



## 2 Corinthians - Chapter Eight

### Summary of Chapter Eight

Although the collection for the poor in Judæa had been the Corinthians' idea initially, and had been started a year or so earlier, it had stalled until Titus' recent visit. Paul wanted them to resume the collection.

His encouragement comes in the form of indicating that giving is a gracious act that originates with God, with Paul citing the poorer and afflicted Macedonian churches as an excellent example of those that have given generously, despite their trials and hardships.

Paul concludes the chapter by commending Titus to them once again. He was well known to the church in Corinth, as he had only recently visited them, but Paul wants to make it clear that Titus' affection for them is genuine and that he wanted to come to them because of the joy it would bring him in doing so.

### II. 2 Corinthians 8:1-9:15 - Paul's Appeal to the Repentant Church in Corinth Regarding the Collection

In view of 7:2-16, Paul calls the repentant, that is, the whole church apart from those who still opposed Paul, to complete the collection that they had begun under Titus' leadership earlier that was intended to relieve the suffering of believers in Jerusalem.

Judæa was economically fragile due to a severe famine that had hit the region in the early to mid-40's AD. In addition, many elderly Diaspora Jews including widows had returned to the region adding to the burden, and the Temple had stopped supporting Jews who had become Christians.

Paul, Barnabas and Titus made an initial famine-relief visit to Jerusalem in AD46 and delivered a monetary gift from the church at Antioch (Acts 11:29-30). At that time the Jerusalem church expressed the hope that the believers associated with Paul would continue to remember the Judæan poor, which Paul was more than eager to do; refer to Galatians 2:10.

Paul had clearly taught that the act of giving was gracious and it was the Corinthian church, not Paul, that had suggested contributing to the collection. Although Paul writes to the Romans that it was Achaia and Macedonia that contributed, Luke includes representatives from other churches as well. Refer to the comments made on 8:19-22.

The collection in Corinth had floundered for a while; it was revived by Titus during his visit with the severe letter and finally completed by AD57 during Paul's overwinter stay with the church. Paul then took the money to Jerusalem on what turned out to be his final recorded visit to the city, for he was subsequently arrested and imprisoned for several years in both Palestine and Rome.

The collection went beyond the material relief for the poor Christians in Palestine, for it helped to cement the idea to the Gentiles that salvation had been brought to them through these impoverished Jews. It was equally important to demonstrate to the Jews, who had always seen themselves as being superior as God's people, that the love of Christ had been poured out on the Gentiles; therefore, both Jew and Gentile were now all together in God's family.

## II.a 2 Corinthians 8:1-15 - Encouragement to Be Generous

Paul begins his discussion of the collection by demonstrating how the Corinthians' generosity to the believers in Jerusalem manifests the grace of God in their lives, to the glory of God in the world. The Macedonians are an example to the Corinthians in their generous giving.

<sup>1</sup> We want you to know, brothers and sisters, about the grace of God that has been granted to the churches of Macedonia;

### 2 Corinthians 8:1

We want you to know is a way that Paul often goes about introducing new information to his readers. In this case, the new information concerns the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches and their response to that grace, despite the opposition and persecution they faced, something that can be found throughout the letters to Philippi and Thessalonica, that left the Christians there impoverished.

The grace of God, granted among the churches of Macedonia is a reference to the generosity of the churches in the region of Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea; refer to Acts 16:9-17:15, 18:5, 19:21-22, 19:29, 20:1-4 and 27:2. Here and throughout 2 Corinthians Chapters 8-9, Paul calls the collection an act of grace because contributing to the needs of others is made possible by God's undeserved gifts in their lives.

Grace, the noun *charis*, appears ten times in Chapters 8–9. Even within this short span of verses, the range of usage is surprising. It is employed of a spiritual endowment (8:7), divine enablement (8:1, 9:8 and 9:14), a monetary gift (8:6 and 8:19), a human privilege (8:4), a word of gratitude (8:16 and 9:15), and divine favour or goodwill (8:9). Here it refers to the way that, despite adverse conditions, God had enabled the Macedonians to financially assist destitute Christians whom they did not personally know.

Paul's choice of example is quite deliberate for there had always been an intense political rivalry between Greece and Macedonia. Although Philip of Macedon had united all of Greece through brute force in 338BC, it was a union not destined to last. Here, the Macedonians are put forward by Paul as a competitor of a different sort.

<sup>2</sup> for during a severe ordeal of affliction, their abundant joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. <sup>3</sup> For, as I can testify, they voluntarily gave according to their means, and even beyond their means, <sup>4</sup> begging us earnestly for the privilege of sharing in this ministry to the saints – <sup>5</sup> and this, not merely as we expected; they gave themselves first to the Lord and, by the will of God, to us, <sup>6</sup> so that we might urge Titus that, as he had already made a beginning, so he should also complete this generous undertaking among you.

### 2 Corinthians 8:2-6

Their abundant joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. God's grace was manifested in that the Macedonians gave even though they were poor. Indeed, they not only gave what they could but went beyond that unspecified figure, and notably it was a voluntary act and not an imposition or a response to guilt.

The privilege of sharing in this ministry to the saints. There was a clear recognition in the regional churches that giving to others, even when times are hard, is a blessing beyond material wealth. This was demonstrated in Jerusalem by a poor widow who gave into the offering for the poor at the Temple: <<**He looked up and saw rich people putting their gifts into the treasury; he also saw a poor widow put in two small copper coins. He said, 'Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them; for all of them have contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in all she had to live on'**>> (Luke 21:1-4). Here privilege is *charis*; used for grace in v.1. Refer to the comments made on that verse.

Sharing is Greek *koinonia*, and is commonly translated fellowship in the NT, meaning 'that which we hold in common or have a share in'. In Christian circles it came to denote the close union and common faith that believers have as members of the church of Christ. Implicit in this close union is a responsibility to care for those in need in the family of God.

Not merely as we expected. What surprised Paul was that the Macedonians also gave themselves first to the Lord, a recommitment of their lives, and then by the will of God to us; that is, they offered not only money but also any other personal help they could give to Paul.

Titus, had already made a beginning. At face value it suggests that Titus had launched the collection effort. Yet technically Paul was the initiator: <<**Now concerning the collection for the saints: you should follow the directions I gave to the churches of Galatia. On the first day of every week, each of you is**

*to put aside and save whatever extra you earn, so that collections need not be taken when I come. And when I arrive, I will send any whom you approve with letters to take your gift to Jerusalem. If it seems advisable that I should go also, they will accompany me*>> (1 Corinthians 16:1-4). The choice of words may indicate that the offering had been so completely abandoned that Titus had to effectively start it again from scratch. Although a latecomer on the Corinthian scene, Titus was nonetheless an important player. He was able, not only to reinforce the dictates of the severe letter, but also to revive the church's flagging collection efforts.

<sup>7</sup> Now as you excel in everything – in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in utmost eagerness, and in our love for you – so we want you to excel also in this generous undertaking.

### 2 Corinthians 8:7

Now as you excel in everything. Although beset by several problems, as Paul had dealt with throughout 1 Corinthians, the church also had strengths: *<<I rejoice, because I have complete confidence in you>>* (2 Corinthians 7:16).

In faith, in speech, in knowledge is a reference especially to the Corinthians' spiritual gifts: *<<for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind>>* (1 Corinthians 1:5). Giving is identified as a gift of the Spirit: *<<the giver, in generosity>>* (Romans 12:8b), where Paul exhorts the Roman believers that if one's gift is contributing to the needs of others, then that person should give generously.

Faith is grouped with gifts of healing and miraculous powers in 1 Corinthians 12:9-10. So Paul is probably thinking not of intellectual assent to a set of propositions but of a belief that God can and will act in a particular situation. Speech may be a generic term for such oral gifts as prophecy, teaching and tongues. Similarly, knowledge may refer to the gifts of discernment, word of wisdom, word of knowledge and interpretation of tongues.

They showed utmost eagerness for Paul and the work of the Gospel: *<<For see what earnestness this godly grief has produced in you, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what zeal, what punishment! At every point you have proved yourselves guiltless in the matter. So although I wrote to you, it was not on account of the one who did the wrong, nor on account of the one who was wronged, but in order that your zeal for us might be made known to you before God>>* (2 Corinthians 7:11-12).

Love is fundamental to the Christian life; in fact, it is an identifying feature: *<<I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another>>* (John 13:34-35). Paul lists the attributes of love in 1 Corinthians 13.

You excel is Greek *perisseuete*, and is a reference to following the example of the Macedonians in v.2, whose 'abundance', Greek *perisseia*, of joy 'overflowed', Greek *eperisseusen*, in a wealth of giving.

<sup>8</sup> I do not say this as a command, but I am testing the genuineness of your love against the earnestness of others. <sup>9</sup> For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich.

### 2 Corinthians 8:8-9

I do not say this as a command. Giving to the Lord's work must be voluntary, not compelled. And when it is voluntary it brings much blessing: <<*So I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to go on ahead to you, and arrange in advance for this bountiful gift that you have promised, so that it may be ready as a voluntary gift and not as an extortion. The point is this: the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work*>> (2 Corinthians 9:5-8).

I am testing the genuineness of your love against the earnestness of others is again a reference to the faithful response of the Macedonians, perhaps raising the competition stakes between the two regions. The term test, Greek *dokimazo*, carries the positive sense of examining something to prove its worth or authenticity. The something here is sincerity; not only the sincerity of the Macedonians but the perfect sincerity of Jesus.

Was rich, became poor is a reference to Christ's pre-existent status as the eternal Son of God in heaven: <<*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being*>> (John 1:1-3a), <<*But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law*>> (Galatians 4:4), and: <<*who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited*>> (Philippians 2:6); and the humility of his incarnation, including his death: <<*For Christ did not please himself; but, as it is written, 'The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me'*>> (Romans 15:3), and: <<*but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross*>> (Philippians 2:7-8), so that the believer might become rich, i.e. their salvation and all the benefits that flow from it. It must not be forgotten that Jesus' death was a voluntary act for the benefit of others: <<*For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father*>> (John 10:17-18).

It is not just that Jesus gave up the glorious riches of being in the father to become human, something that was itself an astonishingly humbling thing to do, but in the sense that the human life he took on was not royal, rich and splendid in the world's terms but instead was poor, humble and eventually shameful.

<sup>10</sup> And in this matter I am giving my advice: it is appropriate for you who began last year not only to do something but even to desire to do something – <sup>11</sup> now finish doing it, so that your eagerness may be matched by completing it according to your means.

### 2 Corinthians 8:10-11

I am giving my advice. Paul does not issue a command, even though his apostolic authority would permit him to: <<*For this reason, though I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do your duty, yet I would rather appeal to you on the basis of love*>> (Philemon 8-9a). Paul's advice here is to finish the work they started with the collection, i.e. now finish doing it.

A human failing is often to start something with very good intentions but then to grow tired or disillusioned for whatever reason. The result is always frustration and disappointment.

Your eagerness may be matched by completing it. The Corinthians currently enjoyed a twofold precedence over the Macedonians in that they were the first to give and the first to have the desire to do so. If they had also been the first to complete the collection, they would have truly lived up to their reputation for excellence. But the Macedonians, who were latecomers to the collection effort, finished ahead of the Corinthians. So it was then incumbent on the Corinthians to bring their work to a speedy conclusion so that they did not lose what small advantage they still possessed.

Desire to do something. What Christ has done for the Corinthians is to be reflected in what they choose to do for others, and therefore, for him: <<*And the king will answer them, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me"*>> (Matthew 25:40).

According to your means. Paul is not asking believers to give more than they can afford, although the experience of the Macedonian churches is an example of God's faithfulness when believers trust in him by giving what is needed rather than simply the minimum: <<*Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in my house, and thus put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts; see if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you an overflowing blessing*>> (Malachi 3:10).

Although tithing is encouraged and even practised in some churches, it is not a command of the NT writers. Paul never stipulates any amount for the giving, neither did Jesus. It is not a legalistic requirement in Christianity; it is a matter of the heart. If people need to justify to themselves that their giving is sufficient then it probably isn't!

<sup>12</sup> For if the eagerness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has – not according to what one does not have.

### 2 Corinthians 8:12

For if the eagerness is there, the gift is acceptable. In the final analysis, the key to giving lies in the attitude of the heart of the giver. Here, and in: <<*Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver*>> (2 Corinthians 9:7), Paul shows that

it is not the amount that counts with God. If a readiness to give is present, then the gift is gladly received, whether it be large or small.

According to what one has. Paul did not pressure people to give what they did not have or could not afford to give. However, the language here is quite deliberate. Giving is not a percentage of income; it is a proportion of possessions and income. Proportional giving is much more affordable than a fixed percentage for it encourages greater generosity from those who have more disposable assets and income than others.

<sup>13</sup> I do not mean that there should be relief for others and pressure on you, but it is a question of a fair balance between <sup>14</sup> your present abundance and their need, so that their abundance may be for your need, in order that there may be a fair balance.

### 2 Corinthians 8:13-14

I do not mean that there should be relief for others and pressure on you. Paul does not want to reverse the economic situations in Achaia and Judæa. The early church had often given everything they had for the common good, but that had led to problems, for when the money ran out, so did the source of income. Paul is calling for a more sustainable way of giving that has benefits to all.

A fair balance, in both cases, is the Greek word *isotēs*, which can also mean equality, but in Paul's only other use of the term it means 'with fairness': <<***Masters, treat your slaves justly and fairly, for you know that you also have a Master in heaven***>> (Colossians 4:1). Paul was not asking all Christians to share their possessions equally, for he did not ask these wealthy Corinthians to send money to the poorer Macedonians (v.2); he simply asked that Corinth do its fair share in meeting the extreme needs of the Christians in Jerusalem.

Your present abundance is also translated at the present time, that is, that particular time in redemptive history: <<***it was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies the one who has faith in Jesus***>> (Romans 3:26), and: <<***who gave himself for our sins to set us free from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father***>> (Galatians 1:4), when the Gentile believers can contribute financially, while the Jewish believers can contribute spiritually with leadership and the ministry of the Gospel: <<***So I ask, have they stumbled so as to fall? By no means! But through their stumbling salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make Israel jealous. Now if their stumbling means riches for the world, and if their defeat means riches for Gentiles, how much more will their full inclusion mean!***>> (Romans 11:11-12). Although Paul was not predicting a reversal of fortunes in the two regions, the reciprocity can refer to meeting material needs generally between churches. This idea fits well with the quote in v.15.

Their need relates to the requirements of daily basic living: food, shelter, clothing and warmth. Some people in the modern church, and indeed society in general, often feel they are underprivileged if they do not have the same luxury goods or disposable income that others seem to have.

<sup>15</sup> As it is written,

‘The one who had much did not have too much,  
and the one who had little did not have too little.’

### 2 Corinthians 8:15

As it is written is followed by a quote from Exodus 16:18. As with God’s provision of manna during the first exodus, the provision at the second exodus in Christ, the journey through life to a future promised inheritance, has also been equally sufficient between Jew and Gentile, rich and poor, slave and free, so that each may be able to provide for the other.

It should be noted that Paul is not saying that it is wrong that some Christians, like those in Corinth, should not enjoy their wealth while others, like those in Palestine, had little. He is saying the wealthy should do what they can to ensure fairness. At first glance the Exodus narrative could be read to say that each Israelite ended up with the same amount regardless of how much or little was gathered. But in fact what the text says is that God made certain that no one had more or less than their fair share. Although the Israelites gathered varying amounts of manna, what they ended up with was the amount that met their individual needs. The key phrase in Exodus 16:18 is: *<<they gathered as much as each of them needed>>*. It is equity of needs met rather than an equality of supply that the narrative illustrates. Even though some gathered more and some less, the needs of all were fairly met. In the wilderness it was God who ensured such equity. Today it is the responsibility of each believer.

### II.b. 2 Corinthians 8:16-24 - Commendation of Titus

Verses 16-24 show the kind of precautions a 1<sup>st</sup> Century fundraiser like Paul took to ensure the responsible handling and transportation of a considerable sum of money. Paul’s co-workers assisted him in collecting the gift for Jerusalem.

As already discussed in Chapter 7, Titus had proved to be a very successful ambassador during his recent visit to Corinth and was also highly motivated to return to continue the work.

<sup>16</sup> But thanks be to God who put in the heart of Titus the same eagerness for you that I myself have.

### 2 Corinthians 8:16

Once again, Paul’s thanks to God begins a new section, as he did in 1:3 and 2:14; and his thanksgiving concludes it in 9:15, just as it also did in 1:11.

<sup>17</sup> For he not only accepted our appeal, but since he is more eager than ever, he is going to you of his own accord.

### 2 Corinthians 8:17

He is going to you of his own accord. Paul did not have to persuade Titus to return to Corinth for he was clearly still enthusiastic following his previous visit to

them: <<And his heart goes out all the more to you, as he remembers the obedience of all of you, and how you welcomed him with fear and trembling>> (2 Corinthians 7:15).

<sup>18</sup> With him we are sending the brother who is famous among all the churches for his proclaiming of the good news;

### 2 Corinthians 8:18

The identity of the famous brother is unknown, for he is not recorded anywhere in Scripture with regard to this visit. It seems unlikely that he would be one of the other apostles for Paul would surely have named him and, indeed, he would have been the one leading the work and not Titus. Apollos, too, would surely have been mentioned by name. It could well either refer to a Corinthian or a senior leader in Macedonia who was well known for his work. Refer to comments made on vv.19-22 for a further clue to this man's identity.

The brother rather than 'our brother', a term used for the third member of the party, would seem to eliminate any of Paul's close co-workers such as Timothy, Luke or Barnabas, all of whom have been mentioned in speculation about this man.

**Some commentators have suggested that Paul did name this famous brother but that his name was removed when the letter was copied for general circulation. Although this may be considered a possibility, it is pure speculation and would leave the question as to why Titus was not also removed from the copy!**

<sup>19</sup> and not only that, but he has also been appointed by the churches to travel with us while we are administering this generous undertaking for the glory of the Lord himself and to show our goodwill. <sup>20</sup> We intend that no one should blame us about this generous gift that we are administering, <sup>21</sup> for we intend to do what is right not only in the Lord's sight but also in the sight of others. <sup>22</sup> And with them we are sending our brother whom we have often tested and found eager in many matters, but who is now more eager than ever because of his great confidence in you.

### 2 Corinthians 8:19-22

He has also been appointed by the churches to travel with us. This refers to the famous brother who it appears was released from a church in Macedonia to help with the transportation of the collection. Sopater, Aristarchus and Secundus are all listed by Luke as coming from Macedonian churches for the purpose of escorting the offering and could be candidates. However, there is no mention of an individual from Philippi. Whether this is an omission by Luke in Acts 20:4 or whether they did not feel it necessary to send someone is not known.

Administering this generous undertaking, that we are administering. This is the same phrase used in: <<and you show that you are a letter of Christ, prepared by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts>> (2 Corinthians 3:3), to describe Paul's new covenant ministry of the Spirit, i.e. prepared by us, showing that the  
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collection of money for the needy in Jerusalem was an essential part of the apostolic ministry of the Gospel.

**This generous gift.** The term *hadrotes*, found only here in the NT, means abundant or lavish. Paul is anticipating a very large offering indeed, which is all the more reason for him to do whatever has to be done to guarantee its safe handling.

**In the sight of others.** Paul was usually concerned with doing what is right in God's eyes rather than human eyes, especially since God's way and humankind's way are often in conflict. Here he takes the additional step of taking into consideration what is right from the perspective of those making the offering as a way of reassuring them that their gift will be appropriately utilised. Why? Because life and ministry are inseparable. There will always be those who judge the claims of Christ by the lives of those who claim to be his followers. If the conduct of the fundraiser can be faulted, then the Gospel itself can be called into question. Not only this, but God's reputation can be damaged. The ultimate purpose of the collection was **for the glory of the Lord himself** – an aim that could hardly be accomplished if any suspicions attached to the collection process.

**We intend that no one should blame us.** As Paul delivers the gift to Jerusalem, he will be accompanied by a team of men well known for their integrity: *<<He was accompanied by Sopater son of Pyrrhus from Berea, by Aristarchus and Secundus from Thessalonica, by Gaius from Derbe, and by Timothy, as well as by Tychicus and Trophimus from Asia>>* (Acts 20:4). Their presence will guarantee a public accounting for the gifts and also provide protection from robbers, for the amount of money would have been significant.

**Our brother whom we have often tested** is not the famous brother of v.18 but a third member of the party; this time one of Paul's co-workers seems likely.

<sup>23</sup> As for Titus, he is my partner and co-worker in your service; as for our brothers, they are messengers of the churches, the glory of Christ.

<sup>24</sup> Therefore, openly before the churches, show them the proof of your love and of our reason for boasting about you.

## **2 Corinthians 8:23-24**

A summary of the credentials of the three individuals is provided. **Titus** is described as **my partner and co-worker in your service**, and not as Paul's subordinate. Paul often makes the point that ministry leaders are there to serve the church, just as Jesus came as the servant of his people: *<<For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many>>* (Mark 10:45). The church is not to be self-seeking but self-giving!

The delegates are equated with **the glory of Christ** since their love reflects Christ's love for his people (v.9), and results from their having encountered the glory of God in the face of Christ: *<<And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit>>* (2 Corinthians 3:18), and: *<<In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the*

*light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake. For it is the God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness', who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ>> (2 Corinthians 4:4-6).*

They are messengers of the churches, the glory of Christ. Messengers are apostles but not in the technical sense of the twelve or Paul. The churches too are the glory of Christ, just as its individual servants are, for the church is its people.

Show them the proof of your love indicates that Paul is expecting the Corinthians to do more than just make these three men welcome and show them the required hospitality. The Christian church should truly embrace their brothers and sisters by sharing in their lives.

They are to do this openly before the churches. Which churches are these? While it could be the Macedonian churches or even all contributing Gentile congregations, the churches that the two brothers represent are most likely the ones Paul is thinking of.

Our reason for boasting about you. Paul liked to boast about the churches, not from any personal perspective as being their apostle, but because of their acceptance of Jesus as Lord. He had stated that his boasting was justifiable: *<<For if I have been somewhat boastful about you to him, I was not disgraced; but just as everything we said to you was true, so our boasting to Titus has proved true as well>> (2 Corinthians 7:14).*