more joyful and generous if those who gave were "first" surrendered completely to the Lord and submissive to the spiritual leadership of the church.

Verse 6

"Insomuch that we desired Titus, that as he had begun, so he would also finish in you the same grace also."

“Insomuch” or because of the encouraging example of the churches of Macedonia, Paul “desired Titus” to make a second visit to Corinth and help finish receiving this special offering for the Jerusalem saints. “Desired” means “urged.” Paul urged “Titus” to come and finish the offering in the “same grace” or same spirit in which the Macedonian churches had given. Paul was anxious to see the Corinthians give in the same manner as had the Macedonia churches.

Verse 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.”

The word “abound” appears twice in this verse. The word means “to exceed or go above.” Commenting on this verse, Doctor Oliver B. Greene writes, “The Apostle Paul always commended believers wherever possible, with sincerity and truth.” The Corinthians had their faults but they also had their virtues. They had exceeded “in faith, and utterance, and knowledge, and in all diligence” and “in their love for Paul.”

“Faith” is trusting God. “Utterance” is the Greek word *logos*, meaning “word.” Paul is saying the Corinthians had the “word” of God which relates to doctrine. “Knowledge” means they exceeded in the ability to understand the doctrine they had. “Diligence” means “spiritual passion.” The activities of the Christian life had been carried out with a diligence to learn. And, in spite of all the differences Paul and the Corinthians had, they abounded “in your love to us” or, in the love Paul inspired in them.

Since they “exceeded” in all those areas there is no reason they can’t “abound in this grace” of giving “also.” Paul is exhorting them to go beyond the norm and exceed in this matter of giving. Why do Christians for the most part accept a preacher’s plea for holy living and faithfulness and immediately throw up a red flag when he exhorts them to give? If we believe in proving our relationship to Christ in our *living* then we should prove it also in our *giving*.

Verse 8

“I speak not by commandment, but by occasion of the forwardness of others, and to prove the sincerity of your love.”

Paul is not commanding the Corinthians to give because he has no authority over their finances or property. “But by occasion of the forwardness of others” means he gave them the example of the Macedonian churches to show them what happens when believers truly give out of a right relationship with the Lord and a joyful heart.

When Paul says, “And to prove the sincerity of your love” he does not make it clear whether he talking about them proving their love to the Lord, to Paul, or to the saints in Jerusalem. It really doesn’t matter because Christianity is “love.” Whether it is “love” to God, to our God-given leadership, or to those in need, “sincere” love is a giving and sacrificial love. Paul will illustrate that in verse 9.

Sacrificial, Joyful Giving is Illustrated in God’s Son (2 Corinthians 8:9)

Verse 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.”

Paul always illustrated his teaching by referencing the life of Jesus. Here, Paul gives the gospel in a sentence laying a foundation for Christian giving. Paul connects the duty of liberal giving to the fact that the Lord Jesus was willing to become poor that He might give salvation to others. Again, Paul uses the word “grace” focusing on the “Lord Jesus Christ” giving sinners what they did not deserve, love and forgiveness.

When Paul said, “though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor,” he was referencing the riches of Christ’s heavenly existence, which included equality with God the Father and being in the form of God (Philippians 2:6). As a voluntary act on His part, Christ “became poor,” or, entered into a state of poverty when He took upon Himself human flesh. This “poverty” to which Paul refers is the earthly fleshly body in which Christ tabernacle while here on earth.

Jesus Christ was God in the flesh (John 1:1-3, 14) and Creator of all things (Colossians 1:16-17). He possessed all things, yet He was willing to leave His exalted position with the Father in order that sinners “might be rich.” Through faith in Christ’s saving work on the Cross of Calvary, all who trust Him become spiritually “rich.” The word “rich” means “abundantly supplied” (Ephesians 1:3).

The actions of Jesus Paul has just described were completely selfless with the supreme object of enriching others. And that is the way the Macedonian churches had given and that is the way Paul wanted the Corinthians to give and that is the way that believers today should give. If you want to know how to give, look to Jesus!

Sacrificial, Joyful Giving is Encouraged among God’s People (2 Corinthians 8:10-14)

Having shared the example of the giving of the churches of Macedonia sacrificial giving, and also the sacrificial giving of the Lord Jesus Christ, Paul now encourages the Corinthians to step up to the plate and do the right thing in regard to their giving.

Verse 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.”

“And herein” means “in this matter.” “I give my advice” refers to the counsel or judgment Paul is sharing with the Corinthians “in this matter” of the offering for the saints at Jerusalem. “Expedient” means “this benefits you.”

The Corinthians had dropped the ball somewhere along the way in regard to the offering for the saints at Jerusalem. That is the meaning of the words “begun before.” “To be forward a year ago” seems to indicate that a year had past and the offering was still not complete. What a challenge these words should be to all of us in regard to our giving. Sometimes the integrity of our giving can be compromised simply because of delay.

The Bible says, *“When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed. Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay. Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin; neither say thou before the angel, that it was an error: wherefore should God be angry at thy voice, and destroy the work of thine hands”* (Ecclesiastes 5:4-6). Giving was serious to the early church and it should be with us. Giving goes deeper than just an offering to someone in need. It is about integrity, discipline, common sense, faith, and keeping your word. The Corinthians had promised to send an offering to Jerusalem and twelve months had passed and no offering. Paul said, “It’s to your advantage to finish what you started.”

Verse 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.”

The Corinthians had “a readiness to will.” That means they were all for giving the offering and helping their brothers and sisters in Christ. Paul encourages them to have the same excitement now they had when they started. Paul is looking for “a performance also out of that which ye have.” In other words, do what you promised out of what you have the ability to do. It’s great to have a heart that wants to give and plans to give but at some point that which is in the heart must show up in the offering plate!

Verse 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.”

This matter of purpose and intent in our giving cannot be overstated. “For if there be first a willing mind” is literally “if willingness and readiness is present.” It means the mind and heart is willing and ready to give. If that is the case, then what is given “is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not.” If the heart is in the offering, that offering will be accepted by God not matter the amount of the offering.

There are many people who give simply to sooth their conscience. Others give in order to receive a tax deduction. God is not please with that type of giving. The Bible says, “*But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased*” (Hebrews 13:16). Commenting on this verse, Doctor Stephen F. Olford writes, “If the clear intention to give is already in the heart the amount of the offering is of secondary importance.”

Illus. You may have heard people say, “I would give more if I had more.” That is not true. Giving is not based on what you have. It is based on what your heart desires to give and the sacrifice you make in giving. Think about that truth!

Verse 13-14

“For I mean not that other men be eased, and ye burdened: 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:”

Paul didn’t want the Corinthians to put themselves in a bad financial situation by giving to the brethren in Jerusalem. He didn’t want them to be “burdened” while the brethren in Jerusalem were “eased.” It was true that the Corinthian’s were able to give more than some other churches. However, by no means did Paul expect them to bear the whole financial load.

“By by an equality” or by sharing and sharing alike, you are able to help the brethren at Jerusalem “at this time” and maybe someday in the future if you have a need “their abundance also may be a supply for your want.” Paul is not saying that the Corinthians should give in order to expect the brethren in Jerusalem to someday pay them back. What he is saying is that giving is based on equality.

Paul is telling the Corinthians and us that giving is to be done on just and equal principles. No believer has a right to enjoy this world’s goods while his brother is in need. In other words, the believers in Jerusalem shouldn’t sit on

hard benches while the Corinthians sat on padded pews! The early church *“...had all things common; And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need”* (Acts 2:44-45). Such action and teaching does not teach communism, laziness, or entitlements. It teaches biblical giving and love and support for those in need. The church today must not allow the laziness and dependency upon government by so many in society to stop us from giving as the Bible requires.

The Apostle John also taught this truth. *“But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him”* (1 John 3:17). The *“need”* mentioned here by John can certainly mean more than food and clothing. Sometimes our brothers and sisters in Christ just need financial assistance. Other times they may need financial advice and guidance. There are so many ways to give and share the sacrificial love of Christ.

Conclusion

Life can change in a hurry. One day everything can be great and the next day the foreclosure sign can be in the yard. Today we may have a surplus and tomorrow we may be in want. This Sunday we may be able to give extra in the offering and next week we may have nothing to give.

Jesus said, *“Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again”* (Luke 6:38).

Illus. The story is told of a farmer who was known for his generous giving, but his friends could not understand how he could give so much away and yet remain so prosperous. One day a spokesman for his friends said, “We cannot understand you. You give far more than the rest of us and yet you always have more to give.” “Oh, that is easy to explain,” the farmer said. “I keep shoveling into God’s bin and God keeps shoveling into my bin, but God has the bigger shovel!” Here was a man whose sacrificial and joyful giving was controlled by the power of His indwelling Lord.

Amen.