

Great Generosity **2Corinthians 8:1-5....(-15)**

In the next **two chapters** Paul turns entirely to a **new subject** – collecting funds--bringing relief to the saints in Jerusalem who had fallen on hard times. One of the forgotten beatitudes that Jesus gave & Paul reminds us of ***“It is more blessed to give than to receive” Acts 20:35***

They were victims of **social & economic exile**. Ostracized from business interest, family ties & friends because of their unwavering belief, inflexible commitment to Jesus Christ.

The world will tolerate **nominal Christianity**, those who are willing to waver in their beliefs, who give in to compromise in order to keep the status quo, ***don't rock the boat***, peace at any cost. But when you, take a firm stand w/o compromise--it offends broad-minded people and they react & resent your **narrow-minded-ness**.

Broad minded people don't resent a narrow minded **pilot** when flying or narrow minded **surgeon** when operated on or narrow minded demolition-expert when imploding a building next door. ***They resent Christians who takes a precise, specific, fixed stand on sin, salvation, heaven & hell—not everyone goes to heaven.***

So believers in Jerusalem had been excommunicated from **social life**, banned from **trade guilds** (***refused 'Caesar is lord'***), were **religious outcast** because of their strict unyielding belief in Jesus as Messiah, God's only provision for salvation—reject Him & God will reject you for all eternity. Receive Him as Lord & savior & He will save you. ***So they were persecuted for their inflexible faith.***

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Paul also believed the offering would strengthen unity among Gentile & Jewish churches. The *'Mother Church'* in Jerusalem was responsible for the initial faith & growth of Gentile believers. Paul calls them *debtors* to the Jews **Rom 15:25-28**-this special collection-a way to respond to that debt.

In Paul's first letter Corinthian believers committed themselves to receive & bring an offering--**but** they hadn't followed thru. It had been over a year & they'd failed to fulfill their obligation. Why? *Low degree of spirituality!*

W Weirsbe 'When a church is not spiritual it is not generous.'

5% of churchgoers tithe (Church Development). 1.5 million people tithe out of the 247 million U.S. citizens identifying as Christians (Sharefaith). **77%** of tithers give more than 10% (Health Research Funding) If every Christian tithed 10%, faith organizations would have an extra \$139 billion each year. 'Let us walk'

Another factor--false teachers talking them out of it--accusing Paul of using the money for himself. When they in reality were charlatans **siphoning** off funds. Things seem to settle down after visits & letters & Titus coming. They were now ready to fulfill their obligation.

Paul lifts his appeal to the highest spiritual level awakening in them the fact that giving was an **act of God's grace**. Ministry & fellowship having its true motivation rooted in the **grace of God**.

Paul's wanted the Corinthian church to experience God's grace working in their lives & it the chief motivating factor in serving God.

It's a delicate subject & Paul exhorts them by the example of believers in Macedonia as role models-primarily Philippi, Thessalonica & Berea. He explains How Gods grace overflowed & directed these churches in their giving. Corinthians should follow their example. Theme Gods grace in giving

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2 Cor 8:1 Now, brethren, we wish to make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia,
 2 that in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality.

Paul's seeks to educate & same time admonishing--Move them to action by the example of others-Macedonians.

Paul is not harsh but kind, calling them brethren. He's not comparing or embarrassing them in order to do right. *Why can't you be generous like your sister church?* His theme is the grace of God--the motivating factor behind Macedonians great generosity--same grace available to Corinthians

Grace operates in hard times--*great ordeal of affliction*-- Suffering often produces selfishness-it turns us inward, not outward. It is a special work of grace to minister to others when we are in a place of pain & suffering.

Our own hurt blinds us to the hurts of others--hard times shut us off & shut others out. Unless God's grace is working in my life.

It's not natural to have joy in times of sorrow--a glad heart when the soul is troubled except God's grace giving assurance of His nearness & care.

Notice what grace does *their abundance of joy* **graces contrast to affliction**

Grace operates in lean times--*deep poverty (resulted in a flood of generosity) overflowed in the wealth of their liberality*. The saints at Macedonia were at *lit rock-bottom destitution*--describes a beggar who has absolutely nothing & has no hope of getting anything.

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Yet it didn't hinder them from generosity—it overflowed & was joyful & abundant. Same w/ Paul's ministry '*as sorrowful yet always rejoicing, as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things.*' 6:10

God's grace is more noticeable in lean times, when things are scarce, destitute conditions. Great generosity is magnified in famine times *Widow w/ Elijah 1Kings 17:13*

To give when I have plenty is no problem. But giving when I have little or nothing is a work of grace. God measures our giving not by the amount but by the sacrifice. David *said I will not offer to God that which cost me nothing.* *Widows mite Lk 21:1-4-Purim (Haman), poor find poorer & give gift.*

This is grace in lean times, times of deep poverty. W Weirsbe 'When you have experienced the grace of God in your life you will not use difficult circumstances as an excuse for a lack of generosity'

3 For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability they gave of their own accord,

Grace operates past our comfort zone--*grace to give according to and beyond their ability.* The problem in Macedonia was not that they didn't give enough but they give too much. '*beyond their ability, past their resources, outside their means.* They were big hearted—some people ask how little can I give they ask how much. Barclay 'It is not always those who are most wealthy who are most generous; often those who have least to give are the most ready to give.' *It is the poor that help the poor'* And the rich help themselves

1 Chr 29:9 Then the people rejoiced because they had offered so willingly, for they made their offering to the LORD with a whole heart, and King David also rejoiced greatly.

Grace operates voluntarily—*they gave of their own accord,*

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2 Cor 9:7 Let each one do just as he has purposed in his heart; not grudgingly or under compulsion; for God loves a cheerful giver.

Exod 35:5;21-22 Take from among you a contribution to the LORD; whoever is of a willing heart, let him bring it as the LORD'S contribution

21 And everyone whose heart stirred him and everyone whose spirit moved him came and brought the LORD'S contribution for the work of the tent of meeting and for all its service and for the holy garments.

22 Then all whose hearts moved them, both men and women, came.....

Exod 36:5-6 and they said to Moses, "The people are bringing much more than enough for the construction work which the LORD commanded us to perform."

6 So Moses issued a command, and a proclamation was circulated throughout the camp, saying, "Let neither man nor woman any longer perform work for the contributions of the sanctuary." Thus the people were restrained from bringing any more.

Prov 11:25 The generous man will be prosperous, and he who waters will himself be watered.

4 begging us with much entreaty for the favor of participation in the support of the saints,

Grace operates w/ enthusiasm--*begging us with much entreaty* Grace

gives spontaneously—Not coerced, manipulated or compelled. As

Chrysostom says *"it was they, not Paul, who did the begging"*. Begging as a favor for them to take part. Didn't wait for the tithe sermon. All they needed was to hear of the need and they gave spontaneously and enthusiastically. *Prosthetic leg--motor scooter*

5 and this, not as we had expected, but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God.

Grace originates & operates thru the life of God--*they first gave themselves to the Lord*

1 Jn 4:9 By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him.

1 Sam 1:28 "So I have also dedicated him to the LORD; as long as he lives he is dedicated to the LORD." And he worshiped the LORD there.

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Rom 6:13 and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.

2 Cor 5:14-15 For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, that they who live should no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf.

Grace operates by way of submission—*gave themselves to us by the will of God.*

Heb 13:17 Obey your leaders, and submit to them for they keep watch over your souls, as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.

1 Chr 12:18 Then the Spirit came upon Amasai, who was the chief of the thirty, and he said, "We are yours, O David, and with you, O son of Jesse! Peace, peace to you, and peace to him who helps you; indeed, your God helps you!" Then David received them and made them captains of the band.