

The Example of Christ
2 Corinthians 8:8-10

Let me ask you this question. Is it possible for a Spirit-filled follower of Christ to have very little or no interest in giving? I would hope that you would say that such a thing would be impossible. And if that is your answer you are absolutely correct. It is impossible.

Jesus was, is and always will be a giver. He can't help Himself because that is who He is. And if He is in fact dwelling in us and filling us, His spirit and attitude toward giving will be seen.

So let me ask you this question. As you look at your life and how you are managing your finances do you see Christ? If you do then praise God! But if you don't you need to be concerned for obviously something is wrong. There is a problem and what might that be? The problem most likely is this: Christ is no longer in control of your life. You have surrendered to a different master or masters. And what is the solution to this. Repentance!

Hopefully as we continue our study of **2 Corinthians** this truth will come alive for us. So where are we exactly within the context of this study?

We have recently passes through a major transition. Paul prior to **2 Corinthians 7:2** had been addressing his remarks to the Corinthian church as a whole, but beginning in **2 Corinthians 7:2** he began to address his remarks solely to those within the Corinthian church who had recently repented of their rebellion against him as Christ's apostle and thus against God Himself. So, what did Paul say to the repentant within the church?

As Paul began to address the repentant within the church of Corinth beginning in 2 Corinthians 7:2, he detailed for them certain responsibilities that still remained for them to fulfill.

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 was 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**. So now let me read these verses for you. **“Now, brethren, we wish to make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia, that in a great ordeal 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 was the first thing that Paul shared with the Corinthians to help them to become wholeheartedly committed to completing the collection for the poor believers in Jerusalem in **2 Corinthians 8-9**? He shared with the Corinthians the example of the Macedonians. We are now ready to move on in our study to the second thing that Paul shared with the Corinthians.

So, what was that second thing? The second thing that Paul shared with the Corinthians was the example of Christ (2 Corinthians 8:8-10). So now let me now read for you **2 Corinthians 8:8-10** and see if this is not so. **“I am not**

speaking this as a command, but as proving through the earnestness of others the sincerity of your love also. (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 through His poverty might be come rich. (10) I give my opinion in this matter, for this is to your advantage, who were the first to begin a year ago not only to do this, but also to desire to do it.” Clearly Paul in these verses is seeking to get the Corinthians to be wholeheartedly committed to completing the collection by introducing a couple of different thoughts, one being the example of Christ.

So, what is my hope for this message as we consider this example as provided by Paul? My hope is that as we consider this example, we might be able to better understand that when we find ourselves abounding in joyful giving it is not as if we have found the path to poverty and to deprivation but rather we have found the path to riches, as the life of Christ fills us and is manifested through us.

So let us now begin to examine these verses more carefully. And we will begin with verse 8. **“I am not speaking this as a command, but as proving through the earnestness of others the sincerity of your love also.”** So, what were the very first words of this verse? The very first words were **“I am not speaking this as a command.”**

Obviously Paul is qualifying what he just said in verse 7 when he told the Corinthians **“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.”**

Paul in verses 1-6 had made it very clear to the Corinthians that the Macedonians had abounded in the gracious work of giving toward the collection for the poor saints in Jerusalem, and then in verse 7 as we just read, Paul also made it very clear that he wanted the Corinthians to abound in this same gracious work also.

But now in verse 8 Paul qualifies what he had just said by saying, **“I am not speaking this as a command.”**

So, what does Paul mean by this? Some people, in fact many people, believe that when Paul said this he was in effect saying, “Yes, I know that I have

told you in verse 7 ‘**to see to it that you abound in the gracious work of giving toward the collection for the poor saints in Jerusalem in the same way as the Macedonians abounded in this gracious work,**’ but don’t get me wrong I am just advising you what you should do and not commanding you what you must do.” Those who take this position, I believe are wrong.

Paul’s point in 2 Corinthians 8:8 is not to deny that he had given the Corinthians a command in 2 Corinthians 8:7 but rather that the command that he had given was from him and not a direct command from Christ (2 Corinthians 8:10-11). This was Paul’s point, which I believe is supported by the fact that Paul in **2 Corinthians 8:11** explicitly commands the Corinthians, using the Greek imperative mood “**to finish**” the collection.

Far from denying that he was commanding the Corinthians, Paul’s qualification in **verse 8** demonstrates that what he was saying was his own imperative as an apostle of Christ. This is Paul’s point in saying what he said at the beginning of **2 Corinthians 8:8**.

And why would Paul, an authoritative apostle of Christ, be so bold to command the Corinthians to abound in this gracious work of giving? Paul provides the Corinthians two compelling reasons.

First of all, The Corinthians, like the Macedonians, should abound in this gracious work of giving because this would prove that their love for Paul and his associates and thus their repentance was genuine (2 Corinthians 8:8). So now let us continue to read the verse and see if this is not so. “**I am not speaking this as a command** [or in other words as a command from Christ], **but as proving through the earnestness of others the sincerity of your love also.**” So who are the “**others**” that Paul is referring to in this verse; whose earnestness in Paul’s mind will prove the sincerity of the Corinthians love one way or the other? The “**others**” that Paul is referring to in this verse are the Macedonians.

And what do we remember about the earnestness of the Macedonians based on **2 Corinthians 8:5**? Hopefully we remember that their earnestness in giving toward the collection for the poor in Jerusalem did not manifest itself until they had given themselves first to the Lord and to Paul.

In other words, Paul is saying to the Corinthians if the Macedonians had not as an expression of their love first given themselves up to the Lord and to them as His ministers, the Macedonians earnestness in giving as described in **2 Corinthians 8:1-6** would not have happened. But it did happen. The Macedonians as of first priority and as an expression of love for the Lord and His ministers did give themselves up to them and were therefore able to commit themselves to this project of giving, believing that in doing so they were pleasing the Lord and supporting His ministers.

Therefore, in Paul's mind, the Macedonians and what they had experienced in terms of their earnestness in giving became a test case for the Corinthians; not so much of their love for people in general or for the poor saints in Jerusalem in particular but rather for the Lord and them as the Lord's ministers thus confirming to Paul that they truly had repented of their rebellion against him as an apostle of Christ and thus God Himself.

So, what was the first compelling reason why Paul, an authoritative apostle of Christ, would be so bold to command the Corinthians to abound in this gracious work of giving? The first compelling reason was that the Corinthians, like the Macedonians, should abound in this gracious work of giving because this would prove that their love for Paul and His associates and thus their repentance was genuine. And why would Paul believe this? Why would Paul believe that their repentance would lead to the same earnestness in giving toward the collection as he had seen in the Macedonians? This leads us to the second compelling reason. So, what was it?

The second compelling reason was that the Corinthians should abound in this gracious work of giving because joyously giving in order to meet the need of others is what Christ is all about (2 Corinthians 8:9). This is something that Paul believed they should have known in light of what he told them at the beginning of **2 Corinthians 8:9**. And what did He say? **“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.”**

And what is grace of our Lord Jesus Christ according to C.B. Cranfield? It is this: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ denotes the utterly undeserved, royally free, effective, unwearying, inexhaustible good will of God, active in and through Jesus Christ.” This is the grace of Christ and this is what Paul believed the Corinthians had come to know. And how did he believe that

they had come to know it? Let us continue to read the verse. And what does it say?

“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.” So, what did Paul mean by his references to “rich” and “poor?”

Paul’s references to Jesus being “rich” and “poor” do not signify his economic status, but His preexistence with the Father and His entering into the humble circumstances of this world including death (Philippians 2:6-8). And why had Christ done this?

He gave in this way so that the Corinthians and others such as ourselves might become rich. Isn’t that exactly what the verse tells us? Absolutely! So let me now once again read this verse for you and see if this is not so. And what does it say? **“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.”** So, what does Paul’s reference to us becoming rich mean?

Paul’s reference to us becoming rich is not a reference to material wealth but to all the blessings of salvation.

Sinners desperately need the riches that are supplied by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ because they are spiritually destitute with nothing to commend themselves to God. But if they by exercising faith in Christ would avail themselves of His grace, they will be become rich having been made the **“heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ”** according to **Romans 8:17**, and **“the partakers of the divine nature”** according to **2 Peter 1:4**.

So why was Paul reminding the Corinthians of Christ’s grace and how they through Christ’s poverty had become so rich? He wanted them to understand that if the grace of Christ had actually been extended to them, which he believed that it had, then he would expect that it would express itself through them in the same manner as the grace of God had been extended to them through Christ, in other words through generous, sacrificial and joyful giving if they had truly repented.

For if they had truly repented then they would in fact be filled with Christ's Spirit, and if they were filled with Christ's Spirit they would be under Christ's control, and if they were under Christ's control they would quite naturally be led to do the very same for others as Christ had done for them. And in this case, as with the Macedonians, it would have meant, in light of Paul's appeal to them as Christ's apostle, that they would have found themselves compelled to give earnestly with great joy to the collection for the poor saints in Jerusalem as an expression of Christ's life.

Isn't this true. Let me ask you a question. Did Christ ever turn away from anyone when He was confronted with their need? No! And neither will we if we are if we are willing to give ourselves up to God so that the life of Christ might fill us and flow through us

And is this a good thing? Absolutely! What did Paul say at the beginning of **verse 10**? **"I give my opinion in this matter, for this is to your advantage."**

So why would it be to their advantage? It would show they had not only repented but most importantly that they by the grace of God had been filled with the life of Christ who once again was living in and through them as He had been doing a year earlier prior to their rebellion against Paul and thus against God Himself.

At the beginning of this message this morning I asked this question: Is it possible to be a Spirit-filled follower of Christ and have very little or no interest in giving? And what was our answer? Our answer was no, and I believe that this would be very consistent with the thinking of Paul as communicated in the passage we considered this morning.

If the grace of God has indeed been poured out upon us through Christ, and if we are willing in light of what He has done for us through Christ to give ourselves up to Him wholly and completely as an act of worship, we will be filled with the Spirit of God and the life of Jesus will fill us and His life will joyfully pour itself out through us as we encounter people who are in need. And when this takes place, we who have received such great riches will actually begin to enter into the joy and the glory of those riches.

May God give us the grace to understand that joyful giving is not the path to poverty and deprivation but rather the path to riches, as the life of Christ fills us and is manifested through us.