

The Example of the Macedonians
2 Corinthians 8:6-7
Part Three

There was an article written a number of years ago that claimed that you and I spend as much as 50 percent of our time thinking about money—how to get it, how to spend it, how to save it, how much does this thing cost, or how much does that thing cost, etc.

Now I would have to think that most of us here this morning, if not all of us, would probably find ourselves challenging that claim. But even though we might challenge that specific claim I don't believe that we could possibly challenge the fact that most everyone thinks a great deal about money.

But now let me ask you this question. In terms of all the time people in general spend thinking about money, how much of that time is spent thinking about giving? Probably not a whole lot, but this should not be true of Christians.

Why is this? Is it because Christians have a lot of money? No, this is not the reason. So if having a lot more money is not the reason why Christians would be thinking about giving far more than the general population, then what is the reason? The answer is this: Christians when thinking about money will find themselves thinking about giving far more than the general population because they in Christ have been given far more grace or in other words they have been given far more when it comes to the undeserved and unmerited kindnesses of God. And this is the truth. And it is this truth that hopefully will come alive for us this morning as we return to our study of **2 Corinthians**.

So where are we in this study? 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 when 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 having mistreated His apostle.

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?

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). This responsibility 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 began to examine several weeks ago.

And what is the question that we are seeking to answer as we examine these two chapters? What did Paul share with the Corinthians that helped them to become wholeheartedly committed to completing the collection for the poor believers in Jerusalem in 2 Corinthians 8-9?

This is the question that we began to answer last week. 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). And where do we find this example? We find this example in **2 Corinthians 8:1-7.**

Paul, in sharing the Macedonians' example of giving, began by sharing the source of it in 2 Corinthians 8:1. So now let me read that verse for you. 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.”** So, what was the source of the Macedonians' giving? The source of the Macedonians' giving was the grace of God that had been given to the churches of Macedonia.

So why did Paul want to make this known to the repentant within the church at Corinth? He wanted them to understand that everything he was about to say concerning the Macedonians and the way they had given had nothing to

do with them and their fleshly impulses but rather had everything to do with the work of God in them and through them. This is why Paul wanted the repentant within the church at Corinth to know that the source of the Macedonians' giving was the grace of God. So after Paul made this known to the Corinthians, then what did Paul share?

Paul after sharing the source of the Macedonians' example went on to describe it in 2 Corinthians 8:2-5. So now let me read those verses for you. **“That in a great ordeal of affliction [speaking of the Macedonians] 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.”** What an amazing description of grace giving?

Even though the Macedonians were being sorely tested “in a great ordeal of affliction” by all that they were suffering, it did not prevent them from giving liberally when given the opportunity (2 Corinthians 8:2). And not only did we learn that the Macedonians were giving liberally, even in a great ordeal of affliction, but we also learned that their giving, while they themselves were mired in deep poverty, sprung from an abounding inward joy. We saw this in **verse 2**.

And what made this all possible? It was only possible because the Macedonians, in having given themselves up to God as a matter of first priority according to **verse 5**, had been given the grace of God according to **verse 1**. We are now ready to move further in our examination of the Macedonian' example.

So after Paul shared the source the Macedonians' giving in **verse 1**, and after Paul described the Macedonians' giving in **verses 2-5**, what did Paul share next?

Paul, after sharing the source as well as the description of the Macedonians' giving, went on to share with the Corinthians the implication of it in respect to their own giving practices (2 Corinthians 8:6-7). And where do we see

this implication for the Corinthians being spelled out for them? We see it being spelled out for them in **2 Corinthians 8:6-7**.

So let me read these verses for you. **“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 based on these verses addressed to the Corinthians, what would be the implication of what Paul had said about the Macedonians’ giving on the Corinthians’ giving practices? This is what I believe we will discover. Based on the words of Paul to the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians 8:6-7, if the Corinthians believed that they were in fact the recipients of God’s grace then they like the Macedonians should be giving in the same manner.

So, what is my hope for this message? My hope is that this message will be as challenging for us in our giving practices as Paul hoped his words in **2 Corinthians 8:6-7** would be for the Corinthians, knowing that we like the Corinthians have been given by God much grace.

So how did Paul begin? Paul began by highlighting for the Corinthians the gracious work of God on their behalf through Titus (2 Corinthians 8:6). So no let me read this verse for you and see if this is not so. **“So we urged Titus that as he had previously made a beginning, so he would also complete in you this gracious work as well.**

So where in this verse do we see the gracious work of God on behalf of the Corinthians? We first of all see it in respect that what God had already done through Titus. We see this initial work that had already been done in the phrase, **“So we urged Titus that as he had previously made a beginning.”**

So, what did Paul mean by this? This question is not as easy to answer as some people might think. In fact, it is rather difficult. And yet, though it is difficult, it is important. Therefore we must seek to answer it. So, what exactly is this “beginning” that Titus had “previously” made that Paul hoped would be brought to completion?

There are two different options. So, what is the first option? The first option is that the “beginning” that Titus “previously” made could refer to a visit

Titus made prior to the writing of **1 Corinthians** that informed the Corinthians of Paul's intent to collect an offering for the poor saints in Jerusalem. This is the first option.

So, what is this option based on? This option is based on an inference that we can deduce from **1 Corinthians 16:1-2**. So let me read these verses for you and see if this is not so. **“Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so do you also. (2) On the first day of every week each one of you is to put aside and save, as he may prosper, so that no collections be made when I come.”**

So, what is Paul doing in these verses? Paul is giving instructions concerning the collection for the poverty-stricken believers in Jerusalem.

But notice how he began these instructions. He began these instructions with the words, **“Now concerning the collection for the saints.”** In other words, he began these instructions in a way that would lead us to conclude that someone had already informed the Corinthians about this collection prior to these instructions.

So who might that person have been that informed the Corinthians about this collection? Those who hold this first option as the correct option have chosen to believe that the person who informed the Corinthians of the collection was Titus. And therefore when Paul spoke of this “beginning” that “previously” had been made he was in fact referring to this supposed earlier visit by Titus when he, perhaps for the very first time, introduced the possibility of a collection being taken up for the poor saints in Jerusalem. So that is one option.

But what is the second option? The second option is that the “beginning” that Titus “previously” made, rather than referring to a speculative visit to the Corinthians prior to the writing of **1 Corinthians**, could be referring to an actual visit referenced in **2 Corinthians 7:5-6** where we find Titus reporting back to Paul how the Corinthians had responded to the “severe letter” that he had written to them and that he had entrusted to Titus to deliver. And this is by far the best option.

Not only is this visit an actual visit rather than a speculative visit but based on **2 Corinthians 7:14** it was in fact his first visit to Corinth.

So now let me read this verse for you. **“For if in anything I have boasted to him [referring to Titus] about you, I was not put to shame; but as we spoke all things to you in truth, so also our boasting before Titus proved to be the truth.”** It would appear that Titus though having a great deal of knowledge about the Corinthians had no actual firsthand knowledge of them, like Paul himself had, thus leading Paul, based on his firsthand experience with the Corinthians to boast about them to Titus here in **2 Corinthians 7:14**.

So, what is the best option? The best option is the second option. In other words, if we are going to understand the words of Paul in **2 Corinthians 8:6**, we must understand those words not in the context of a speculative visit prior to **1 Corinthians 16:1-2** but rather we must understand his words in the context of an actual visit in the context of Titus’s visit to the Corinthians when he delivered the “severe letter.”

So in light of that context how should we understand Paul’s reference to this “beginning” that Titus previously made in **2 Corinthians 8:6**? We should understand it this way:

The “beginning” that Titus previously made was the grace of God expressed in the Corinthians’ restoration in response to the severe letter that he had delivered to them on behalf of Paul during his first visit.

In other words, Titus came into the church of Corinth with a very strong letter that blasted the Corinthians, and God used that letter to pour out His grace upon them producing in them a godly sorrow that only He could have produced in them, a godly sorrow that led to their repentance and thus to their restoration, not only to God’s apostle but consequently to God Himself.

So if this is so and we do in fact understand Paul’s reference to the “beginning” that Titus previously made was a reference to the grace of God expressed in the Corinthians’ restoration, then how should we understand Paul’s reference to the completion of this “grace,” or in other words to the completion of this “gracious work” that Paul also referenced in **2 Corinthians 8:6**?

If the “beginning” were a reference to the grace of God expressed in the Corinthians’ restoration, then the completion of this “grace,” or in other

words this “gracious work” would be referring to their recommitment to the collection.

To Paul this recommitment to the collection was not in doubt. He fully expected that just as God had graciously used Titus to bring about their restoration that God would also graciously use Titus to bring about their recommitment to the collection.

And not only did he expect that they through the visit of Titus would make a recommitment to the collection but that their recommitment would be just as generous, sacrificial and cheerful as the Macedonians. And this brings us to **verse 7**; so now let me read this verse for you. **“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 why did Paul expect that the Corinthians once restored and recommitted would abound in giving very much in the same way as the Macedonians?

Paul expected that Corinthians once restored and recommitted would abound in giving very much as the Macedonians, because they like the Macedonians had been given the grace of God (2 Corinthians 8:7).

So where did Paul point the Corinthians to prove his point. He pointed to their spiritual gifts of “faith,” “utterance,” and “knowledge.” Isn’t this what we see in the verse? Absolutely! What does the verse say? **“Just as you abound in everything, in faith and utterance and knowledge.”** The Corinthians had not been slighted when it came to God distributing spiritual gifts, which is a point that Paul had made earlier in the epistle of **1 Corinthians** when he supplied a similar list in **1 Corinthians 1:5, 7** and **1 Corinthians 12:8-10**. And why would Paul have selected this expression of grace toward the Corinthians to make his point? Paul selected this expression of grace because it was an expression of grace that the Corinthians not only would have accepted but would have exalted in.

In addition to all of this Paul also pointed to their “earnestness” for him as evidence of God’s grace in their lives (cf. 2 Corinthians 7:11-12) and, in turn, to his love for them (cf. 2:4; 6:11; 11:11; 12:14-15).

And in light of all this grace that had been poured out on the Corinthians, what did Paul then exhort the Corinthians to do? Let us go back and read the verse. **“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.”** And what is that gracious work? Giving!

Though people in general think a whole lot about money they probably spend very little time thinking about giving!!

But this should not be true of us! Why? Is it because we have more money than most people? No! It is because we have been given in Christ far more grace. And those who have been given grace will, like the Macedonians, give. This is the point that Paul was seeking to make for the Corinthians in **2 Corinthians 8:1-7**, and this is the point that hopefully that Holy Spirit has now graciously driven home to us.

So now let me ask you this question. Do you believe that you have in Christ received much more grace than the world in general? If you do, then what should be the result of that? It is this: Not only should we be thinking about giving more often than the world in general, but we should also be giving more often than the world in general.

May God, in light of all the grace that He has and continues to pour out upon us, cause us to be conformed more and more to the giving practices of the Macedonians.