

Paul's Expectation for the Corinthians
2 Corinthians 8:11-12
Part One

Let me begin by asking you the same question that I asked you at the beginning of last week's message. Is it possible for a Spirit-filled follower of Christ to have very little or no interest in giving? And what is the answer? The answer would be the same as it was last week. Such a thing would be 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 not only indwelling us but also filling us, His spirit and attitude toward giving will be seen in the way we manage our finances. And this is not a maybe, or a might, but it is a certainty if He is in fact controlling us.

And once again I would hope that this truth would come alive for us as we continue our study of **2 Corinthians**. So where are we exactly within the context of this study?

We have recently passed 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.

So, 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?

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, (2) 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.”** What work? The gracious work of giving toward the collection for the poor believers in Jerusalem.

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.

So, what was the second thing that Paul shared? 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 was again seeking to get the Corinthians to be wholeheartedly committed to completing the collection, but this time he did not point to the example of the Macedonians but to the example of Christ Himself.

This is what we covered last week. But now we are ready to move on in our study. So, what was the third thing that Paul shared with them to get them wholeheartedly committed to completing the collection for the poor believers in Jerusalem?

The third thing that Paul shared with the Corinthians was his expectation for them in respect to the collection (2 Corinthians 8:11-15).

So now let me read for you **2 Corinthians 8:11-15** and see if this is not so. **“But now finish doing it also, so that just as there was the readiness to desire it, so there may be also the completion of it by your ability. (12) For if the readiness is present, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have. (13) For this is not for the ease of others and for your affliction, but by way of equality— (14) at this present time your abundance being a supply for their need, so that their abundance also may become a supply for your need, that there may be equality; (15) as it is written, ‘He who gathered much did not have too much, and he who gathered little had no lack.’”** What Paul introduced to the Corinthians in these verses by way of expectation was the third thing Paul introduced to stir them up to be wholeheartedly committed to the collection.

And what is my hope for this message? My hope for this message is that as we consider Paul’s expectation for the Corinthians, God would use Paul’s expectation for the Corinthians to help us to better understand what God’s expectation might be for us in terms of using our money, however much money we have, to meet the spiritual and material needs of others.

So now let us go back and look at Paul’s expectation for the Corinthians more carefully beginning with the very first verse and the very first word of

that verse. And what is that word? It is the word “**but.**” Paul by using this conjunction is drawing a contrast between what he just said and what he was about to say. So, what had Paul just said?

Paul in **2 Corinthians 8:10** had just reminded the Corinthians that they, a year earlier and prior to their rebellion against him, had been the first to give toward the collection for the poor saints in Jerusalem. And they had done so, not grudgingly but willingly. This is what he had just told them in **verse 10**.

But what was true in the “past” was no longer true in the “present.” The Corinthians in having rebelled against Paul stopped contributing to the collection and apparently had not contributed anything to the collection for a year even though they recently repented.

In the mind of Paul this was unacceptable. For if they had truly repented then the Spirit generated desire that they had manifested a year earlier in giving toward the collection should once again express itself in the same manner as it had expressed itself earlier.

This belief led Paul, using the conjunction “**but,**” to draw out the contrast between what he had just said in **verse 10** about what they had been doing a year earlier and what he is about to say in **verse 11**, about what they should be doing. So, what was that? Let’s continue to read **verse 11**. “**But now finish doing it also.**”

So, what was happening here? When Paul told the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians 8:11 “to finish doing it also” he was explicitly commanding the repentant within the church to complete what they had begun in respect to the collection a year earlier. It was not “do this if it is convenient for you.” It was more like “just do it.”

And what was Paul’s explanation for this explicit command? Let us go back to the **verse 11** and continue to read. “**...So that just as there was the readiness to desire it, so there may be also the completion of it.**” So, what was Paul’s explanation for him having given such an explicit command at the beginning of **verse 11**? Paul’s explanation was that if the Spirit had in the past generated in the Corinthians a desire to give to the collection then it would seem logical in light of their recent repentance that the Spirit would now generate within them a desire to complete the collection. This is why

Paul, based on the words of **verse 11**, gave such an explicit command to the Corinthians at the beginning of the verse.

One of the most vexing aspects of the ministry is dealing with those who make a good beginning in the Spirit but then who tragically fail to finish what they had started as they succumb to the flesh.

And this was the danger that had been facing the Corinthians. They had begun well in respect to the collection but having grieved and quenched the Spirit of God, through their rebellion, they came to a complete stop. Why? The Spirit was no longer controlling them, and because the Spirit was no longer controlling them they were in danger, though having started well, of not finishing well.

But praise God, the Corinthians repented. And because the Corinthians had repented and were once again under the control of the Spirit, Paul was confident that the Spirit generated desire to give that was present a year earlier would once again express itself and would lead to the completion of what they had begun.

And therefore, based on that expectation, he explicitly commanded the Corinthians at the beginning of **verse 11** **“to finish doing it also.”** This is the inference that I believe we can draw from his words, **“so that just as there was a readiness to desire it, so there may be also the completion of it.”**

So after having given this command and having explained the basis of the command, what did Paul do next? Paul then qualified the command. So how did he qualify it? Let us continue to read the **verse 11**. And what did it say? It said this, **“But now finish doing it also, so that just as there was the readiness to desire it, so there may be also the completion of it [and then what did he say? He said this] by your ability.”** So how did Paul qualify the explicit command he had given?

Paul after having commanded the Corinthians to finish the collection, he then qualified that command by telling them that it should be by their ability in 2 Corinthians 8:11.

This is an important qualification. Though Paul commanded the Corinthians to give toward the completion of the collection and expected the Corinthians to give toward that completion as an expression of their Spirit generated desire within them, he only expected them to give according to their ability. In other words, if they had a lot then he expected that they, as an expression of their Spirit generated desire, would joyfully give a lot. But if they only had a little, then he only expected that they, as an expression of their Spirit generated desire, would joyfully only give a little.

God is not concerned with the amount we give, He is only concerned that when we do give that we give willingly according to our ability as a manifestation of His Spirit (2 Corinthians 8:12).

This is reinforced by Paul in **2 Corinthians 8:12**. So now let me read this verse for you. **“For if the readiness [or in other words the Spirit generated desire to give] is present, it is acceptable [acceptable to whom? Acceptable to God] according [to what? According...] to what a person has, not according to what he does not have.”**

So let me say this again. God is not concerned with the amount we give; He is only concerned that when we do give that we give willingly according to our ability as a joyful manifestation of His Spirit.

But someone might say but what about tithing, or in other words giving of our 10%? Don't the Scriptures teach us that God requires us to give 10% percent? And what is the answer? The answer is no! The Bible does not teach us this.

The nation of Israel under the Mosaic Law was required to give tithes, but the church is not required to give tithes. So why would I say this? Let us first of all look at the nation of Israel.

So, what were the tithes that the nation of Israel was required to give under the Mosaic Law? The nation of Israel was required to give three different tithes under the Mosaic Law (Leviticus 27:30-33; Numbers 18:20-21; Deuteronomy 12:17-18; 14:28-29).

The first tithe was “the Lord’s tithe.” It was to be given each year to support the Levites as well as the temple ministry. This tithe is found in **Numbers**

18:20-21. The second tithe was “the festival tithe.” It was also to be given each year, but this tithe was not to support the Levites and the temple ministry but rather the national feasts of Israel. This tithe is found in **Deuteronomy 12:17-18**. And the third tithe was the “the widow’s or orphans tithe.” This tithe rather than being given each year was to be given every third year in order to supply for the basic necessities for the needy within the nation of Israel. This tithe is found in **Deuteronomy 14:28-29**.

These three tithes that represented a little more than 23% of a Jewish families income were not optional. These three tithes, very much like taxes, were required to be given by every Jewish family to support Israel’s theocracy as spelled out in the Mosaic Law.

Though Israel under the Mosaic Law was required to give tithes, the church is not the nation of Israel and therefore is not required to give tithes for the church is “in Christ” according to Romans 7:1-4 and is therefore dead to the Law.

So does God require His church, or in other words “those who are in Christ” to give a certain amount money? No! He does not require that any one of us give any specific amount of money. This is why we do not find a command for the church to tithe in the New Testament.

Though God does not command the church to tithe, He does expect the individual members of His church, in response to His grace and as an expression of Christ’s life, to financially give, as they are able to meet the spiritual and material needs of others. And it was this expectation that was at the heart of Paul’s expectation for the Corinthians when he commanded them to give toward the collection for the poor believers in Jerusalem.

True followers of Christ cannot sit passively on the sidelines when they through the resources God has entrusted to them can help relieve the spiritual or material needs of others.

So let us for a moment consider these respective needs. This morning I would like to focus on how we can use our money to help address the spiritual needs of people. And next week I would like to focus on how we can use our money to help address the material needs of people. Now why am I doing this when the passage is clearly focused on the material needs? I

am doing this for the sake of balance, or in other words that we would lose the forest for trees.

So let us begin by looking at how God would want us to use our money to meet the spiritual needs of people.

We as members of Christ's church, as we seek to meet the spiritual needs of others, must first and foremost support the ministers and therefore the ministries of this church (Matthew 10:10).

And why would I say this? I am saying this because this is the right thing to do based on the clear teachings of the Word of God.

Those who preach gospel should receive their living from the gospel. When Jesus sent his disciples out to preach the good news, He instructed them to take nothing with them, no money, no bag, and no extra clothes. And why was this? Christ told them in **Matthew 10:10** **“that the worker is worthy of his support.”** And this is the truth. Though there may be other ways we may use our money, which may be helpful in meeting the spiritual needs of people, the one specific way that the Scriptures highlight for us is by willingly and joyfully supporting those who need our support in order to carry out the ministry of the gospel. And at this point I would think that it would be appropriate for me to highlight those within our church that are doing this very thing,

The ministerial staff of this church at the present time are faithfully seeking not only to meet the spiritual needs of the 1300 to 1400 members of this church but also the spiritual needs of this community and the world through our various outreach programs.

In light of this I would hope that we would feel compelled, as a joyous expression of God's grace and through the leading of the Spirit as He speaks to us through the Word to commit ourselves to giving regularly and systematically to this church so that the ministers and ministries of this might be supported and that we would do so according to our ability.

This should not be something that we see as optional for a Spirit-filled follower of Christ. For I truly believe that if Christ is in fact filling us and thus controlling us that we will not be able to help ourselves. We will do

this. Not because we have to but because we want to for Christ, as we have seen this morning, wants His ministers supported so that the spiritual needs of people might be met.

I am not speaking this to you because I am trying to get more money for myself. Why would I do this after all these years? And why would I do this when I am approaching by virtue of my age the end of my ministry. I am speaking these things because I truly believe that as we surrender our lives to Christ and allow His life to be lived through us is when we are truly blessed and He is glorified.

May God give us the grace, as an expression of the life of Christ, to give joyfully according to our ability so that the spiritual and material needs of others might be met.