

# Christ Reformation Church

Tillamook, Oregon

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## *God's Word to a Hesitating Church*

Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God. (7:1)

*“Practical Religion”*

**December 14, 2014**

**Sermon Text:** 2 Cor 8

**Scripture Reading:** Exodus 16

### **Introduction-**

This morning we come to a very practical (as if ALL Scripture isn't practical!) section of this second letter of Paul to the Corinthians. Chapters 8 and 9 address the issue of *money*, and specifically the subject of God's people giving of themselves and their

resources to Christ's work. Many sermons, and properly so, have been preached and much has been written on these two chapters. Does the OT law of the tithe still apply to us today? Or is there a new principle of giving to be followed in the church? These are things we have looked at before in this church and you will recall that in our Sunday School class study some years back we concluded that the tithe is not binding today, but that we follow the principle of “gracious giving” as Paul describes here in the opening of chapter 8. Listen now to the first 15 verses:

2 Corinthians 8:1-15 We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, (2) for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. (3) For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, (4) begging us earnestly

for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints-- (5) and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us. (6) Accordingly, we urged Titus that as he had started, so he should complete among you this act of grace. (7) But as you excel in everything--in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you--see that you excel in this act of grace also. (8) I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine. (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 by his poverty might become rich. (10) And in this matter I give my judgment: this benefits you, who a year ago started not only to do this work but also to desire to do it. (11) So now finish doing it as well, so that your readiness in desiring it may be matched by your completing it out of what you have. (12) For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have. (13) For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened, but that as a matter of fairness (14) your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your

need, that there may be fairness. (15) As it is written, "Whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack."

Now, right off as we consider what Paul has had to say to this point in this letter, these two chapters strike us as *odd*. Paul has been defending his ministry and the gospel. He has been admonishing them, and exposing the wicked ones among them. And when you get to chapter 10, well, listen –

2 Corinthians 10:1-6 I, Paul, myself entreat you, by the meekness and gentleness of Christ--I who am humble when face to face with you, but bold toward you when I am away!-- (2) I beg of you that when I am present I may not have to show boldness with such confidence as I count on showing against some who suspect us of walking according to the flesh. (3) For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. (4) For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. (5) We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ, (6) being ready to punish every

disobedience, when your obedience is complete.

See it? He seems there to be back on the same track as in chs 1-7. Kistemaker writes:

*“Many scholars regard this chapter and the next as two separate letters, and they do so on the basis of content: the ingathering of gifts for the poor in Jerusalem. One (supposedly) is addressed to the church in Corinth, the other to Christians at large. In the opinion of these scholars, the break between chapters 7 and 8 introduces an entirely new subject not discussed earlier.”* [New Testament Commentary]

I am going to conclude that since the translators of the ESV and other trusted translations of our Bible include these chapters with no note of them being an addition, that they are indeed part of the original manuscript Paul wrote. Is it possible that Paul might have “copied and pasted” two other letters he had written into this letter? I suppose so. But if he did, it is still inerrant Scripture and belongs here.

In fact, let me make a suggestion for us to consider:

*Chapters 8-9 may well state the primary reason Paul wrote this letter! But before he could call upon the Corinthians to give of themselves and their resources for the relief of the poor and persecuted believers in Jerusalem, he had to first deal with their alienation from him and the negative effect these troublemakers at Corinth were having upon the church there.*

Listen to John Calvin on this:

*“As in the event of the Corinthians retaining any feeling of offense, occasioned by the severity of the preceding Epistle [ie, 1 Corinthians] that might stand in the way of Paul’s authority having influence over them, he has hitherto made it his endeavor to conciliate their affections. Now, after clearing away all occasion of offense, and regaining favor for his ministry, he recommends to them the brethren at Jerusalem, that they may furnish help to their necessities. He could not have attempted this in the commencement of the epistle. Hence, he has prudently deferred it, until he has prepared his minds for it. Accordingly, he takes up the whole of this chapter and the next in exhorting the Corinthians to be active and diligent in collecting alms to be taken to Jerusalem for relieving the poverty of the brethren. For the were afflicted with a great famine, so*

*that they could scarcely support life, without being aided by other churches. The Apostles had entrusted Paul with this matter (Galatians 2:10) and he had promised to concern himself in reference to it, and he had already done so in part, as we have seen in the former epistle. Now, however, he presses them still farther.*" [Calvin's Commentary on 2 Cor]

As Kistemaker notes, Paul is very wise here and Kistemaker quotes Matthew Henry:

*"How cautious ministers should be, especially in money-matters, not to give occasion to those who seek occasion to speak reproachfully."*

Paul's enemies at Corinth would LOVE to jump on any hint of something they could accuse Paul on – and the collection of money would surely be something that they would use in anyway they could to discredit and charge him. The curious thing is that they themselves ABUSED the Corinthians!

And so we say again, chapters 8-9 may very well contain the primary purpose and subject Paul had in mind in writing this second letter.

### **The Lord Jesus on Giving & Money**

Money and its use, as you know, is a very important subject that is mentioned repeatedly in Scripture. The use of our money and resources and the place they have in our minds and hearts reveals quite a lot about a person. Here are some examples from the Gospels:

Matthew 6:24 "No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.

Matthew 6:31-34 Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' (32) For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. (33) But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. (34) "Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

Luke 12:19-21 And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.' (20) But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose

will they be?' (21) So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God."

And we could certainly cite many more things Jesus taught about this subject.

But I want to recommend to you this morning, that these two chapters, 8-9, are not *fundamentally* about the Christian's use of money as much as they are about the Christian's *giving of himself to the Lord and to his fellow believers*. This after all is what Paul has been striving to call them to:

2 Corinthians 6:11-13 We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians; our heart is wide open. (12) You are not restricted by us, but you are restricted in your own affections. (13) In return (I speak as to children) widen your hearts also.

2 Corinthians 7:2 Make room in your hearts for us. We have wronged no one, we have corrupted no one, we have taken advantage of no one.

Let's take another look then at 8:1-15 with these things in mind.

### The Grace of God in Macedonia

2 Corinthians 8:1-5 We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, (2) for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. (3) For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, (4) begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints-- (5) and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us.

Macedonia was the region to the north of Greece, way north of Corinth. Berea was there as was Philippi. And here, Paul tells the Corinthians about something quite amazing that happened there. The *grace of God* was "given" among the churches of Macedonia. I suppose it would have been something akin to a revival. An outpouring of the Spirit of Christ. Paul will describe it further in chapter 9:

2 Corinthians 9:6-11 The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. (7) Each one must give **as he has decided in his heart**, not reluctantly or under

compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. (8) **And God is able to make all grace abound to you**, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work. (9) As it is written, "He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever." (10) He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. (11) You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God.

I don't understand all of what went on in those Macedonian churches, but this much we do know. Their giving to the suffering brethren in Jerusalem was so remarkable, both in the degree and kind of generosity emanating from their hearts and in regard to seemingly impossible amount they gave, that Paul recognized this was a work of God in them. "The grace of God was given" to them.

Notice how intricate this word "grace" is in the Bible. Fundamentally it means "giving a gift" or, "a gift given." Undeserved. Unpaid for. Unearned. So Paul says that this "act of grace" (giving funds to the poor) was effected by "the grace of God" given first to the

givers...the churches of Macedonia. That grace given them by God was an *enabling* grace that compelled them to show grace themselves. Remarkable grace. Giving beyond what you would have thought they ever could give. And then the Lord giving back to them, as we will see more about when we study chapter 9.

So there was this "grace given" among the churches of Macedonia, and Paul is telling the Corinthians about this remarkable event. Even though they themselves were in "a severe test of affliction," with abundant joy their *poverty overflowed in a wealth of generosity*. The things speaks of a miracle akin to this:

1 Kings 17:9-16 "Arise, go to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and dwell there. Behold, I have commanded a widow there to feed you." (10) So he arose and went to Zarephath. And when he came to the gate of the city, behold, a widow was there gathering sticks. And he called to her and said, "Bring me a little water in a vessel, that I may drink." (11) And as she was going to bring it, he called to her and said, "Bring me a morsel of bread in your hand." (12) And she said, "As the LORD your God lives, I have nothing baked, only a handful of flour in a jar and a little oil in a

jug. And now I am gathering a couple of sticks that I may go in and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it and die." (13) And Elijah said to her, "Do not fear; go and do as you have said. **But first make me a little cake of it and bring it to me, and afterward make something for yourself and your son.** (14) For thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, "The jar of flour shall not be spent, and the jug of oil shall not be empty, until the day that the LORD sends rain upon the earth." (15) And she went and did as Elijah said. And she and he and her household ate for many days. (16) The jar of flour was not spent, neither did the jug of oil become empty, according to the word of the LORD that he spoke by Elijah.

Here, and perhaps even more so in chapter 9, it is quite probably that Paul had this account of Elijah and the widow in mind as he wrote to the Corinthians. Especially notice this in 8:5-

*"...and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us."*

This is a vital principle and one that is very likely a chief theme here in 2 Corinthians. Let me state it like this:

*The first thing we must give to the Lord is ourselves, and then to the Lord's Word, if we are going to receive His grace that enables us from the heart to be generous, joyful, cheerful, sacrificial givers.*

This is where, I conclude, so many fund-raising programs in the church fail, even if they end up bringing in a large amount of money. Ultimately they do not originate in the Lord but in man's doings. Throughout these 2 chapters, you will notice that Paul always attributes the praise and glory to God, who gave His grace to the Macedonian churches.

Remember now, Paul had to deal with these Corinthians in regard to the fact that they were withholding themselves from him under the influence of false teachers. He is now pointing them to the example of the Macedonian believers who, listen to it again –

*"...gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us."*

What is this business of "giving oneself to the Lord"?

2 Corinthians 5:15 and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.

Romans 6:13 Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness.

In some way, these believers resolved that they were slaves of Jesus Christ. That they had died with Him and been raised to new life in Him. They heard Paul's call to give to the relief of these fellow believers in Jerusalem and they applied that death in Christ to that situation. They knew that the Lord owned them and everything they possessed. They would give themselves and all they had to Him and do so joyfully.

Then, they recognized Paul as an apostle, a genuine messenger of Christ. They believed him. You see an example of this very thing in 1 Thessalonians (Thessalonica was one of the Macedonian churches) –

1 Thessalonians 2:12-14 (12) we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory. (13) And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God,

which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers. (14) For you, brothers, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea. For you suffered the same things from your own countrymen as they did from the Jews,

See it? That is what Paul means when he tells the Corinthians that the Macedonians “gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God” to him.

Now, let's bring this thing home to ourselves by way of application.

***We can joyfully suffer loss and persecution, we can cheerfully and sacrificially give of ourselves and our resources, because the Lord gives His grace to us so that we, for His glory, willingly commit radical acts of grace.”***

But, first, we must give ourselves to the Lord and to His Word. Because really, even in Paul's day, that is what these people did. They gave themselves to the Lord and to His Word as preached to them by Christ's apostle. They were willing to suffer persecution as a result which probably involved some economic persecution,



resulting in what Paul describes in 8:2

–

*“...for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity...”*

And that really is a true, biblical, “fund-raising” ministry in the church. When Christ’s people, who have given themselves to the Lord as His own bond-servants, and who have given themselves to full trust in His Word, are presented with a genuine need among Christ’s people, you don’t have to pressure them to give. God by His Spirit leads them to it and that is why Paul is setting the example of the Macedonian churches before the Corinthians, and to us. They will BEG for the “favor” (privilege) to take part in meeting the need.

### **The Nature of the Need**

Now look at this phrase – *the relief of the saints* in verse 4. When Paul and Titus brought this need before the Macedonian churches, the believers there:

- Though in a severe test of affliction and extreme poverty,
- Had abundance of joy
- A wealth of generosity
- Gave beyond their means

- BEGGED with earnestness to be allowed the **privilege** (Greek word here is “charis” = grace/gift) of taking part in this offering

Now notice the nature of this need. It was valid. It was serious. It resulted from persecution for the name of Christ. It was verified. And it was FELT by the rest of the body. Kistemaker describes it:

*“It applies to those Christians in Jerusalem who were living in abject poverty. They had endured persecution (Acts 8), years of famine (Acts 11:27ff), social turmoil, and political instability. All these factors had contributed directly and indirectly to the poverty of the saints in the mother church. Earlier, Paul had explicitly noted that the collection was meant for Jerusalem (1 Cor 16).*

*In this text we see a role reversal. We normally expect the person who solicits funds to plead with a prospective donor to support a cause. But here the DONORS were petitioning Paul to allow them to help the poor....The enthusiasm that they displayed in their giving was directed first to the Lord. He was the recipient of their gratitude for the spiritual gifts they had received from him. Realizing that Paul and his co-workers had*

*brought them Christ's gospel, the Macedonians directed their fervor also toward them. They yielded themselves to the Lord and his servants."*

There are many things that Christians contribute money, resources, and energies to in the name of Christ. Some of those things, probably far too many, should not be supported. Paul has mentioned "peddlers of the gospel" earlier in this letter. "Peddlers" are motivated in their "ministry" by a desire for money. We must not give it to them. It is possible that in Greek thinking, the more a teacher was valued, the more money he made. Paul is turning this around, trying to get the Corinthians to see that the grace of God results in GIVING, not receiving. That in POVERTY, we are rich.

In God's Word we learn that in the household of God we give of our resources for:

- The support of the ministry of God's Word (including missions)
- The maintenance of worship
- The support of those in genuine need. The poor, the widow, the orphan

And I wanted to encourage you particularly in regard to the last area – the support of the widow and orphan in need. This church has been given the

privilege of sharing in very effective ministry to a specific group of widows and orphans. Namely, those who have been deserted, abused, and left in poverty. Right now for the most part we provide them with encouragement and advice and teaching, for which they are very grateful. Some of these Christians don't have enough money to buy groceries or pay their electric bill or buy gas for the car. It amazes me how they are able to feed their children on so little. The wicked abuser's tactic of choice, as you know, is often financial abuse and threat.

This is the very kind of need that Christ calls us to and invites us to share in. Someday, who knows, we may have the opportunity to use the church parsonage for the shelter of such a person. For now, by the contributions you faithfully make here, I want to encourage you are resulting in us being able to have a very effective ministry for the Lord to victims of abuse and their children. I have actually had these people tell me (and they never asked for a penny of money) that the ACFJ ministry that you all are a part of *saved their lives and their sanity*.

We here in this church have, perhaps not to the degree these Macedonians experienced, but nevertheless we have experienced some "severe tests of

affliction” and while we are not in “extreme poverty” as they, still the Lord has preserved us and given us His grace so that we (as Paul calls it) “excel in this act of grace.”

I hope that this encourages all of you. This ministry really is evidence that the Lord remains at work: “We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given Christ Reformation Church.”