

The Example of the Macedonians
2 Corinthians 8:1
Part One

Let me read you an e-mail that I just received.

Dear Dale Whitehead,

For those concerned with practical techniques to transform your annual report into a powerful tool that boosts donations, retains donor loyalty, and invites new supporters, there will be a live, 60-minute webinar:

“Annual Reports: Your Key to Raising More Money: How to do it”
Thursday, January 13, 2011 1:00-2:00PM ET.

Then the e-mail gave the website and the conference agenda.

So, what do you think? Should I log on? Would that be in the best interest of this church and the cause of Christ in general, to find out how we can use an annual report to boost donations, retain donor loyalty, and invite new supporters? Personally I would find such a thing not only disconcerting but also dangerous.

But why would I find it so? Is it because giving is not important and therefore should not be encouraged? No! Giving is important! And certainly it should be encouraged. But let us not, in our quest to encourage people in the good work of giving, begin to market it as if the key to generous, sacrificial, and cheerful giving, as described for us in the Scriptures, is more the work of clever marketing techniques rather than the work of God ministering His grace to those who having placed their faith in Christ are seeking to live in a manner pleasing to Him.

Encouraging people to give is not about employing better techniques. It is about teaching them about God, and what God has done for them, what God wants to do in them, what God wants to do through them in Christ. And if we teach these things faithfully to those who are truly His children and who wholeheartedly want to follow Him they will be transformed in every area of their lives including their giving.

And hopefully this will all come alive for us as we now return to our study of **2 Corinthians** and more specifically to **2 Corinthians 8-9**, the most extensive passage on giving in all of Scriptures.

But before we begin our examination of these two chapters, let us begin by considering the bigger context.

Because of the controversy still raging in the church at Corinth that had been fueled by certain false teachers, Paul in **2 Corinthians 2:12-7:1** had been defending his apostolic integrity to the whole of the church excluding no one. But beginning in **2 Corinthians 7:2** this all changed as Paul began to address his remarks exclusively to only the repentant, or in other words only to those who in response to the “**severe letter**” had acknowledged their sin against God in having ignored and even mistreated him, the apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ.

As Paul began to address the repentant within the church of Corinth, he detailed for them certain responsibilities that still remained for them to fulfill. So, what was the first responsibility that he brought to their attention?

The first responsibility that Paul brought to the attention of the repentant in 2 Corinthians 7:2-16 was their need to completely separate from his opponents. This is what Paul in essence meant when he admonished the repentant in **2 Corinthians 7:2** to make room for him and his associates in their hearts. But this was not the only responsibility that Paul brought to the attention of the repentant. There was another.

The second responsibility that Paul brought to the attention of the repentant was their need to complete the collection for the poverty-stricken believers in Jerusalem (2 Corinthians 8-9). These responsibilities as well as the instructions related to that responsibility were then spelled out for the repentant in **2 Corinthians 8-9**, which are the chapters that we will begin to examine this morning. So, what do we know about this collection?

First of all, we know this collection was instigated and orchestrated by Paul on his third missionary journey among the churches of Galatia, Macedonia, and Achaia, which of course would have included the church at Corinth.

Secondly, we know that the church at Corinth had been informed of this collection before the epistle of **1 Corinthians** had even been written. We

know this because Paul, in explaining how this money should be collected in **1 Corinthians 16:1-4**, addressed them as if they already knew about the collection.

And thirdly, based on **2 Corinthians 8:10** we know that once the church had been informed and instructed concerning the collection, they responded positively and were happy to participate with the other churches in contributing to this collection for the poor in Jerusalem. But unfortunately once the false teachers had entered Corinth and attacked Paul and successfully undermined His influence among the Corinthians, this all blew up and the collection ceased.

And this is the way it remained until Paul, here in **2 Corinthians 8-9**, stirred up the repentant to finish what they had begun in respect to the collection.

So how did Paul in **2 Corinthians 8-9** go about stirring up the repentant to once again wholeheartedly commit themselves to completing the collection for the poor in Jerusalem? He did it in a number of different ways.

And this leads us to the question that we will be seeking to answer over the next several months. What did Paul share with the Corinthians that helped them to become wholeheartedly committed to completing the collection that they had begun a year earlier? This is the question that we will be seeking to answer. So, what was the first thing?

The first thing that Paul shared with the Corinthians was the example of the Macedonians (2 Corinthians 8:1-7).

So let me now read for you **2 Corinthians 8:1-7** and see if this is not so. **“Now, brethren, we wish to make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia, (2) that in a great deal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality. (3) For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability, they gave of their own accord, (4) begging us with much urging for the favor of participation in the support of the saints, (5) and this, not as we had expected, but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God. (6) So we urged Titus that as he had previously made a beginning, so he would also complete in you this gracious work as well. (7) But just as you**

abound in everything, in faith and utterance and knowledge and in all earnestness and in the love we inspired in you, see that you abound in this gracious work also.”

So, what the first thing that Paul shared with the Corinthians to help them to become wholeheartedly committed to completing the collection that they had begun? It was the example of the Macedonians, who in spite of their difficulties and their own personal challenges, had given generously, sacrificially and cheerfully toward the very same collection that Paul was now in **2 Corinthians 8-9** encouraging the repentant in Corinth to complete.

So why did Paul give this example to the Corinthians? Did he give this example to shame them into giving? God forbid! Did he give this example to cause the Corinthians to pridefully enter into a competition with the Macedonians to see who could give more? God forbid!

Such manipulations of the baser elements of a person’s humanness would have been totally unacceptable to Paul, as it also should to us as well. Giving generated by such manipulations is not what God wants and therefore it should not be what we want.

So if Paul did not share the example of the Macedonians, in respect to giving, to manipulate the baser elements of the Corinthians humanness such a guilt, shame, fear, greed or pride, then why did he share the example?

I believe Paul shared the example of the Macedonians with the Corinthians not to manipulate the baser elements of their humanness but rather to cause them to focus on the source of the Macedonians extraordinary giving that propelled them to give so generously, sacrificially and cheerfully, so that they in recognizing its source might enter into that very same God-honoring blessedness that the Macedonians themselves were enjoying.

And this thought concerning the source of the Macedonians generous, sacrificial and cheerful giving brings us to **verse 1**. **“Now, brethren, we wish to make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia.”**

Paul began this verse by affectionately addressing the Corinthians as **“brethren,”** and then he quickly moved on to inform them that he wanted to

make known to them the grace of God that had been given in the churches of Macedonia.

So, what exactly was this “**grace of God**” that had been given in the churches of Macedonia that Paul was so eager for the Corinthians to know about? The grace that Paul was so eager for the Corinthians to know about and that had been given to the churches of Macedonia by God was the grace of giving as described in verses 2-5. This is what Paul was referring to when he spoke of the grace of God in **verse 1**.

So why was Paul so eager for the Corinthians to know this? Why was he so eager for them to know that what he was about to describe in **verses 2-5** was the grace of God that had been given to the churches of Macedonia? It is really very simple. If the giving that Paul was about to describe in **verses 2-5** was the visible manifestation of God’s grace, or in other words the grace of giving, then there was no way that the Macedonians could take any credit for the incredible example of giving that they manifested, for the source of that incredible welling up of giving was God Himself who had blessed them or had given them this specific grace. It was His work not theirs.

Now notice I said “**this specific grace.**” So why did I say this in this particular way? I said it in this particular way because I did not want you to think that the grace of giving is the only way that the grace of God can be manifested. It can be and should be manifested in a multitude of different ways.

The term “the grace of God” when not limited by its context to one specific thing is an inclusive term that refers to all of God’s undeserved gifts and kindnesses, all of which flow from our reconciliation to Himself in Christ.

In other words, because we by the grace of God have been reconciled to God in Christ, we now have access to God’s grace, not just in the area of giving but also in every area of our lives. Praise God!

Having access to God’s grace, to all of God’s undeserved gifts and kindnesses, make it possible for us to live holy lives (Philippians 2:12-13; 4:13).

What does **Philippians 2:12-13** tell us? “**So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; (13) for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.**” And then what does Paul tell us about himself in **Philippians 4:13**? “**I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.**”

So let me ask you this question. Do you think that there is any person here this room this morning that has taken advantage of all the grace that is available to them in Christ in respect to their growth in holiness? And what is the answer? The answer would have to be no. For if the answer was yes, that would mean that we in essence believe that there is someone in this room that has gone as far as they can go in respect to holiness and has no further room for growth. But obviously this would not be correct in light of the fact that we have not yet been fully conformed to the image of Christ.

So where does this leave us? This is where it leaves us. It leaves us with a challenge. And what is that challenge? It is this:

Knowing that there is sufficient grace available to us to live holy lives and also knowing that we are not yet perfect, now let us commit ourselves before God to grow in His grace (2 Peter 3:18).

And this is exactly what the Apostle Peter commanded his readers to do in **2 Peter 3:18**. He commanded his readers to grow in God’s grace. And this is exactly we need to do. And this is exactly what the Corinthians needed to do in respect to the grace of giving.

And this is why I believe Paul began this section on giving, directed at the Corinthians, with the example of the Macedonians. He began this section with the example of the Macedonians, not to shame the Corinthians or provoke them to pridefully compete with the Macedonians but rather to challenge them to grow in grace of giving.

So now let me ask this question. Do you believe that we, like the Corinthians, might have some room for growth in the area of the grace of giving? And I would like to think that there is not a single born-again believer here in this room this morning who would not answer that question with a resounding yes!

And if there is perhaps even a single person here this morning who might answer that question no, thinking that they have arrived in terms of this particular grace, I would strongly urge you to return next week as we consider Paul's description of how the grace of God in giving manifested itself in the hearts and lives of the Macedonians in **2 Corinthians 8:2-5**.

But before you come back next week to consider these various manifestations of the grace of giving I would like to make something perfectly clear.

The example of the Macedonians and the manner in which the grace of God was manifested as described in 2 Corinthians 8:2-5 would have been worthless if the Corinthians had not repented.

Paul could have talked to the Corinthians about the Macedonians and their generous, sacrificial and cheerful giving until he was blue in the face and nothing would have happened if the Corinthians had not, as we learned in **2 Corinthians 7**, repented and wholeheartedly committed themselves to God. For apart from this whole-hearted commitment, the Spirit of God will not fill us, and if His Spirit does not fill us we will not receive the grace that God wants to pour out upon us in respect to our growth in holiness.

Now do you understand why I was not excited about responding to the e-mail that I received this past week that promised through the webinar to help me find out how we can use an annual report to boost donations, retain donor loyalty, and invite new supporters?

May we, as those who have been reconciled to God in Christ, ask God to help us grow in the grace of giving.

Valley Bible Church
3347 West Avenue J
Lancaster, California 93536
www.valleybible.net