

## Grace Abounding in Giving, Part 2

2 Corinthians 8:1–6

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### Introduction

Well we return once again to our study on Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians, so open with me in your Bibles to 2 Corinthians chapter 8. And this morning we find ourselves in the second message on the opening paragraph of 2 Corinthians chapters 8 and 9, which stand together as a structural unit in Paul's letter. Paul devotes these two chapters to the ministry of Christian giving, and in fact gives us the most detailed theology of Christian generosity and giving that we find in all of Scripture.

And I mentioned last week that we do not embark on a sermon series through these two chapters on giving because the elders of the church or the leaders of GraceLife discern any deficiency in your giving. Quite the contrary is true. Instead, we devote our attention to these two chapters on giving simply because we have been working through 2 Corinthians verse by verse, and these two chapters are next in line! And that means that God, in His providential governance of all things, has so ordered it that at *this* time, in GraceLife, we come to consider what Scripture says concerning Christian giving. For the generous among us, you will be exhorted to excel still more in your generosity. For those of us who need to be instructed and exhorted in the matter of genuine generosity, it will be a blessing to consider how the grace of God—especially displayed in the Gospel—means to motivate and fuel our own generosity, unto the glory and praise of God in Christ.

And Paul doesn't just land on the subject of giving at random. Having heard the favorable report from Titus that the Corinthians had received him well and responded in repentance to Paul's severe letter, and had reaffirmed their love and loyalty to him, with his relationship to the Corinthians virtually restored, Paul recognized that he could now revisit with them this matter of the collection for the poor saints in Jerusalem.

And we mentioned last time that that the poverty of the Jerusalem church was a perennial issue for the early church to deal with. Many of those early converts were pilgrims who had left everything to remain with the church of Christ. And even those who weren't were still Jews abandoning Judaism and embracing Jesus as Messiah, and therefore they faced the persecution from their families and fellow countrymen—persecution that undoubtedly had a financial effect. And so from the beginning, the Apostles were concerned with ministering to the believers in Jerusalem, and Paul especially. 1 Corinthians 16 tells us that he had been organizing a collection

from the churches in Galatia as well, and that he wanted the Corinthians to do as they did. “Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so do you also. On the first day of every week each one of you is to put aside and save, as he may prosper, so that no collections be made when I come.” And so this was an intentional, organized, multi-church effort to meet the needs of the saints in Jerusalem.

And it was an effort with which the Corinthians were familiar. We learn from these chapters that they had been preparing for this offering a year prior. The conflict generated by the false apostles had stalled that, but the desire was there and they had made a beginning. And so Paul’s driving concern—his main point—in these two chapters is to stir up the Corinthians to complete the collection for the Jerusalem church that they had begun a year ago. We see that clearly in verse 6 and verse 24, but most clearly in verses 10 and 11: You “were the first to begin a year ago not only to do this, but also to desire to do it. But now finish doing it also, so that just as there was the readiness to desire it, so there may be also the completion of it by your ability.” And it is from the details of this 2,000 year-old offering that we are exposed to universal principles of Christian giving that are applicable to the church throughout all ages.

And Paul begins his appeal by informing them of the grace of God at work in the churches of Macedonia, and by holding them up as an example to be imitated. And we see that in the opening paragraph, which we began studying last week. Look once again with me at 2 Corinthians 8, verses 1 to 6. “Now, brethren, we wish to make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia, <sup>2</sup>that in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality. <sup>3</sup>For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability, they gave of their own accord, <sup>4</sup>begging us with much urging for the favor of participation in the support of the saints, <sup>5</sup>and this, not as we had expected, but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God. <sup>6</sup>So we urged Titus that as he had previously made a beginning, so he would also complete in you this gracious work as well.”

And I proposed to you last week that we can make **four observations** concerning the Macedonians’ giving—by whose example Paul aims to stir up the Corinthians to grace-driven generosity—which observations will yield **several principles for our Christian giving**, principles that ought to inform how we think about money, about generosity, and about faithful stewardship of the financial resources that God has blessed us with. And we got to **three** of those **observations** last week, which we’ll review just briefly.

### **Review I: The Motivating Source (v. 1)**

The **first** was that **grace** is the **motivating source** of Christian giving. Verse 1: “Now, brethren, we wish to make known to you **the grace of God** which has been given in the churches of

Macedonia.” Paul begins his appeal, not by vividly describing the crippling poverty of the saints in Jerusalem so as to guilt them into giving, not by pressing into their consciences the necessity of their duty and issuing apostolic injunctions. No, the very foundation of all he will say about needs, and giving, and money is **the grace of God**. “I want you to behold God’s grace at work in the Philippians, and the Thessalonians, and the Bereans, and be motivated to aspire to the same kind of grace-fueled generosity!”

And we spoke about how grace is the scarlet thread woven throughout the fabric of these two chapters, some form of the word appearing no less than *twelve* times in 39 verses. It is the beginning of Paul’s appeal here in chapter 8 verse 1. It’s the end of his appeal, chapter 9 verse 15: “Thanks be to God for His indescribable *gift!*” And it is at the center of his appeal, chapter 8 verse 9: “For you know the *grace* of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich.” You see, in Paul’s mind, the only reasonable starting place for **motivating** the people of God to sacrificial, generous giving is the sacrificial, generous giving of *God* in His grace. And the pinnacle of that grace is the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, whereby the One who possessed all riches voluntarily laid them aside in order to serve those who were destitute of God’s blessings.

And we noted from this that there is a direct connection—an umbilical cord of spiritual life and perspective—between (a) the central truths of Gospel grace and (b) the hearts and the behavior of those who are beneficiaries of that grace. The truths of the Gospel must be brought to bear on our lives! The realities of Gospel-grace must actively shape all our thinking, feeling, speaking, and acting about absolutely everything! If grace is at work in your heart, the effects of that grace will be evidenced in your life—and, in this case, in the way you steward your money.

And so, dear people, we must pursue this grace. We need to avail ourselves of the various means by which God dispenses His grace in our lives—such as Scripture reading, prayer, meaningful fellowship with the body of Christ. Because it is only the **grace** of God that is the **motivating source** of the large-heartedness and generosity of spirit that makes us eager to meet the financial needs of our brothers and sisters.

## **Review II: The Challenging Circumstances (v. 2a)**

Secondly, we **observed the challenging circumstances** of the Macedonians’ giving. Verse 2 tells us that the grace of God produced this generosity in the hearts of the Macedonians “in a great ordeal of affliction” and in “deep poverty.” And we explored those terms and learned that the Macedonians were experiencing severe afflictions and persecutions, all the while being in a state of extreme destitution and rock-bottom poverty.

And you'd think that such **circumstances** might lead the Macedonians to seek an excuse for not participating in the offering. But the opposite was true! The text says, "In a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty *overflowed* in the wealth of their liberality"! It was their ability to maintain an abundance of joy—even in the midst of their severe afflictions and crushing poverty—that caused them to overflow in generosity. When the Macedonians realized that there was more of the glory of Jesus to enjoy on the path of generous, sacrificial giving, their joy in Him severed the root of joy in money, or joy in pleasant circumstances, and they experienced the freedom of radical, self-forgetful generosity.

The grace of God works in the heart to so satisfy you with the beauty of the glory of Christ that you experience the kind of abounding joy that enables you to live above your **challenging circumstances**. Severe affliction and deep poverty do not need to be barriers to Christian generosity, because grace displays the inestimable worth of Christ to the eyes of your heart that, from the abundance of joy over finding this treasure, you can release our grip on your possessions in service of the Gospel, and experience that loss as gain, because you gain Christ (Phil 3:7–8). We need to so cultivate the grace of God in our hearts that our joy in Jesus would cause our generosity to not be hindered by our **difficult circumstances**.

### **Review III: The Driving Disposition (v. 2b)**

And that brought us to our **third observation**, namely, **the driving disposition** of the Macedonians' giving. Verse 2: ". . . in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality." In concert with this grace-fueled joy, poverty abounded into wealth! Not material wealth! Grace does not miraculously transform poor people into rich people! No, grace creates a **driving disposition** of the heart to give generously in spite of circumstances—a **disposition** of generosity that can only be described as spiritual wealth.

And we examined this word translated "liberality" or "generosity," and saw that it refers to generosity without duplicity, without double motives. They gave with integrity, with simplicity of heart, with genuine, open-hearted generosity to see their brethren's needs met and burdens relieved—even if it meant imposing significant financial burdens upon themselves.

And last week we celebrated the fact that this **driving disposition** of biblical generosity is not measured by what comes through your *hands*, but by what is in your *heart*. Generosity isn't about the amount of money you give. It's about the **driving disposition** of your heart that, in spite of the most challenging of circumstances, by the supernatural grace of God overflows with an abundance of joy in Jesus, and so delights to find a way to open your heart with genuine sincerity to meet the needs of the people of God.

#### IV. The Detailed Character (vv. 3–5)

Well, that brings us to our **fourth observation** concerning the Macedonians' giving that informs our understanding of Christian generosity. We've seen the motivating source, the challenging circumstances, and the driving disposition. In the **fourth** place, we ought to observe **the detailed character** of the Macedonians' giving. Look with me at verses 3 to 5: "For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability, they gave of their own accord, <sup>4</sup>begging us with much urging for the favor of participation in the support of the saints, <sup>5</sup>and this, not as we had expected, but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God." And I summarize these three verses as **the detailed character** of giving because they outline **six characteristics** that make up the **character** of Christian giving. And that will be our outline for this morning's sermon.

##### A. Proportional (v. 3)

The **first characteristic** of the Macedonians' giving that teaches us concerning genuine Christian generosity is that giving is to be **proportional**. Verse 3 says, "For I testify that *according to their ability . . . they gave.*" Now, to speak of giving according to one's ability is to speak of giving according to the means or resources that one presently has. This is a principle that Paul speaks about repeatedly. We see it again down in verses 11 and 12, where Paul says to complete the collection "by your *ability*. For if the readiness is present, it is acceptable *according to what a person has*, not according to what he does not have." And then again in 1 Corinthians 16, when Paul was giving instructions about the collection in his first letter to the Corinthians, he says in 1 Corinthians 16:2, "On the first day of every week, each one of you is to put aside and save, *as he may prosper.*"

What this teaches us is that Christian giving under the New Covenant is to be **proportional**; it is to be measured according to what a man has, not according to what he does not have. Paul doesn't say, "On the first day of the week, each one of you is to put aside fifty dollars." He doesn't say, "Each one of you is to put aside five percent of his income, or ten percent, or fifteen percent." Neither in this passage nor in any other passage of the New Testament is a fixed percentage attached to the standard of Christian giving. No, he says each of you is to put aside and save *as he may prosper*. And this is what Paul testifies that the Macedonians did. They gave according to their *ability*.

But just what is one's "ability" to give? Well, it's what you have at your disposal after you meet your basic obligations to provide the necessities of life for yourself and those for whom you're responsible. And what are those obligations and necessities? Well, first we are to give to God a portion of what he has blessed us with, giving to the work of the Gospel first from the home-base of our own local church. Paul says in 1 Timothy 5:17 that the elders who rule well in the church

and who work hard at preaching and teaching are to be considered worthy of double honor—which is to say not only the honor of reverence and submission to their leadership, but also the honor of financial support. And then he quotes Deuteronomy 25:4, “You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing,” which he also quoted in his first letter to the Corinthians, chapter 9, and soon after explained that “The Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel” (1 Cor 9:14). And so, our first obligation is to give to the Lord from our first fruits, so that the ministry of the Gospel might be sustained through our local church.

But we are also obligated to provide for ourselves and for those for whom we are responsible. In 1 Timothy 5:8, Paul says, “If anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.” So this is a serious obligation we have. And Paul identifies those basic necessities in 1 Timothy 6:7 and 8, where he says, We’ve “brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either. If we have food and covering, with these we shall be content.” Food and covering. Not necessarily the finest food, or the nicest clothing, or the biggest house, but enough to provide covering from the elements, and to keep us healthy and strong so we might serve the Lord. So our giving is to be **proportional** to our “ability,” which is defined as what we are able to give after supporting the work of the Gospel through our local church and after providing for the basic necessities of life for ourselves and those whom the Lord has entrusted to our care.

And what a wonderful thing it would be, dear people, if each and every one of us at this church gave according to our ability! I dare say that this is not the standard that many of us use when we decide how much we are able to give to meet the needs of the saints. Rather than considering that we may give up to the measure of our ability, we often are content to give out of the excess—the leftovers—so that the question of whether we’re able to afford to be generous very seldom enters our minds. We don’t view our net-spendable income as whatever doesn’t go for the offering, for food, and for covering. But Paul calls us to imitate the example of the Macedonians, who gave according to their ability.

### **B. Sacrificial (v. 3)**

But then, beyond that, look at the **second characteristic** of Christian giving. Number two: Giving is to be **sacrificial**. Again in verse 3: “For I testify that according to their ability, and *beyond their ability*, they gave.” Now, you say, “How in the world do they do that? If my ability is measured by meeting the bare necessities of supporting my local church and providing for myself and my family, how is it possible to give *beyond* my ability?”

Well, in providing food, shelter, and clothing for you and your family, you could engage in self-denial so as to **sacrifice** the enjoyment of legitimate pleasures for the sake of increasing your ability to give. The Macedonians engaged in what Al Martin, one of my favorite preachers,

called “fiscal fasting.” Fasting, of course, is denying yourself a meal that you might otherwise legitimately enjoy for the purpose of strengthening your trust in and thankfulness to God for His provision of your daily bread. Well, the grace of God was so at work in the hearts of the Macedonians that, for the purpose of expressing their driving disposition of generosity, they engaged in *fiscal* fasting. They denied themselves otherwise-legitimate pleasures, and—already in a state of deep poverty—they imposed upon themselves an even greater poverty so that they could contribute to the needs of the saints!

Maybe when they went to the market to buy food for the week, instead of getting the choice cuts of meat, they bought the budget cuts. Maybe instead of shopping at the ancient equivalent of the department store, they decided to buy their clothes at the thrift shop. It wouldn’t mean much; maybe a dollar or two here or there. But that is what grace produces in the heart! It compels us to think creatively as to how we might be able to marshal every penny in service of the Gospel and of God’s people.

Giving is to be **sacrificial**. We give not just what we can spare off the top without feeling any pressure. When the need calls for it, Christians endure whatever personal cost is necessary to minister to the body of Christ. Why? Because we believe the words of Jesus, who said that our Father knows what we need before we ask Him (Matt 6:8), and therefore not to worry about what we’ll eat or drink or what we’ll wear, but rather to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to us (Matt 6:31–33). We believe the promises of Scripture, which in Philippians 4:19 says to one of these generous Macedonian churches, “And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.” One commentator wrote, The Macedonians “looked at their ability to give, took into consideration both their present situation and their future needs and obligations, and then showed total disregard for both!” (Storms, 51). Another said, “The Macedonians, . . . poor though they were, had shown a complete disregard of their own [necessities]. . . . [They refused] to take anxious thought for the morrow because of their confident dependence on God” (290–91).

And I pray that that same grace is at work in *your* hearts—that grace would compel you to think creatively about how to give **sacrificially** to meet the needs of your brothers and sisters in Christ. Whether it’s budget cuts of meat, or thrift store shopping, or downsizing the home—whatever it may be! Would that the grace of God be so dynamically active in our hearts that we would welcome self-imposed poverty, knowing that it was precisely self-imposed poverty that saved us! If Jesus had not been possessed of a **sacrificial** spirit of giving—if *His* grace did not issue in self-imposed poverty—each and every one of us would still be dead in our sins! “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor,”—for your sake He **sacrificially** imposed upon Himself the poverty of life and death in a fallen world—“so that you through His poverty might become rich.”

### C. Voluntary (v. 3)

Well, Christian giving is to be proportional, and it is to be sacrificial. A **third characteristic** of Christian giving is that it is **voluntary**. Once again in verse 3: “For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability, they gave *of their own accord*.”

You could imagine someone hearing that the Macedonians gave *beyond* their ability and thinking, “They gave beyond what they were able? They must have been coerced! Paul must have been leaning on them pretty hard to pry out of their hands the money they needed for their daily necessities!” Or, “Paul must have manipulated them! That smooth talker! He must have hoodwinked them into thinking that if they gave more then God would eventually bless them with even *more* money! Or maybe he really confronted them in their sin, and then led them to believe that giving to the collection for the Jerusalem church would somehow appease God concerning their sin!” And Paul says, “No, I testify—I bear solemn witness—that their giving was **voluntary**. They gave *according* to their ability, and even *beyond* their ability, *of their own accord*!”

This means, friends, that true Christian generosity cannot be coerced. It cannot be manipulated. It must be **voluntary**—a spontaneous movement of one’s own will, springing from an abundance of joy in Christ worked by the grace of God in the heart. And one of the plagues on what passes for Christianity these days—preeminently in the form of the health, wealth, and prosperity movement—is that we have a superabundance of con artists and hucksters who pretend to be pastors, who get on television programs and convince people that if they send them \$1,000 for an “anointed” prayer cloth, God will pay their bills and make them prosperous. That kind of manipulation is damnable blasphemy! And those false teachers will suffer God’s wrath for it; 2 Peter 2:3 says “In their greed they will exploit you with false words; their judgment from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.”

And if not the overtly fraudulent deception of the liars and charlatans of the health/wealth/prosperity movement, what about just the sappy gimmickry that goes on in churches and Christian “fundraisers” all throughout our country? I remember being at a fundraiser for a Christian parachurch ministry—a ministry that I love and wholeheartedly support. But they had brought in a seeker-sensitive pastor to give the “message” and the appeal for gifts at the end of the night. And I’ll tell you: By the end of it I wanted to take a shower! I felt so embarrassed for having invited guests to that event, because I felt like someone was spending 30 minutes trying to pry their wallets open. Friends, this is not how Christian giving works! When you employ manipulation tactics like that, you automatically short-circuit genuine generosity, because you fundamentally undermine the **voluntariness** of it.



And dear people, with as much strength with which I would exhort you to give proportionally and sacrificially, I just as forcefully exhort you to run from any ministry that engages in this sort of carnal manipulation and fleshly gimmickry. And by God's grace, you keep your leaders accountable to this biblical principle of **voluntariness** in giving. If you ever hear anyone from this church attempting to coerce you into giving via any motivation save for the almighty grace of God in Christ, you bring two or three with you and you hold their feet to the fire of this text!

But be just as diligent, friends, when you do hear appeals from your elders, your Bible study shepherds, or others in good standing in the body of Christ, and when those appeals *are* grounded in the grace of God in the Gospel, to go to work on your own heart, so that if you give, you give **voluntarily**, of your own accord, gladly and willingly, from the heart. Apart from this, there is no genuinely Christian generosity. 2 Corinthians 9:7: "Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." Labor to be in such a frame of heart that when you're confronted with genuine, grace-motivated, God-honoring appeals for giving, that your heart would receive them and respond with willing cheerfulness.

#### **D. Grateful (v. 4)**

The giving of the Macedonians was proportional, it was sacrificial, and it was voluntary. A **fourth characteristic** of the Macedonians' giving that teaches us concerning the true nature of Christian generosity is, number four, it is **grateful**. Look again at verses 3 and 4: "For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability, they gave of their own accord, *begging* us with *much urging* for the *favor* of participation in the support of the saints." So far from having to be coerced or manipulated by the Apostle Paul to give beyond their ability, the Macedonians *begged* Paul to be allowed to give to this need! They considered it to be a favor shown to *them*!

We can expect that Paul was familiar with the severe afflictions and deep poverty of the Macedonian churches. And it would have been natural for him to simply pass over them in this campaign among the churches. After all, it was likely that the Macedonians didn't have much more—if any more at all—than the saints in Jerusalem whom the offering was designed to relieve. And so you can imagine, as Paul spent time with the Macedonian Christians, that they heard of the collection he was organizing. But, because he was being sensitive to their own need, he very likely would have said to them, "Dear brothers and sisters, I understand your large-hearted desire to support the saints in Jerusalem. But God doesn't expect you to impoverish yourselves to relieve them. You leave this to the other churches." And they said in response to that, "No, Paul, please. It would be our pleasure to give in support of this ministry to our brothers and sisters in the church in Jerusalem! We will do what we have to do, but please don't deny us the privilege of participating in this ministry!" The Macedonians were beggars! But when we

think of beggars in regard to money, we think of people begging to *get*. The Macedonians were begging to *give*!

And those who are filled with this spirit of genuine Christian generosity, they, like the Macedonians, regard giving to meet the needs of their fellow brothers and sisters in Christ as a privilege, not an obligation. They are **grateful** to give. They are earnest about giving. They even regard it as a favor to them to give! Look again at the text: “Begging us with much urging for the *favor* of participation.” Literally, the word for “favor” is the word *grace*, which we’ve said is the dominating thought of these entire two chapters. “Paul, please do us this favor by accepting our gifts! Please grant us this *grace* of being a part of the ministry to these dear brethren!”

And friends, I would just ask you if you recognize anything like that in your own life? Are you **grateful** to give? Do you see giving as a privilege? As a favor? As we read these verses and behold the example of God’s grace at work in the Macedonians, it becomes painfully obvious, doesn’t it, that we’ve got some heart-work to do? We need to be before the Lord and beg *Him* to pour out such grace in our lives that we would beg *others* for the **privilege** not of getting, but of giving.

#### **E. Mutual (v. 4)**

Closely associated with understanding giving as something inherently for which to be grateful, is the notion that there is a certain **mutuality** to Christian giving. That’s a **fifth characteristic**: Giving is proportional, sacrificial, voluntary, grateful, and, number five: **mutual**. And by that, I don’t mean that you only give to those who have given or will give to you. I mean that there is a genuine mutuality—a genuine unity—that is the matrix for genuine Christian generosity. Generous people understand that their gifts to fellow members of the body of Christ are both a result and a means of spiritual unity. And I see that toward the end of verse 4, where Paul says the Macedonians begged him “with much urging for the favor of *participation* in the support of the saints.” And that word that gets translated “participation” is the familiar Greek term *koinonia*—the New Testament word for *fellowship*. So literally, they begged for the grace of the fellowship of the ministry to the saints. Christians who are truly generous understand giving as a fellowship—as the sharing of common life with those to whom they minister.

And I mentioned that Christian giving is both a result and a means of spiritual unity. Perhaps better said: It’s a result of spiritual *union* and a means of spiritual *communion*. In the first place, it’s a result of the spiritual unity that all genuine believers have with one another in Christ. When God saves us, and we repent of our sins and put our trust in Christ for forgiveness and righteousness, God unites us to Christ by that faith that He gives us. We become members of Christ’s body, joined to Him as our spiritual head. And that union to Christ brings immense

blessings—justification, adoption, sanctification, assurance of salvation, and—one day—even glorification.

But union with Christ does not affect us on a merely individual level. When we become united to Christ by faith, we also become united to everyone else who has been united to Christ by faith! We are each members of the body of Christ. And inasmuch as the members of my body are mine and united to me, so also do they belong to one another, and are united to one another. Your left foot is united to your right hand. It doesn't matter that they can be the furthest things away from each other on your body; where your foot goes, your hand goes. Well the same is true for believers in Jesus. 1 Corinthians 12:27 says, "Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it." And that means that caring for one another is caring for ourselves! In a similar way that Paul says, in Ephesians 5:28, that husbands ought to love their wives *as their own bodies* because of the spiritual union that has taken place between them, and that a husband who loves his wife loves *himself*, so also has there been a spiritual union between all who belong to Christ by faith, such that caring for our brothers and sisters in Christ is as caring for our own body.

The Macedonians understood this. And so when they heard of the needs of the saints in Jerusalem, they heard that report as the needs of fellow members of their own body. And it was out of that bond of fellowship that they realized they must be granted the grace of sharing the burden of their brethren! There were no two ways about it! "They gave because they envisioned themselves as one people with the Jerusalem saints, a common body united by the indwelling Spirit through faith in one Lord Jesus Christ" (Storms, 52).

But it wasn't only a result, or an expression, of Christian unity that led the Macedonians to give. It was also a means of greater unity with one another—a deeper communion among the members of the body of Christ. The **mutuality** of Christian giving not only flows from a context of fellowship, but it builds and deepens that fellowship. And you know this. When someone has, in kind generosity, met a physical or financial need of yours, your heart is only further bound toward them in cords of love. When you have the privilege of ministering to a brother or sister in their need, you have a keener sense of your connection to one another as fellow members of the body of Christ. And that is precisely how it should be! The Macedonians, friends, were not merely giving to a *cause*! They weren't just coldly and dispassionately writing out checks to the saints in Jerusalem like they were paying their water bill! No, they weren't giving to a cause; they were giving to a *people*! They were giving to brothers and sisters! To family! And so their giving was a genuine expression of the love and compassion that filled their hearts for them. And the next time the Macedonians saw Paul, how long do you think it would have been before they asked him, "So how are the brethren in Jerusalem doing? Has the collection been dispersed? Are their needs met?" This ministry binds us to one another.

And this teaches us, dear people, that our giving ought to be done with this same consciousness of **mutuality**—this same awareness that we are engaging in the fellowship of the needs of the saints, and so it ought to bind us to one another’s hearts. We ought not to just coldly write our checks to the missionaries we support, or, if you do the automatic monthly credit charge, to just put that thing on autopilot and never think of how they’re doing. Our financial support should only be the occasion for further *prayer* support, and for greater *fellowship* together in the things of the Gospel.

#### **F. Whole-Hearted (v. 5)**

Well, a **sixth characteristic** of Christian giving is one which perhaps deserves its own sermon, but we’ll do our best to treat it briefly now, and will likely revisit these themes in the exposition of the rest of these two chapters. But in addition to being proportional, sacrificial, voluntary, grateful, and mutual, Christian giving is also **whole-hearted**. Look at verse 5: “And this, not as we had expected, but they first gave *themselves* to the Lord *and* to us by the will of God.” And this fits nicely with the previous point. When you recognize the spiritual unity that is both the foundation and the blessed result of genuine generosity, you must give of yourself before you ever give of your resources. Genuine Christian generosity, before it has anything to do with money, has to do with the devotion of oneself—both to the service of the Lord Jesus and therefore necessarily to the service of His Church.

What does it mean to give yourself? Well, first, it means you give yourself to the Lord. That is to say, it is to recognize that—by virtue of being purchased out of the slave market of sin at the ransom price of Christ’s own precious blood—that all that you are belongs utterly to the Lord. In fact, belongs doubly to the Lord—first, by right of creation; the Creator rightly has ownership over the creature. But secondly, by right of redemption. He made you, and when you rebelliously sold yourself into sin, He came and bought back what was His to begin with at the cost of His own blood! And so Paul says in 1 Corinthians 6:19 and 20: “Do you not know...that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.” Before the Macedonians could give of their meager resources to meet the needs of their brethren, they had to come back to reaffirm this foundational reality of being a genuine Christian: that Jesus Christ is Lord of all! That I am doubly owned by Him! By right of creation *and* by right of redemption: all that I am and all that I possess is His! Every ounce of strength in my hands, every dime of money in my wallet! I belong to Him lock, stock, and barrel!

Friends, genuine Christian giving is grounded in the Lordship of Jesus Christ! When you have a proper conception of the fact that Christ lays claim to every square inch of your life, and you reaffirm your commitment to follow Him in everything as His faithful disciple, money is just a part of the whole. If the Lord doesn’t have your heart, it’s no wonder why He doesn’t have your resources. If it’s a burden for you to give to meet the needs of God’s people, then you need to ask

whether you've first given yourself to the Lord. But it's easy to surrender your wallet when you've surrendered your heart. And so recognize, friends, that every occasion of your sacrificial giving is an occasion for a renewed commitment to the Lordship of Christ—to once again offer, not only your shekels, but your very lives as living and holy sacrifices to God (Rom 12:1–2).

But then notice, secondly, that to give yourself means to give yourself in willing submission to the spiritual leaders that the Lord has appointed for you. And this is so important. Look again at verse 5: “They first gave themselves to the Lord *and to us* by the will of God.” The “us” in this context refers to the Apostle Paul and to Titus (and likely Timothy) as the spiritual leaders to whom Christ had entrusted oversight of the Macedonians. These were their pastors and elders, so to speak. And so they gladly entrusted themselves to the care and spiritual oversight of those whom God had placed over them, even in this matter of Christian giving. In other words, genuine Christian giving recognizes the centrality of the local church in the mission of God, and therefore acts in harmony with biblical principles of church order. Pastor John put it this way: “Their devotion to the Lord led them to easily and eagerly submit to the leadership of their pastors. They realized that these men were under-shepherds of Christ, who stood in the place of Christ giving direction and leadership to the church, and they responded to their leadership. God wants His people to respond not only to Him but to His leaders as well” (cf. 1 Pet 5:5; Heb 13:17; 1 Thess 5:12–13). And so there is no way to give oneself in submission to the Lord without giving oneself in submission to the spiritual leaders whom the Lord has placed over you in your life.

And so Paul says in verse 6 that he is once again dispatching Titus to the Corinthians them to help them complete this collection. He speaks in chapter 8 verses 18 and 19 of the brother who has been *appointed by the churches* to travel with Paul for the gathering of the collection. Verses 23 and 24 again mention the *churches*. There is an ecclesiastical order to be followed. Giving like this is to be administrated by the spiritual leaders appointed *by the local church*. And while there are many parachurch ministries that are worthy of the support of the saints, the principle we glean from these texts is that appeals for and the collection of money are to be overseen by the leadership of local churches. And we'll have more to say about that as we work through the rest of chapter 8.

### Conclusion

But such is the example of the grace of God at work in the giving of the Macedonians. When God works graciously in the hearts of His people, He cultivates in them such an abundance of joy in Jesus that they are able to rise above their circumstances, and, out of a driving disposition of generosity, they give proportionally, sacrificially, voluntarily, gratefully, mutually, and wholeheartedly. And in light of that, the imperative comes to the Corinthians to imitate the example of the Macedonians, in verse 6 and verses 10 and 11, as Titus comes to receive their offering.

And the imperative comes to us as well, GraceLife. How will you respond to the example laid out before you? After meeting your responsibilities to your families and then supporting your local church, how will you go above and beyond your regular giving in response to the various needs that come before you? How will you press after the grace of God? Whether it's Faith Promise, Christmas in September, the Deacons' Fund offering, deciding to support an individual missionary, supporting our church's local outreach, and even just the individual needs of your brothers and sisters in GraceLife, in your Bible study, who are going through a tough time and could be blessed by your generosity. How will you seek to grow in this grace?

As I said last week, friends, the same grace of God that was at work in the churches of Philippi and Thessalonica and Berea is available to us here in Los Angeles, through the very same means it was available to the Macedonians. May this text weigh on our hearts as we press after that grace at work in our lives. May God make His hand of sanctifying grace heavy upon us, until we all come to experience greater depths of genuine Christian generosity, so that we ourselves might be an example of generosity—such that someone might be able to say of us, “I make known to you the grace of God which has been given to Grace Community Church! to GraceLife! That despite the difficulty of their circumstances, their abundance of joy in Jesus constantly overflows into a wealth of generosity! They give according to their ability, and when necessary even sacrificially—and that voluntarily, without needing to be coaxed or pressured. They maintain such a clear vision of the grace of Christ displayed in the Gospel, that they even beg—not to get, but to give!—because they understand the privilege it is to partake in the fellowship of the God's people by ministering to their needs of the saints.” May God so work in our hearts, to the glory of His name.