

2 Corinthians 8

The following illustration is adapted from Dennis Prager, who is Jewish, and was used by Joseph Telushkin in his book *Jewish Literacy*:

Suppose two people who have the exact same earnings and expenses are confronted by a poor man in truly desperate need of food and money for his family. The first person, after hearing the man's horrible experiences, cries and then out of the goodness of his heart gives him five dollars. The second person, although concerned, does not cry at all, and in fact has to rush away. But because his religion commands him to give 10% of his income to charity, he gives the poor person \$100. Who did the better thing – the person who gave \$5 from his heart, or the one who gave \$100 because his religion commanded it? It turns out that when presented to high school students in classrooms, 70-90% of the teenagers questioned asserted that the person who gave the \$5 from his heart did the better deed.

This response suggests that in secular society, even charity is becoming a somewhat selfish act. Many people care less about the good their money is doing than about how they feel giving it. The same students were later asked who they would think had done the better deed if they were the ones who needed the money. This invariably led to a lot of confusion as to how to answer. You don't care quite so much how the giver feels if you're in serious need; you just need them to give. You begin to suspect that the one who gives more does more good.

As we try to be more like Jesus, God will make us generous givers.

- I. We should consider giving a privilege; our ability to give is evidence of God's grace. 8:1-7
- II. We should give with a right heart, out of love for God and others. 8:8-15
- III. We should always be sure that we handle God's resources with integrity. 8:16-24

First Corinthians 16:1-4 NKJV ¹Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also: ²On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come. ³And when I come, whomever you approve by your letters I will send to bear your gift to Jerusalem. ⁴But if it is fitting that I go also, they will go with me.

Rom 15:25-28 NKJV ²⁵But now I am going to Jerusalem to minister to the saints. ²⁶For it pleased those from Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor among the saints who are in Jerusalem. ²⁷It pleased them indeed, and they are their debtors. For if the Gentiles have been partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister to them in material things. ²⁸Therefore, when I have performed this and have sealed to them this fruit, I shall go by way of you to Spain.

The churches that started in other areas as a result of Paul's missionary efforts were combining their efforts into one large offering. The gifts that Paul was collecting from them were going to poor believers in Jerusalem.

I. We should consider giving a privilege; our ability to give is evidence of God's grace. 8:1-7

A. 8:1 Giving is a church effort. This is what was behind Paul's words in 1 Cor 16:2. More than that, these churches were working together to accomplish something bigger than any of them might have been able to do alone.

B. 8:2-7 The Macedonian churches were not wealthy. Paul describes their condition as "deep poverty" (v.2), but they gave sacrificially. They were more than simply willing, they were eager to give. Warren Wiersbe said the following:

Giving does not depend on material circumstances so much as spiritual convictions.

Paul sets up the Macedonians as an example for the Corinthians to follow. If we let God do what He wants to in our hearts, He is going to make us generous. That's His grace at work.

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II. We should give with a right heart, out of love for God and others. 8:8-15

A. 8:8-9 That grace all starts with Jesus. There is no better example of sacrificial giving ever than the way Christ humbled Himself: God became a man. That man was put to death in the most humiliating way ever contrived by human imagination.

Php 2:5-8 NKJV ⁵Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, ⁶who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, ⁷but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. ⁸And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.

B. As God's grace works within us, it will be evidenced by self-sacrifice. We'll never match the level of loving, sacrificial giving that Jesus exhibited, but His example gives us a standard to work toward.

C. 8:10-15 Giving should be in proportion to what we have. The biblical measure that we get from the OT is the tithe, or 10%. Some people find it hard to balance the idea of giving voluntarily, from our heart and giving 10%, which sounds a lot more like intentional, regular giving.

Remember our story of the high school students and giving? Prager puts explained the balance of giving from your heart and giving by percent like this:

"Judaism would love you to give 10% of your income each year from your heart. It suspects, however, that in a large majority of cases, were we to wait for people's hearts to prompt them to give a tenth of their money away, we would be waiting a very long time. Therefore, Judaism says, "Give 10%, and if your heart catches up, terrific. In the meantime, good has been done."

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III. We should always be sure that we handle God's resources with integrity. 8:16-24

A. Paul wanted to make sure that no one could accuse him of any mishandling of the money that was being collected. This passage shows that there were at least three men who travelled together with it. Titus (vv.16-17), the brother (vv.18-19) and another brother (v.22).

B. It's very important for Christian organizations to use sound financial practices. The key verses in this section are vv.20-21. We can't just say that God knows our hearts. Good intentions need to be followed up with policies and procedures that other people, even those outside the church, would approve.

Conclusions:

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1. Giving is a privilege (8:4). That's how the Macedonian church saw it and Paul uses them as an example we should attempt to follow.
2. Giving flows from our commitment to Christ (8:5).
3. Giving is voluntary (8:8) – but it's also the right thing to do.
4. Giving is intentional (8:10-11).
5. Giving is proportional to our means (8:11). A tithe is a nice biblical measurement to set up for ourselves as a starting point.
6. The point of this chapter is generosity to the poor.
 - a. As a pastor, of course I want everyone to give to our church's general fund. We have bills to pay, a building to maintain and salaries to cover. I get stressed out whenever we run short of money. The same goes for KIDS Inc. That, however, is not really the kind of giving being talked about in this chapter – so let's not miss the obvious.
 - b. Also, if we let the OT inform our understanding of the NT, we see that the idea of "charity" is not present in OT Hebrew thought. Hebrew actually has no word that can be translated as "charity" – that "giving from the goodness of your heart" type of thing. People are simply commanded by God to be generous.

Deut 15:7-11 NKJV ⁷*"If there is among you a poor man of your brethren, within any of the gates in your land which the Lord your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart nor shut your hand from your poor brother, ⁸but you shall open your hand wide to him and willingly lend him sufficient for his need, whatever he needs ... ¹⁰You shall surely give to him, and your heart should not be grieved when you give to him, because for this thing the Lord your God will bless you in all your works and in all to which you put your hand. ¹¹For the poor will never cease from the land; therefore I command you, saying, 'You shall open your hand wide to your brother, to your poor and your needy, in your land.'*

- c. The word most frequently associated with giving in Hebrew thought was *tzedaka*, which is more like “righteousness” or “justice” – an obligation to be upright.
- d. In the next chapter, 2 Cor 9:9, Paul quotes Psalm 112:9. “Righteousness” in the original verse in the psalm is *tzedaka*.
- e. Paul is obviously not teaching a works-based salvation. But we should understand that his thinking was shaped by OT concepts. He viewed giving – especially generosity toward the poor – not as “charity” in the feel-good sense of that word, but rather as righteousness or justice. Therefore, he can say, in 8:24, “Show them the proof of your love.” He’s really not saying anything different here from James

Jms 2:15-16 NKJV ¹⁵*If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food,* ¹⁶*and one of you says to them, “Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,” but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit?*

- 7. Now it’s true that there was a strong sense of works-righteousness in Israel around the time of Jesus. Thus the story is told of Rabbi Akiba’s debate with Tineius Rufus, the Roman governor of Judea. Rufus challenged the rabbi: “If, as you say, your God loves the poor, why then does He not support them?” Rabbi Akiba is said to have replied that God left the care of the poor to the Jew “so that we may be saved by giving’s merits from the punishment of Gehenna.”
- 8. The NT idea of giving is not a good work that gains us merit before God. But God’s grace working within us prompts us to give. That’s why the word grace was repeated by Paul in this chapter. We don’t view our giving as a good work that gives us good standing with God. The blood of Christ gives us good standing before God. We view giving as a response to the grace that God has shown us already. God grace is what produces righteousness within us.

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