



Part 9 – Excel in This Grace (3)

2 Corinthians 8:1-15

The collection for the church in Jerusalem was something that occupied nearly two decades of the Apostle Paul's ministry. Indeed, raising funds for the relief of the Jerusalem Christian's suffering was a major component of his ministry, inseparable in many ways from his preaching. It is important to remember that "the collection" or "this act of grace" was not charity work in general.

It was a focused project of Christian fellowship and generosity. For Paul, there was no clear separation between his gospel proclamation and his work to alleviate the suffering of the church in Jerusalem. They mingled together to form one unified mission.

In verse 8 Paul states that he is not giving a command to the Corinthian church concerning how they should contribute to the collection. So concerned is he that they give without coercion that he does not even provide figures for the present need in Jerusalem which would have surely been significant. Rather he appeals to their hearts. Paul desires their generosity to mimic that of the Lord Jesus and their brethren in Macedonia. But he is jealous for the Corinthians to experience the joy of freely given generosity.

We are all, without exception, susceptible to making an idol of money and the things money promises. We often find our attitudes toward money, possessions, and security shaped more by the world than by God's Word. In his appeal to the Corinthian church Paul points to the Macedonian churches and the Lord Jesus as examples of generosity worth emulating. We see, both in Jesus and the Macedonian Christians principles of generosity which ought to shape our thinking about and use of money.

Biblical Principles of Christian Generosity

1. Gospel

- Paul's letter to the Philippian church is in part a letter of thanks for their financial support. He refers to them as partners in the gospel on the basis of their financial support (**Phil. 1:15; 4:15**). Their assistance enabled his continued ministry and supplied his needs in prison. The Philippian church's giving reflects their concern both for Paul's ministry of gospel proclamation and for the alleviation of his suffering in prison. That twin concern highlights the two specific "line-items" that are insisted upon in the New Testament: 1) Provide for those who make their living by the gospel, and 2) The alleviation of the suffering of the poor and persecuted.

A) Gospel Proclamation

1 Corinthians 9:13-14; 1 Timothy 5:17-18

- From the time of Jesus' ministry, the proclamation of the gospel was enabled by the generosity of God's people. The Apostle Paul made it clear that those elders who serve well, especially those who labor in teaching and preaching are to be "considered worthy of double honor."

B) Gospel Application

2 Corinthians 8:9; Galatians 6:10

- The church is to give generously to alleviate the suffering of the needy, especially our fellow Christians. The office of Deacon was created in order to assure that the church did not neglect the needy in their midst, particularly widows (**Acts 6**). One of Paul's chief purposes was raising funds for the suffering church in Jerusalem. Certainly, the Bible commands those who are able to work to do so. Scripture rebukes those who are able but unwilling to work: "For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat" (**2 Thess. 3:10**). Otherwise, the church is responsible to meet the needs of those who, because of matters outside their control, find themselves impoverished. This sort of generosity may be understood as an application of the gospel. That is, giving

generously to the suffering is a tangible application of the truth that Jesus, impoverished himself for our sake (**2 Cor. 8:9**).

2. Cheerful

2 Corinthians 8:3–4; 9:7

- Giving is to be done cheerfully. It is to be a voluntary act, not forced (**2 Cor. 8:3,11-12; 9:5,7**). Cheerful giving is possible because, among other things, our giving will result in praise to God. Indeed, the very act of giving is to be one of joyful praise to God (**2 Cor. 8:4; 9:12; Phil 4:15-18**). Do not misunderstand Paul's instruction in 2 Corinthians 9:7. He is wooing the Corinthians toward greater generosity, an area where they have needed to grow. He does not want to tell them to give at a specific level. Rather he provides them with the example of the Macedonian churches and, of course, Christ himself, to stir up cheerful, voluntary generosity from their hearts.

3. Proportional

2 Corinthians 8:12–13

- Giving is to be in proportion to wealth (**1 Cor. 16:2; 9:8-11**). This is the principle of the tithe first observed in Abraham's honoring of the priest king Melchizedek (**Gen. 14:18-20**). "Tithe" means a "tenth" portion. In the Old Testament God called for various tithes each year from his people in addition to other offerings. While there is no New Testament command to give a specific amount, it is reasonable to assume that the principle of the tithe still stands as, at minimum, a guide for proportional giving. It is also reasonable that, with the fullness of God's revelation in Christ and the completion of the work of atonement, the standard of generosity for God's people would be broadened rather than constricted.

4. Sacrificial

2 Corinthians 8:2

- The sacrificial giving of the Macedonian churches was a reflection of the sacrificial generosity of God (8:9). We must learn to grip loosely our possessions in this life. And just as the impoverished Macedonians found a way to give financially, it is important for all of us to the same. Even in times of financial calamity we can all find a way to give, even if the amount seems miniscule to us. The flow of generosity is something that can be maintained even in times of great trials. One thing Christians ought to consider is how we might live below our means in order to have greater margin for generosity.

5. Home

Galatians 6:10

- Our generosity begins (but does not end) with the "household of faith." The giving of church members provides for the ministries of the church, the meeting of physical needs, building and maintenance of church facilities, pastors and ministry staff, and the sending and sustenance of missionaries near and far. This responsibility to give to one's church is reflected in the vows taken by incoming members to PCA churches. The question reads: "Do you promise to support the work and worship of the church?" As members we have promised to support, to the best of our ability, the work and worship of the church. This includes the full range of the resources God has given us (time, talents, treasure).

6. Blessing

2 Corinthians 9:11 – "You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way..."

- While we must reject the errors of the prosperity teachers, it is nevertheless clear that God promises blessings upon those who give generously. There is no promise that God will make generous givers wealthy or keep them in perfect health. However, there is a certainty of blessing for those who give generously. After thanking the Corinthian church for their promise to give a generous gift for the needs of another church Paul writes: "The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully...He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God" (**2 Corinthians 9:6, 10-11**)