

2 CORINTHIANS 8:1-15 AND NOW, BROTHERS AND SISTERS, WE WANT YOU TO KNOW ABOUT THE GRACE THAT GOD HAS GIVEN THE MACEDONIAN CHURCHES. <sup>2</sup> IN THE MIDST OF A VERY SEVERE TRIAL, THEIR OVERFLOWING JOY AND THEIR EXTREME POVERTY WELLED UP IN RICH GENEROSITY <sup>3</sup> FOR I TESTIFY THAT THEY GAVE AS MUCH AS THEY WERE ABLE, AND EVEN BEYOND THEIR ABILITY. ENTIRELY ON THEIR OWN, <sup>4</sup> THEY URGENTLY PLEADED WITH US FOR THE PRIVILEGE OF SHARING IN THIS SERVICE TO THE LORD'S PEOPLE <sup>5</sup> AND THEY EXCEEDED OUR EXPECTATIONS: THEY GAVE THEMSELVES FIRST OF ALL TO THE LORD, AND THEN BY THE WILL OF GOD ALSO TO US. <sup>6</sup> SO WE URGED TITUS, JUST AS HE HAD EARLIER MADE A BEGINNING, TO BRING ALSO TO COMPLETION THIS ACT OF GRACE ON YOUR PART. <sup>7</sup> BUT SINCE YOU EXCEL IN EVERYTHING—IN FAITH, IN SPEECH, IN KNOWLEDGE, IN COMPLETE EARNESTNESS AND IN THE LOVE WE HAVE KINDLED IN YOU—SEE THAT YOU ALSO EXCEL IN THIS GRACE OF GIVING. <sup>8</sup> I AM NOT COMMANDING YOU, BUT I WANT TO TEST THE SINCERITY OF YOUR LOVE BY COMPARING IT WITH THE EARNESTNESS OF OTHERS. <sup>9</sup> 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. <sup>10</sup> AND HERE IS MY JUDGMENT ABOUT WHAT IS BEST FOR YOU IN THIS MATTER. LAST YEAR YOU WERE THE FIRST NOT ONLY TO GIVE BUT ALSO TO HAVE THE DESIRE TO DO SO. <sup>11</sup> NOW FINISH THE WORK, SO THAT YOUR EAGER WILLINGNESS TO DO IT MAY BE MATCHED BY YOUR COMPLETION OF IT, ACCORDING TO YOUR MEANS. <sup>12</sup> FOR IF THE WILLINGNESS IS THERE, THE GIFT IS ACCEPTABLE ACCORDING TO WHAT ONE HAS NOT ACCORDING TO WHAT ONE DOES NOT HAVE. <sup>13</sup> OUR DESIRE IS NOT THAT OTHERS MIGHT BE RELIEVED WHILE YOU ARE HARD PRESSED, BUT THAT THERE MIGHT BE EQUALITY. <sup>14</sup> AT THE PRESENT TIME YOUR PLENTY WILL SUPPLY WHAT THEY NEED. SO THAT IN TURN THEIR PLENTY WILL SUPPLY WHAT YOU NEED. THE GOAL IS EQUALITY, <sup>15</sup> AS IT IS WRITTEN: "THE ONE WHO GATHERED MUCH DID NOT HAVE TOO MUCH, AND THE ONE WHO GATHERED LITTLE DID NOT HAVE TOO LITTLE."

MANY OF US REMEMBER THE COMEDIAN JACK BENNY. IN REAL LIFE JACK BENNY BECAME RICH, AND PRIVATELY GENEROUS. BUT ONE OF HIS MOST FAMOUS MODES OF ENTERTAINMENT WAS TO PRESENT HIMSELF AS A RICHMAN AND STINGY MAN, ONE WHO ABSOLUTELY HATED TO LOSE OR SPEND MONEY. OVER AND OVER AGAIN IN HIS COMIC ROUTINES BENNY AND HIS MONEY WERE SHOWN TO BE INSEPARABLE.

IN ONE OF HIS SKITS BENNY IS ACCOSTED BY A MAN WHO DEMANDS "YOUR MONEY OR YOUR LIFE." WHEN BENNY DOES NOT RESPOND, THE ROBBER ASKS: "WELL WHICH IS IT?" AND BENNY REPLIES, "I'M THINKING."

IN THIS COMEDY ACT BENNY GETS A LAUGH BECAUSE EVERYONE KNOWS HIS MONEY IS HIS LIFE, HENCE THE IDEA GIVING UP HIS MONEY WAS IN A WAY TO GIVE UP HIS LIFE.

ANOTHER HUMOROUS STORY ABOUT MONEY FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE, COMES FROM THE TEACHING AMONG SOME THAT WE SHOULD GIVE MONEY SO WE CAN GET BACK EVEN MORE MONEY FROM GOD.

ONE DAY A MAN RECEIVED A LETTER FROM A CHRISTIAN ORGANIZATION SEEKING A DONATION. IN THE LETTER IT WAS PROMISED THAT IF HE GAVE THEM \$100 DOLLARS, GOD WOULD RETURN THE GIFT TEN-FOLD TO HIM.

THE MAN WROTE BACK TO THE GROUP SUGGESTING THEY SEND A DONATION OF \$100 DOLLARS TO HIM AND THEY COULD KEEP THE \$1000 DOLLARS FROM GOD.

THIS BRINGS US TO THE NEW TESTAMENT PASSAGE AND PAUL'S WORDS ABOUT GIVING. IN THIS AND HIS OTHER WRITINGS CONCERNING CHRISTIAN GIVING, HE WAS NEITHER TRYING TO ROB OTHERS OF THEIR WEALTH, NOR PROMISING THEY COULD "PURCHASE" BLESSINGS FROM THE LORD BY BEING GENEROUS.

INSTEAD HE TOLD ABOUT HOW OTHERS HAVE BEEN INSPIRED TO GIVE, NOT TO PAUL, OR LOCALLY, BUT TO NEEDS FOUND ELSEWHERE.

HE WROTE ABOUT HOW THE CHRISTIANS IN MACEDONIA GAVE TO THE COLLECTION HE WAS TAKING FOR THE BELIEVERS IN AND AROUND JERUSALEM.

HE REMINDS THEM ABOUT HOW THESE MUCH POORER CHRISTIANS IN PLACES LIKE: PHILIPPI, THESSALONICA, AND BEREIA, WERE SO FILLED WITH LOVE AND GRATITUDE THEY GAVE GENEROUSLY TO THE COLLECTION.

AGAIN, HIS INTENTION WAS NOT TO SEEK TO “HOLD UP” THE CHRISTIANS OF CORINTH. PAUL DID NOT ROB THEM OF THEIR FREE WILL TO GIVE OR NOT GIVE, BUT RATHER SOUGHT TO MOTIVATE THEM, TO COMPLETE AND SEND THE MISSION FUND THEY HAD ALREADY BEGUN.

HE HOPED TO INSPIRE THEM TO FULFILL THEIR EARLIER DESIRE TO HELP OTHERS THEY HAD NEVER MET, IN A PLACE MOST CORINTHIANS WOULD NEVER VISIT.

LET US LOOK AT WHAT WAS BEHIND THE NEED DISCUSSED IN THIS PART OF THE LETTER, IN ORDER TO BETTER UNDERSTAND PAUL’S REQUEST.

THE LETTER SPEAKS ABOUT CHRISTIANS IN JERUSALEM WHO HAD BECOME IMPOVERISHED FOR A NUMBER OF REASONS. THESE BELIEVERS, WE SHOULD REMEMBER, WERE AMONG THE FIRST CONVERTS TO FAITH IN CHRIST ON AND AFTER PENTECOST.

ACCORDING TO THE BOOK OF ACTS THESE CHRISTIANS ENTHUSIASTICALLY LIVED OUT THEIR FAITH IN CHRIST BY SHARING RESOURCES WITH ONE ANOTHER.

ACTS 4:32, SAYS THAT OUT OF THEIR HEARTFELT GRATITUDE TO GOD, THE JERUSALEM BELIEVERS FREELY SHARED RESOURCES AMONG THEMSELVES.

THEIR GENEROSITY WAS FURTHER EMPHASIZED IN VS. 34 WHICH STATES THAT “THERE WAS NOT A NEEDY PERSON AMONG THEM.”

THEIR COMMUNAL SHARING WAS ALL WELL AND GOOD IN THE BEGINNING, AND IT PROBABLY WOULD HAVE WORKED OUT PERFECTLY HAD JESUS RETURNED FAIRLY SOON.

BUT, AS WE KNOW, HE DID NOT. THIS MEANS THAT EVENTUALLY CIRCUMSTANCES CHANGED FOR THAT COMMUNITY. PERSECUTION CAUSED MANY TO FLEE JERUSALEM AND OTHERS SUFFERED SOME LOSS OF INCOME.

THIS MEANT THAT THE COMMUNAL RESOURCES WERE NOT BEING REPLENISHED WELL ENOUGH TO MEET THE MATERIAL NEEDS OF THE PEOPLE.

THIS WAS MADE WORSE BY A FAMINE IN THE AREA, WHICH IS WHY SO MANY PEOPLE IN THE CHURCH THERE WERE IN NEED. THE RESPONSE OF CHURCH LEADERS TO THE SITUATION WAS TO SEEK HELP FROM CHRISTIANS OUTSIDE THE HOLY LAND.

IN FACT PAUL WRITES IN ROMANS 15 THAT WHEN HIS MISSION TO THE GENTILES WAS CONFIRMED BY THE APOSTLES IN JERUSALEM, THE ONE REQUEST THEY MADE OF HIM WAS TO REMEMBER THE POOR BELIEVERS THERE.

SO PAUL BEGAN A COLLECTION, ASKING FOR HELP FROM CHRISTIANS IN MANY OTHER PLACES, WHICH BRINGS US BACK TO TODAY’S PASSAGE.

PAUL HAD SEVERAL REASONS FOR PROMOTING THIS OFFERING FOR THE POOR AMONG THE CORINTHIAN BELIEVERS. THE FIRST REASON WAS BECAUSE THERE WAS A NEED; THE SECOND TO WAS TO FULFILL HIS PROMISE TO HIS BROTHER APOSTLES, AND THIRD WAS TO PROMOTE CHRISTIAN UNITY.

THIS WOULD HAPPEN, PAUL HOPED, AS THE GENTILE BELIEVERS SHOWED SOLIDARITY WITH JEWISH BELIEVERS BY SENDING FINANCIAL HELP TO MEET THEIR DAILY NEEDS.

PAUL SAYS THAT THIS SPECIAL FUND WAS SOMETHING THE CHRISTIANS OF CORINTH HAD PLEDGED TO CONTRIBUTE TO, AND IN FACT BEGAN TO COLLECT MONEY FOR.

UNFORTUNATELY, BY THE TIME PAUL WROTE THIS LETTER TO THE CHURCH IN CORINTH, THEY HAD BEGUN TO DRAG THEIR FEET CONCERNING THEIR CONTINUED SUPPORT.

THE LETTER SUGGESTS SOME OF THE PROBLEM MAY HAVE BEEN THE PEOPLE HAD LESS MONEY TO GIVE THAN EXPECTED.

PAUL HOWEVER IS NOT CONCERNED WITH THEM MEETING THE PLEDGE, BUT WANTS THEM TO GIVE WHAT THEY ARE ABLE. HE OFFERS SEVERAL REASONS WHY HE IS ASKING, THEM TO BE FAITHFUL TO THIS MISSION TO FELLOW CHRISTIANS.

TODAY'S READING OPENS WITH PAUL CELEBRATING THE MANIFESTATION OF GOD'S GRACE HE WITNESSED AMONG THE CHURCHES OF MACEDONIA.

THESE CONGREGATIONS WERE IN AREAS LESS WEALTHY THAN CORINTH, AND THE CHRISTIANS THERE WERE MUCH POORER THAN THE CORINTHIANS. YET PAUL WRITES THAT THEY NOT ONLY GAVE GENEROUSLY, BUT BEGGED HIM TO ALLOW THEM TO GIVE THIS OFFERING.

ONE REALLY SIGNIFICANT PIECE OF INFORMATION IS PROVIDED IN VERSE 4. THERE IT SAYS THESE CHRISTIANS SAW GIVING AS A PRIVILEGE.

HOW INTERESTING A NOTION IT IS FOR CHRISTIANS TODAY, TO BE INSPIRED TO SEE GIVING NOT AS A DUTY, BUT AS A PRIVILEGE!

HERE THE APOSTLE FURTHER TEACHES THAT ONE WAY CHRISTIANS CAN PUT TO PRACTICAL USE THE GRACE THEY HAVE BEEN GIVEN IS- TO HELP THOSE IN NEED.

WE ARE ALSO TOLD HERE THAT THE GRACE OF GOD IS THE BASIS FOR CHRISTIAN GIVING TO OTHERS. THUS PAUL SOUGHT TO INSPIRE THE CORINTHIANS TO REVIVE THEIR MISSION GIVING TO JERUSALEM IN SEVERAL WAYS.

KNOWING THE CORINTHIANS HAD A COMPETITIVE NATURE, SINCE THEY OFTEN COMPARED THE SPIRITUAL GIFTS EACH OTHER RECEIVED, THE APOSTLE BEGINS WITH WHAT WE MIGHT CALL A "WORLDLY" CHALLENGE.

PAUL USES COMPETITION IN A POSITIVE WAY, BY BRINGING UP THE GENEROSITY OF CHRISTIANS LIVING UNDER GREATER PERSECUTION AND HARSHER ECONOMIC CONDITIONS THAN THE CORINTHIANS.

WE MIGHT IMAGINE PAUL IS ENCOURAGING SOME "FRIENDLY COMPETITION"; HOPING THE CORINTHIANS WILL DESIRE TO OUT-GIVE THE MACEDONIANS.

THE MACEDONIANS, PAUL TOLD THEM, FIRST GAVE THEMSELVES TO THE LORD, THEN TO THE APOSTLES, AND THEY ALSO GAVE MONEY TO THE JERUSALEM FUND.

THE MESSAGE HERE IS ONE OF PAUL REMINDING THE CORINTHIANS ABOUT THE PRIORITY CHRISTIANS HAVE TO: FIRST AND FOREMOST GIVE THEMSELVES TO GOD. PAUL HOLDS UP THE ATTRIBUTES OF THE MACEDONIA CHRISTIANS AS AN EXAMPLE FOR THE CORINTHIANS.

NEXT, PAUL OFFERS WHAT COULD BE CALLED A "SPIRITUAL" CHALLENGE, BASED ON REMINDING THEM ABOUT THE GRACE THEY HAVE RECEIVED DIRECTLY FROM GOD.

HE STATES IN VERSE SEVEN: "NOW, AS YOU EXCEL IN EVERYTHING- IN FAITH, IN SPEECH, IN KNOWLEDGE, IN EARNESTNESS, AND IN YOUR LOVE FOR US- SEE THAT YOU ALSO EXCEL IN THIS GRACE OF GIVING."

REMEMBER THE CORINTHIANS HAD MANY STRUGGLES BESIDES BEING OVERLY COMPETITIVE. THEY ALSO HAD BEEN STRUGGLING BETWEEN WORLDLY AND SPIRITUAL WAYS IN THE AREAS OF LOVE AND FELLOWSHIP WITHIN THEIR OWN CHURCHES.

THE VARIOUS CLICKS AND CLASHES, WHICH PLAGUED THE CORINTHIAN CONGREGATIONS, SPILLED OVER IN AREAS OF WORSHIP AND ARROGANCE OVER SPIRITUAL GIFTS.

BUT- BY THE TIME OF PAUL'S SECOND LETTER TO THEM MUCH IMPROVEMENT HAD BEEN MADE WITHIN THE PEOPLE, AND SO PAUL SEEKS TO BUILD UPON THEIR SPIRITUAL PROGRESS.

THE CORINTHIANS ARE ALSO GIVEN A SUBTLE REMINDER ABOUT WHY THEY OUGHT TO BE THANKFUL TO GOD, AND HOW TO PUT THEIR LOVE AND GRATITUDE INTO ACTION.

IT IS IN VERSE NINE THAT PAUL REMINDS HIS READERS ABOUT THE BASIS FOR THEIR FAITH AND THE REASON FOR THEIR SALVATION.

HE WROTE: "FOR YOU KNOW THE GRACE OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, THAT THOUGH HE WAS RICH, YET FOR YOUR SAKES HE BECAME POOR, SO THAT YOU THROUGH HIS POVERTY MIGHT BECOME RICH."

THIS STATEMENT IS, OF COURSE, SPEAKING ABOUT JESUS BECOMING HUMAN, SO LET'S THINK ABOUT WHAT HE GAVE UP TO BECOME ONE OF US.

JESUS GAVE UP THE RICHNESS OF HIS LIMITLESSNESS DIVINITY TO INHABIT A LIMITED MORTAL BODY. HE WAS RICH IN HONOR AND POWER AND GLORY, BUT BECAME POOR AS A FLESH AND BLOOD HUMAN BEING- WHO ENDED UP DESPISED AND REJECTED BY MANY.

JESUS CHRIST GAVE UP THE WORSHIP OF THE ANGELS FOR THE CONFLICT AND SCORN OF HIS ENEMIES. AND, THROUGH HIS SUFFERING AND DEATH ON THE CROSS-JESUS NOT ONLY LOST HIS DIVINE DIGNITY, BUT HIS HUMAN DIGNITY AS WELL.

THROUGH THIS IMAGERY PAUL SEEKS TO INSPIRE CHRISTIANS IN CORINTH TO RESPOND TO THE RICHES OF GOD'S MERCY, BY CONTINUING THE MISSION FUND THEY HAD BEGUN.

PAUL ALSO REMINDS ALL CHRISTIANS THAT JESUS DID NOT DIE TO INCREASE HIS OWN STATUS, BUT RATHER OUT OF LOVE FOR US. INDEED, HE WAS NOT DEMANDING A TITHE FROM THEM BUT SEEKING AN OFFERING, AND LOVE WAS MEANT TO BE THE REASON FOR THEM GIVING TO HELP OTHERS.

IN FACT, IT IS IMPORTANT TO NOTE THE APOSTLE WAS NOT TRYING TO GUILT CHRISTIANS INTO GIVING, OR SAYING THEY MUST GIVE BECAUSE THEY NEED TO PAY JESUS BACK FOR THEIR SALVATION.

INSTEAD PAUL'S ULTIMATE DESIRE FOR ALL CHRISTIANS IS FOR US TO EXPERIENCE THE SPIRITUAL RICHES OF GOD'S GRACE.

HE WANTS US TO GIVE NOT OUT OF COMPULSION, OR FEAR, NOT AS A DUTY, BUT TO GIVE FREELY OUT OF LOVE. PAUL'S FIRST LETTER TO THE CORINTHIANS CONTAINS THE NOW FAMOUS CHAPTER ABOUT LOVE.

IN THAT EPISTLE, PAUL WROTE: "IF I GIVE AWAY ALL OF MY POSSESSION, AND IF I HAND OVER MY BODY TO BE BURNED, BUT HAVE NOT LOVE, I GAIN NOTHING."

THIS IS WHY THE APOSTLE DID NOT DEMAND THEY GIVE, EITHER OUT OF GUILT, NOR TO RECEIVE BLESSINGS FROM GOD, BUT SOLELY AS AN ACT OF LOVE.

LOVE IS THE WAY JESUS SAID WE SHOW OUR GRATITUDE TO GOD, FOR THE GRACE GOD FREELY GIVES TO US BY THE SALVATION WE RECEIVE THROUGH CHRIST.

ONE WAY THIS CHURCH DOES THIS LOCALLY IS THE BLESSING BOX OUTSIDE THE BUILDING. IN IT WE, AND EVEN THOSE NOT PART OF THE CONGREGATION, LEAVE BOOKS, FOOD, PAPER AND OTHER PRODUCTS, AND EVEN TOYS, F OR OTHERS TO TAKE.

IN THIS WAY WE NOT ONLY GIVE TO OUR NEIGHBORS, BUT ALSO ALLOW THEM TO FREELY GIVE OR TAKE. MAY WE CONTINUE TO SEEK INSPIRATION TO FREELY AND LOVINGLY GIVE TO OTHERS BOTH LOCALLY AND FAR AWAY.

LET US PRAY:

GRACIOUS GOD, WE THANK YOU THAT YOU GIVE THE GIFT OF ABUNDANT AND ETERNAL LIFE. YOUR GENEROSITY AND GRACE OVERFLOWS TO US. HELP US TO REMEMBER THAT EVERYTHING WE HAVE IS A GIFT FROM YOU.

AND HELP US TO GIVE OUT OF LOVE- FREELY, SACRIFICIALLY, AND CHEERFULLY TOWARDS THE WORK OF YOUR KINGDOM.

HEAVENLY FATHER, MAY THE MAJESTY OF YOUR LIGHT GUIDE US, THE COMPASSION OF JESUS BE THE LOVE THAT INSPIRES US, AND THE PRESENCE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT EMPOWER OUR LIVES, BOTH INDIVIDUALLY AND COMMUNALLY. THROUGH JESUS CHRIST, OUR LORD WE PRAY, AMEN.

SERMON SUMMARY: 2 CORINTHIANS 8:1-15

THIS PASSAGE IS ONE OF THE PLACES PAUL WROTE ABOUT CHRISTIAN GIVING. HE WAS NEITHER TRYING TO ROB OTHERS OF THEIR WEALTH, NOR PROMISING THEY COULD “PURCHASE” BLESSINGS FROM THE LORD BY BEING GENEROUS.

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