

Week 9, 2 Corinthians 8

Hook



Main Point: Believers should give graciously.

Current Event: To give is better than to receive—and science agrees. Elizabeth Dunn of the University of British Columbia conducted a study in an attempt to discover how one's spending money impacts his or her happiness. She conducted several experiments in which individuals' levels of happiness were tracked as they went about spending; whether the experiment involved college students who were given a \$20 bill or employees of business who received bonuses of various sizes, those who spent the monies on others were consistently happier after their choice than those who directed the funds another way. Further, Dunn's research indicated that happiness correlated with the amount of money people spent on others rather than the absolute amount of the bonus or income they received. An article by the American Association for the Advancement of Science detailed Dunn's work:

Dunn says the results "confirmed our hypothesis more strongly than we dared to dream." The effects of altruistic spending are probably akin to those of exercise, she notes, which can have immediate and long-term effects. Giving once might make a person happy for a day, but "if it becomes a way of living, then it could make a lasting difference," she says. She hopes the finding might someday spur policymakers to promote widespread philanthropy that could make for a more altruistic—and happier—population.¹

¹ <http://www.sciencemag.org/news/2008/03/secret-happiness-giving>

***Have you found that you are more satisfied when you spend on others rather than yourself?
Why is that?***

How do the Scriptures address giving and generosity? Why should a believer give?

How does generosity impact a believer's witness?

Week 9, 2 Corinthians 8

Book

Main Point: Believers should give graciously.

Text Summary: 2 Corinthians 8 In this chapter, Paul starts a section on the theology of giving. As he invites the Corinthians to help relieve the poverty-stricken church in Jerusalem, Paul clearly wants the church in Corinth to understand what giving really means.

2 Corinthians 8:1–15 [Read]

Sub-Point: True believers give graciously because God gives graciously.

Introduction/Overview For the Corinthian church to become healthy again, it needs to follow through in its gift to Jerusalem. The Corinthians had begun a collection for the needy in Jerusalem (1 Corinthians 16:1–4), but it came to a stand-still due to Paul’s “falling out” with the Corinthians. Now that the relationship has been restored, Paul resumes the call to generously give to the church in Jerusalem (verse 11).² And what were the specifics of that call?

First, it was a *theological* call. Paul believes that salvation changes a believer’s orientation to money. Through their giving, the Corinthians would demonstrate evidence that they genuinely are Christians. Christ himself became poor so that we may become rich in the Lord. We must do the same for others.³

Second, the call was a *demonstration of fellowship*. By this one-time gift, the Corinthian church would express their support of the unity between believing Jews and Gentiles.⁴ The church in Jerusalem was made up mostly of converted Jews. The Corinthian church was made up of converted Gentiles.⁵

How has your salvation informed your perception of money?

What are ways that you can join with Prestonwood in supporting other congregations throughout the world?

Verses 1–7 To illustrate his thoughts on giving, Paul uses the Macedonian churches as an example.⁶ They were impoverished and also being afflicted for their faith on a daily basis (v. 2).

² R Kent Hughes, *2 Corinthians: Power in Weakness*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2006), 156.

³ Hughes, *2 Corinthians: Power in Weakness*, 156.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Murray J. Harris, “2 Corinthians” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Tremper Longeman III and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2008), 431.

⁶ Hughes, *2 Corinthians: Power in Weakness*, 156-157.

While Paul was likely reluctant to take their gifts after seeing their extreme poverty, it seems *they* were the ones doing the begging so they could be involved in the relief effort (v. 4)! Poor or not, giving was an honor that the Macedonian churches wouldn't be denied.

Paul doesn't bring up the Macedonian churches to shame the Corinthians into giving, but to help them understand a couple of points: 1) a giving heart comes from an overflow of God's grace (v. 1), and 2) true believers are marked by generosity.

In light of what God was doing among the Macedonians, Paul believed that the Corinthians (who had benefited so greatly from God's grace, 1 Corinthians 1:4–7) should do no less (vv. 6–7).⁷ And so Titus would be sent to administer the Corinthian's portion of the collection; thereby giving them the opportunity to excel in this act of grace.⁸

In what ways are you blessed when you give of your finances?

Verse 8 Paul's challenge for the Corinthians to give to Jerusalem isn't a *demand*; it's a *test*, testing the giving of the Corinthian church against the "earnestness of others" (the Macedonians). Their giving, like the giving of the Macedonians, should be motivated by the love of Christ in them.

The Macedonian's ability to give so graciously came from God. How? God's grace at work in their lives prompted a unique perspective in the Macedonians: "They gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us." They gave themselves *completely* to God and so viewed their lives (including their possessions) as belonging to Him.

This carries an important lesson to us now: While giving to others exemplifies true faith, it does no good unless we've actually given *ourselves* to God. As we live surrendered to Him, we become more and more like Jesus, especially in the area of giving. We see our lives and our money as His, not ours. We give greatly only because *God* gives greatly.⁹

What areas of your life are easy to give to God? What areas have you found difficult to give to Him?

Verses 9–16 The comparisons for the Corinthians did not stop with the Macedonians; in verse 9 Paul introduces the example of what Christ gave. This is a reference to the pre-incarnate Jesus, the humiliation he willingly endured through his incarnation (including death on a cross) all in order that the believer might become spiritually rich.

⁷ David K. Lowery, "2 Corinthians," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 573.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 573.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 157-160.

After making his argument in this chapter, Paul believes that the Corinthians will indeed resume their collection for Jerusalem. Paul gives his advice in verses 10–12 concerning the offering:

- Finish what you started
- Desire and wishing to complete a task are no substitute for action (James 2:15–16)
- The size of the gift should correspond to an individual’s means to give¹⁰

Paul expresses in verses 13–15 that he did not intend for the Corinthians to become poor while the people of the church in Jerusalem became rich; fairness calls for the abundance of the Corinthians today to supply for the need of the people in Jerusalem and one day the needs of the people in Jerusalem might provide for the needs of the Corinthians. This idea of meeting needs was demonstrated in Exodus 16:16–18. When God gave food to the Israelites in the wilderness, He did so equally according to their needs.¹¹

Explain how our giving proves our understanding of the Gospel.

Describe a time when God used another believer to provide for your needs. How did that impact your interactions with others?

2 Corinthians 8:16–24 [Read]

Sub-Point: Churches should entrust their financial gifts to trustworthy leaders.

Verses 16–24 are Paul’s commendation for three brothers who would take up the offering from the Corinthians. Scholars say that Paul purposefully distances himself from the actual gathering where the Corinthians would give their money so that his enemies could not accuse him of coercing or putting pressure on the people of Corinth. Instead of being there himself, he puts safety measures in place to make sure the offering is well taken care of and not a product of manipulation or force. The three brothers include the *soul brother*, the *famous brother*, and the *earnest brother*.¹²

The “soul brother” (as one commentator Ken Hughes labels him) is Titus. He is dubbed with this title because he seems to share the same special heart and care that Paul has for the Corinthians (v. 16). The “famous brother” is ironically anonymous to us today but Paul clearly esteemed him highly. The “third brother” is an unnamed soldier, but we can tell he is a very earnest man indeed (v. 22), energetic to get the job done and help the church in Jerusalem.¹³

When it comes to financial giving, those managing the financial gifts must be trustworthy

¹⁰ Ibid., 573.

¹¹ Ibid., 573.

¹² Ibid., 165-168.

¹³ Ibid.

leaders, full of character and eagerness. Paul took extensive safety measures with the contributions in Corinth; we, too, must choose those people with the highest integrity to manage financial gifts.

Twice in this section, Paul refers to the “glory of the Lord” or the “glory of Christ” (vv. 19, 23; in other translations, “honor to the Lord”). Here we see Paul’s ultimate goal—for the collection to be a tangible expression of the new relationship between the Jews and the Gentiles which could only be achieved through Christ’s work.¹⁴ For Paul, giving to the collection for the Jewish Christians would show off the power of God to reconcile those who were once natural enemies.

Finally, Paul wraps up this chapter by returning to his major point: “give proof before the churches of your love” of those needy believers in Jerusalem (v. 24). Real love for other believers requires not just *desire* to help them, but completed *actions*. Paul does not budge on this: Financial giving is a proof that your love for God and His Church is genuine.

God has placed common care and passion in the hearts of Paul and Titus for the Corinthians (v. 16). What people group, church or organization has God given you a care and passion for? How are you ministering to them?

Why do you think Paul is going through such safety measures for this offering (vv. 20–22)?

How does giving demonstrate proof of love?

¹⁴ Colin G. Kruse, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, revised ed., vol. 8, *2 Corinthians: an Introduction and Commentary* (Nottingham, England: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 210.

Week 9, 2 Corinthians 8

Took



Main Point: Believers should give graciously.

Media: Have you been burdened to be a giver above and beyond your tithe? Consider donating to the World Missions Offering. The following video gives insight into the World Missions Offering and its global impact. <http://prestonwood.org/connect/missions-outreach/international-missions/world-mission-offering>

Lesson Conclusion: While taking up an offering to help out a fellow church seems normal to us, we must remember all that this particular offering in Corinth was achieving. It proved the validity of this Gentile church's faith. It would also allow this struggling Jerusalem church to survive. It would demonstrate the miraculous power of God through the Gospel to make Jews and Gentiles one in Christ. And finally, it would declare the glory of the Lord to the Church and to the world.

Challenge

Repent of greed. Take time to pray to the Lord and repent of greed in the forms it takes—finances, glory and comfort. Identify the ways greed has infiltrated your mind and heart, and surrender it to the Lord, asking Him to replace it with a spirit of generosity instead.

List all the things God has given you. The reason a lot of us fail to give extravagantly to others is that we believe we don't have enough. To combat this, make a list of all the things God has given you—the big and small things, the spiritual and material things, the temporary things and permanent things, the liquid funds and the stored resources. As the list grows, the Lord will remind you of all the ways He has blessed you and provided for you. Take time to give Him glory for all He has done on your behalf.

Give things on your list to another. As you review the list you made in #2, think of a person who does not have items on this list. How can you share them with that person? Remember that Paul considers the giving of blessings a marker of true Gospel—Christianity. How can the things God has given you become a blessing to others?