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A1350 – December 12, 2013 – 2 Corinthians 8:8-15
The Example Of Christ

If you open your Bible to 2 Cor 8 we'll return to the principles of giving for the NT Church as revealed through Paul's instructions to the Corinthians, principles which stand in contrast to the principles of tithing for OT Israel. In Israel the tithe was required of believer and unbeliever alike because it was a mandatory national tax averaging annually 23 1/3%. For the Church the giving is voluntary for believers only according as one has been prospered. Obviously the two sets of principles are entirely distinct. We're interested in giving for the NT Church and as such we argue that giving is the responsibility of all believers but some believers even have the spiritual gift of giving and as such giving for them is more natural, whether they are rich or poor. And there are many stories down through church history of those with this spiritual gift. LeTourneau was one of those who gave much out of much and Charles Wesley was one who gave much out of little. But all who have this spiritual gift to some degree give over and beyond the average believer proportionately speaking. And the principal point of the first seven verses is that this giving is sourced in God's grace not human works of philanthropy! Paul in verse 1 says it was evident that the grace of God had been given to the churches in Macedonia because in verse 2 these churches had abounding joy even in the midst of great affliction and they gave with a single mind to the cause at Jerusalem even out of the depths of poverty. In verse 3 Paul testifies that they gave according to their ability and even beyond it and that this was of their own voluntary choice, not due to pressure. In verse 4 they even begged Paul and urged him to receive their gift because they wanted to be involved in the favor of participating in the saints at Jerusalem. Paul says in verse 5 that this came about in a way not expected in that they first gave themselves to the Lord and to the teaching of the apostles according to the will of God, then and only then did they give to the saints of Jerusalem. Always God and His word should be put first and then

we are in the proper position to give. And this the Macedonians did. Now in verse 6 the Corinthians had begun in the past to give as well but the work was interrupted by the falling out they had with Paul and so now that that relationship has been restored Paul urged Titus to complete this grace work in them as well. In verse 7, in the same way that they abounded in the grace spiritual gifts of faith, tongues and knowledge they should now abound in the grace work of giving. The example of the Macedonians was put forth to spur them on to take advantage of this grace opportunity to help saints in Jerusalem.

Now you see in verse 8 what I explained last week about tact. Paul was using tact in that he did not command the Corinthians to give; he simply set forth the Macedonians as an example to follow. The implication in verse 8 is that he could have commanded them to give. He could have said, "Now I'm an apostle and I speak with authority and you better drop some money in the plate." He could have done that but he didn't. It wasn't tactful in the situation. It may have been, and this is a speculation, but it may have been the way his opponents who were false apostles exerted themselves on the Corinthians and so Paul may be taking a different tact than his opponents to contrast his ways with the false apostle's ways. But in any case he says, **I am not speaking this as a command, but, strong contrast, as proving through the earnestness of others the sincerity of your love also.** In other words, we see here what we saw earlier in 7:12, the Greek word for **proving** is *dokimazo* and this is the idea that God tests us by giving us an opportunity to reveal the work that He has been doing in our lives. And that's why Paul gave the example of the Macedonians, as a test to draw it out of the Corinthians what God had built into them. God is always at work in our lives, in the unseen, deep reaches of the human heart, and Paul knew that and so he was giving the example of the Macedonian's love manifested through giving in order to draw out or prove that God had built this same love into the Corinthian's hearts also.

Now when we look at this concept in the larger context of 2 Corinthians and the Christian life it's the idea that when you became a Christian, on that day God, through your connection with Christ who shed the blood of the new covenant, you received a new nature and from that day forward, through the word, He has been building into you new desires to please Him and when He has built those new desires into you then He gives you an opportunity to

capitalize on those new desires and it's at that moment that it clicks and you realize what God had been doing in your life. And that's wonderful, but of course, it's not enough to just realize what God has been doing in your life; you at that time need to capitalize on it, act. And by giving this example of the Macedonians Paul is trying to draw out of the Corinthians their desire to give. He wants them to **prove** the work that God had been doing in their life, by acting on the new desires, that's clearly what vv 10-11 are getting at. If they would act on it by actually giving it would indeed prove that they sincerely loved other believers. So the giving is just an opportunity to draw out their love in a tangible, material way, to prove the love was actually already there because God had built it into them but they just needed an opportunity to prove it out. There may have been other ways to prove it but the opportunity at hand was to give to the saints at Jerusalem so Paul uses that.

We might say it's a challenge, what you're doing is challenging another believer or group of believers to step up. Now when you do this the believers are very hesitant to step up and that's normal because they just don't realize that God has been building into them the things they need to rise to the challenge. But if they will take on the challenge they'll see what God has built into them and the more they take on the challenges the more they grow and grow and grow. So it's very important to consider challenges because they are opportunities to realize what God has done in your life and move on to the next step! The challenge here was to give.

Now we've seen the example of giving by the Macedonians but verse 9 goes beyond the Macedonians to give the supreme example of giving in the entire Bible. This verse is actually a Christmas verse because it deals with the incarnation, the idea that God became flesh or took to Himself a true humanity in the Second Person of the Trinity. Of course the verse is even more than a Christmas verse because it takes you from the incarnation to the crucifixion. There is no verse in the NT that sums up the career of our Lord more succinctly than this verse. **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.** In other words, Jesus Christ is the greatest gift of all. Let's break it down and then deal with the several doctrines that are intimately tied up with these great thoughts. First, notice the source of it all, **the grace of our Lord Jesus**

Christ meaning that, in eternity past,ⁱ the three members of the Trinity; Father, Son and Spirit, decidedⁱⁱ that it would be the Second Person of the Trinity who, **though...rich** would **become poor, so that through His poverty** we might **become rich**. It wasn't the Father who would do these things and it wasn't the Spirit. They are all three co-equal, co-eternal members of the Trinity but they are distinct in Person and it would be the Second Person of the Trinity, **the Lord Jesus Christ** who **though...rich** would **become poor, so that through His poverty** we might **become rich**. Now when I say this decision was made in eternity past I'm using terms like decision and eternity past hesitantly because as an accommodation to those of us in the creature level of being because in divine level of being there is no such thing as eternity past and God making decisions. God simply is and He knows all things. So I use those terms as an accommodation and you may not understand it but I hope that you will at least think about it. The bottom line is that the source of it all is the **grace of our Lord Jesus Christ**. He was the one from all eternity who **though...rich** would become poor for our sake, that we might **become rich**. What a thing to be thankful for. From all eternity you see there was a plan and that plan involved the Second Person of the Trinity becoming incarnate and being crucified.

Second, notice the content of this grace, **that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor**. The basic idea is the incarnation, the idea that He was God, rich in the heavens and for us He became a man, poor here on earth. But the Greek is much more accurate, there is actually a theological error in the way the NASB translates this and in the way I explained the English. Literally the Greek says, "That although being rich He became poor." In other words, it does not say that **He was rich** in the past tense, as if to imply that He used to be rich but He became poor. NO, absolutely NO. That would be saying that in the incarnation He set aside His deity and was no longer God. But if Christ at any time set aside His deity then God was no longer God because God is Triune and yet if Jesus wasn't God then God wasn't Triune but Biune and that would mean that an essential change in God occurred. But that can't be because God is immutable and this means that God can never undergo an essential change. The **was** is actually in the original a present tense. A. T. Robertson calls it a concessive present participleⁱⁱⁱ and Dan Wallace says of this type of participle that it should therefore be translated "although."^{iv} And that's how I came up with the translation, "That although being rich He became poor. Darby nail it in his

translation, “for your sakes He, being rich, became poor.” You see then that He is always rich but He became poor although at the same time He was rich. And so what we would say is that the verse is saying that Jesus Christ although full deity took to Himself humanity at a point in time. This is the doctrine of the incarnation, that God became flesh such that the Second Person of the Trinity was rich and poor simultaneously.

Now let’s look at the doctrine before we get to the purpose of this at the end of the verse. The first doctrine we see here is the doctrine of the incarnation and this we have stated in this way - that Christ, who is the eternal God having all the divine attributes, took to Himself a true humanity with a reasonable body, spirit and soul. He is God and man at the same time. This is why in the Gospels you read that on one hand He healed the lame, walked on water, cast out demons, etc...all evidences of His deity; and at the same time you read that He was tired, He wept, He died, etc...all evidences of His humanity. In the incarnation He is both God and man. That is the doctrine of the incarnation.

The second doctrine we see here is the doctrine of the hypostatic union. The hypostatic union tries to capture how these two natures related to one another in one and the same person. It states that Jesus Christ is undiminished deity united with true humanity without mixture or separation in one person forever. Let’s unpack that because there’s a lot there. First, Jesus Christ is undiminished deity. That simply means that He is very God of very God; He has all the divine attributes. In the incarnation He did not lay aside His deity. He had and demonstrated that He had all the divine attributes. Second, Jesus Christ is true humanity. That means that He is a true human being with body, spirit and soul. In the incarnation He is one of us. The only difference is that He didn’t have a sin nature. But a sin nature is not necessary to true humanity because Adam was created without a sin nature and he was true humanity. So the first two points are that He is undiminished deity and true humanity. Third, these two are united. This means that the two natures are not separated. If they were separated He would be two people but the Bible presents Him as just one person. So the two natures must be united in one person. Fourth, the two natures in one person are not mixed. What this means is that the deity doesn’t blend with the humanity so that you have a humanized deity or a deified humanity; the two natures remain intact and do not intermingle. This is tough stuff,

ultimately incomprehensible, but it's the way the Scripture presents it that we're trying to maintain. Fifth, neither are the two natures separable. What this means is they are stuck together like glue. This again is to keep the two natures together so that there is but one person and not two. Sixth, we say this is forever because beginning with the incarnation Jesus Christ is always undiminished deity united with true humanity without mixture or separation in one person. This hypostasis is still there today. Jesus Christ is the God-man in resurrection. He's omnipresent, in all spaces in His deity and He's present, in one space in His resurrected humanity. He's omnipotent, all powerful in His deity and He's limited in strength in His resurrected humanity, limited to the capabilities of the resurrection body. And yet He's not two people, He's one person. This is difficult to think about, it is beyond the ability of finite human reason to capture. It's not comprehensible to us. It's comprehensible to Him and it completely makes sense, but our minds are too weak and fallen to comprehend it. It is beyond the ability of reason to encapture. And we can't bring Him down here and think we have this all under control, we don't. That's why the Church has sought ways to explain this but they've all fallen short in some way. This verse tries to catch it; although being rich He became poor. Now how are you rich and poor at the same time? That's who Jesus Christ is in hypostasis.

The third doctrine we see here is the kenosis. That's a Greek word that means "the emptying" and is found in Phil 2:7. What this doctrine is trying to do is explain the condescension involved in the incarnation. Many, many times people say that in the incarnation Jesus gave up His deity. That is a very grave but common error. He in no way ever gave up His deity. If Jesus gave up His deity then God gave up being Triune and that could never happen because God is immutable and it would constitute an essential change in His being. So Jesus Christ did not give up His deity. What He did, as explained in the doctrine of the kenosis, is He gave up the independent use of His divine attributes. That is, He didn't exercise them independently of the Father's permission. He did exercise them but we gather that when He did it was because it was authorized by the Father.

Now the doctrines of the incarnation, the hypostatic union and the kenosis are all tied up in verse 9 in the concept that although being rich He became poor. So I took you through some of it real fast but you could spend the rest of your life just on Jesus Christ, that's how complex Jesus Christ really is.

There's nothing in quantum physics that gets close to the complexity of Jesus Christ, but is that any surprise considering the statement that He is undiminished deity united with true humanity without confusion or separation in one kenotic person forever? These truths are all wonderful and must be kept in perfect balance so as not to destroy salvation. All of this is vital for salvation. So having looked at the three doctrines let's return to the third observation.

Our first observation was that the source of it all is Christ's grace, the second observation was that the content of the grace which we've just explicated. Third, notice the purpose of this grace at the end of verse 9, **so that you through His poverty might become rich**. Now this is clearly talking about His crucifixion and how through His crucifixion as the God-man the Corinthians **became rich**, it's speaking, of course, of spiritual wealth. Whether they had a lot of material wealth or not I don't know. But spiritually they did have a lot of wealth. We went through a number of the riches of divine grace that instantly come to all believers in Christ at the moment of faith; we are in the eternal plan of God, redeemed, reconciled, forgiven all trespasses, in union with Christ, free from the law, children of God, justified, adopted as sons, delivered from the power of darkness, citizens of a coming kingdom and many, many more riches of divine grace. But all this comes exclusively and only because of the finished work of Christ! He humbled Himself in the incarnation, not utilizing His divine prerogatives but humbling Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross, a most horrid and detestable thing. Now if He gave all that for us, is it too much to ask us to give? That's the entire reason this verse is here, to remind us of the greatest gift that has ever been given, the incarnate, hypostatic, kenotic Christ who was crucified for our sins. If He gave Himself to us how much more should we give to fellow believers in need? Christ is the supreme example of giving. There is no greater example of self-sacrificial giving. He literally gave all; out of gratitude can we not give some?

Paul says in verse 10, **I give my opinion in this matter**. The Greek word **opinion** is *gnome* and means "my way of thinking." Paul says, my way of thinking on this matter is **this is to your advantage, who were the first to begin a year ago not only to do this, but also to desire to do it**. A year before is when they had first begun to take up collections for the saints in Jerusalem and that beginning was good and the desire to do it was good,

but it is not good to leave it at that beginning, they should now press on to completion.

Verse 11, **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** or out of your means. It's a good thing to have a good **desire**, God places those **desires** there through a variety of channels, but it is to your advantage to act on those desires by **doing** them. Don't just desire to do good; actually do the good. This is what Paul is calling for. This is what results in spiritual advance, not only the desire to do good but the doing of it! James says don't be a hearer only but a doer. And I would hope that the good desires God builds into your heart through the teaching of the word you would act on and do them.

Verse 12, **For if the readiness is present, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have.** The point here is to elaborate on what is meant by the last phrase of verse 11, "by your ability." He means proportionate to what you have and not what you do not have. The Macedonians gave according to their ability and beyond but Paul is only calling on them to give according to their ability. Whatever they give according to their ability **is acceptable**. It will certainly show their love.

Verse 13, **For this is not for the ease of others and for your affliction, but by way of equality**— in other words, this is not robbing Peter to pay Paul. The Corinthians have plenty at this time. So it's not for their affliction but rather by way of equality. **14at this present time your abundance being a supply for their need, so that their abundance also may become a supply for your need, that there may be equality, 15as it is written, "HE WHO GATHERED MUCH DID NOT HAVE TOO MUCH, AND HE WHO gathered LITTLE HAD NO LACK."** Taken out of context verse 13 could be used to support socialism but taken in context it can mean nothing of the sort. Socialism is the idea that the government takes from the rich and gives to the poor. This is made possible by the government assigning value and being the ultimate possessor of all property. In a way, our country is already socialist because of the doctrine of eminent domain. Eminent domain means that the government has the power to take private property for public use. The way it usually works is that the property or a portion of the property will be condemned and then a court will decide a just and fair

price. This means that you don't really own your property. Property taxes are another socialist device. Again they imply that you do not own your property and you never can own your property because you are forever paying for it. These ideas are thoroughly unbiblical. The only thing we see in verses 13-15 is giving voluntarily to other believers. This Paul says in verse 14 is **that there may be equality** but the equality Paul is talking about is an easement of the burden on the saints in Jerusalem at the time. All the passage teaches is that if we see another church in a difficult situation we should help them out financially. There may come a time, Paul says, when you may have a need and at such a time then they could help you in return. This is nothing more than voluntary giving and caring for fellow saints in different parts of the world. Paul backs it up in v 15 by quoting from Exodus 16, **"HE WHO GATHERED MUCH DID NOT HAVE TOO MUCH, AND HE WHO gathered LITTLE HAD NO LACK."** The situation was the manna that God provided for the Israelites. God commanded them to gather as much as they should eat. When they did this some gathered more and some gathered less, in the end everyone had as much as he should eat. In the same way, the Corinthians should give according to the needs of the saints in Jerusalem. In turn we should give according to the needs of others. This all under the auspices of grace. Grace is the resounding note and Jesus Christ is the supreme example. If He "gave up the riches of glory in heaven" by becoming a man and dying "on the cross so that we might share His riches of glory in heaven (cf. Phil. 2:1-11)," out of gratitude for Him shouldn't we give liberally to other believers?

In conclusion, in verse 8 Paul makes clear that his example of the Macedonians' liberality was not a command for them to give but a test designed to prove through their earnestness that God had built love into them also. The supreme example of love is verse 9, "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ" who although rich as God, in the incarnation became poor, taking to Himself true humanity, in hypostasis keeping the two natures united without mixture or separation in one person, in kenosis giving up the free and independent use of His divine attributes in order to humble himself by obedience to the point of death, even death on a cross, so that through His gift we might become spiritually wealthy. It is therefore Paul's thinking in verse 10 that it is to the believers advantage to not only make a beginning to give and to have a desire to give but to verse 11, actually do it and according to our means. In verse 13, this is not to make it more difficult on poorer

believers who might enrich other believers but it is out of our abundance for those who are greatly lacking. Who knows, later the situation may be reversed and those who once helped will be in need from those who were once lacking. In any case, if God provided for all the Israelites according to their needs we should provide for other believers as they have need.

What can we learn? Let's take away three things; First, Jesus Christ is the supreme example of giving. He left heaven, so to speak, and came to earth as a man. And although rich He became poor by taking our sins in His body on the tree so that He might enrich us spiritually by giving us all the riches of divine grace. If He has given us so much then how much more should we give to fellow believers?

Second, challenge believers to grace service. This is designed to draw out or prove the work God has been doing in your life through the Word. I may challenge you to go on a mission trip, a conference, a bible study. What are you going to do with that? A good desire only goes so far. At some point you should do it, act on it. This is necessary to spiritual growth.

Third, reciprocal giving to other churches that have valid needs is important for equality. Don't take this too far. This does not imply a hierarchy of churches whom we all give our money to. Each local church is an independent local entity so the decision to give to another church is a decision made by one local church and not the decision of a hierarchy.

ⁱ If we can speak this way. Eternity can't be in the past, eternity is not past, present or future, it is always present! Thus the expression, "eternity past" is an accommodation to creation.

ⁱⁱ If we can speak this way. Ephesians 1:11 speaks this way, as if there was a counsel in eternity past where a will or decision was made among the members of the Trinity. But this too is an accommodation because God always knows all things and has never decided anything new.

ⁱⁱⁱ See A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*.

^{iv} "The concessive participle implies that the state or action of the main verb is true in spite of the state or action of the participle. Its force is usually best translated with although. This category is relatively common." See Dan Wallace, *Greek Grammar, Beyond the Basics*, p 634.

Wallace, D. B. (1999). *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics - Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (p. 634). Zondervan Publishing House and Galaxie Software.

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