

Paul's Expectation for the Corinthians
2 Corinthians 8:13-15
Part Two

As we all know, our economy has been hit very hard over these past several years by what people have come to call "The Great Recession." This recession has hurt a lot of people; some of these people you know and some you don't know. But now let me ask you this question. What is our responsibility toward these particular individuals or to any other individual who may presently, for whatever reason, be suffering from great financial hardship?

This is the question that we will be seeking to answer this morning as we return back to our study of 2 Corinthians and more specifically back to Paul's instruction to the repentant within the church at Corinth.

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.

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).

To help them to become wholeheartedly committed to completing the collection, he shared with them a number of different things throughout 2 Corinthians 8-9.

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

The second thing that Paul shared with the Corinthians was the example of Christ (2 Corinthians 8:8-10).

The third thing that Paul shared with the Corinthians was his expectation for them in respect to the collection (2 Corinthians 8:11-15). This expectation is spelled out for us **in 2 Corinthians 8:11-15**, and these are the verses that we have been examining over these past several weeks.

So, what have we learned so far about Paul's expectation for the Corinthians in respect to this collection? So far we have learned this:

When Paul told the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians 8:11 "But now finish doing it also," he was explicitly commanding the repentant to complete the collection that they had begun a year earlier. And then what did Paul do?

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

So let us now continue to read **verse 11** 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."**

In other words, even though Paul expected that the repentant within the church (having been filled with the Spirit and having come under the control of Christ) would once again give toward the collection and would in fact complete the collection, he only expected that they would give according to their ability.

Or we could say it this way. If they had "a lot," Paul expected that they would give "a lot", but if they only had "a little," then Paul only expected that they would give "a little."

Paul then went on to expand on this thought in **verse 12** when he said, **"For if the readiness is present, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have."**

God is not concerned with the specific amount that we give. He is only concerned that we give and that when we do give that we give willingly according to our ability, as a joyful manifestation of His Spirit. And hopefully there is no one in this room today, who professes to follower of Christ, who is not giving in this way, for in giving in this way it testifies not

only that Christ is in fact indwelling us but also that He is also controlling us as His Spirit fills us.

And what will be the primary focus for our giving as we, as members of this church, give in this way? Based on the Word of God our giving will be focused primarily, but not necessarily exclusively, on two major areas.

The first major area that we will find ourselves giving money toward would be this church thus fulfilling our biblical responsibility to support our ministers and thus their ministries as spelled out in **Matthew 10:10** as well as in **1 Corinthians 9:6-16**. Supporting our ministers and their ministries in this way will not only fulfill our biblical responsibility toward them but it will also allow us to participate with them as they seek to supply for the spiritual needs of others.

So, what is the second major area that we will find ourselves giving toward? The second major area of giving that we will find ourselves giving toward would be the poor, and this of course now brings us back to our text and to Paul's expectation for the Corinthians in respect to the collection.

So after having giving the explicit command at the beginning of **2 Corinthians 8:11** and now having qualified the command in the latter part of **2 Corinthians 8:11** with the words, "**by your ability**" and having expanded on that qualification in **2 Corinthians 8:12**, Paul will now go on to explain to the Corinthians why he felt it necessary for this command to be qualified in this specific way.

So, what is my hope for this message as we continue to examine our text? My hope is that God might use this message to help us better understand our responsibility to the poor, or in other words to those who are presently suffering great financial hardship and that we with that better understanding might be moved by His Spirit to fulfill that responsibility.

So now let us go back to our text and more specifically to **verse 13**. "**For this is not for the ease of others and for your affliction, but by way of equality.**"

So, what is Paul doing in **2 Corinthians 8:13**? Paul in 2 Corinthians 8:13 appears to be responding to a charge against him that his goal in having

commanded the Corinthians to give was to prejudicially enrich his Jewish countrymen at the expense of the Corinthians. So how did Paul respond to this charge in 2 Corinthians 8:13?

The first thing Paul did in 2 Corinthians 8:13 was to deny the charge. And isn't this exactly what we see. Let us read the verse. **“For this** [my command for you to give and to give proportionately, or in other words “by your ability”] **is not for the ease of others and for your affliction.”** So clearly there is the denial of the charge. But Paul was not satisfied with simply denying the charge. And this brings us to a second thing that Paul did as he responded to the charge that had been made against him. And what this second thing?

The second thing Paul did in 2 Corinthians 8:13 was to explain to the Corinthians that the reason why he gave the command to give and to do so proportionately was for the sake of equality.

Let me now read for you the rest of **2 Corinthians 8:13** and see if this is not so. **“For this** [my command for you to give and to give proportionately, or in other words “by your ability”] **is not for the ease of others and for your affliction, but by way of equality.”** So there we have it. Paul was not playing favorites when he gave the command. No! When he gave the command to give and to give proportionately, as an authoritative apostle of Christ, under the circumstances that he gave the command, it was all about equality.

So, what did this mean? Did this mean that that the Corinthians were to give and to give proportionately so that every Corinthian believer and every believer in Jerusalem would have the same amount of money and the same amount of stuff? And the answer to that would have to be absolutely not! Not only is it inconsistent with the instructions to the rich in the New Testament, it would be absolutely impossible to administrate.

When Paul explained to the Corinthians that the goal of the collection was “equality,” he was speaking of equality with reference to their basic needs (1 Timothy 6:17-18; 1 John 3:17).

And it was the pursuit of this kind of equality that drove the actions of the early church to supply in the way that they supplied for each other in **Acts**

2:44-45 and **Acts 4:32-37**. In other words, the actions of the early church was not driven by the belief that if one person had a car that everybody else had to have a car, but rather the belief that drove the action was this: If a believer had been blessed with an abundance, then that believer needed to share that abundance with those lacking the basic necessities of life such as food and covering so that neither those who had an abundance or those who did not have an abundance would be lacking for the basic necessities of life. In other words, in that sense there would be an equality.

Such an attitude is the mark of a genuine believer. Let me read for you **1 John 3:17**. **“But whoever has this world’s goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?”** In other words, John rightly questions the salvation of those who though having an abundance are unwilling to share with those who are in need, or in other words lacking the basic necessities of life.

Paul expressed the same principle to Timothy in **1 Timothy 6:17-18**. So let me read these verses for you. **“Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy. (18) Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share.”**

There is nothing wrong with being rich if God so blesses. But there is something very wrong if we, having been so blessed, are unwilling to share our abundance with those we see to be in need, or in other words with those who we see are lacking the basic necessities of life for this would be very unlike Christ.

Would you all agree with this? How could we not agree? The Scriptures are absolutely clear! We are to give not only to support our ministers and their ministries, we are to give so that there might be equality among people in respect to the basic necessities of life.

So after Paul in **verse 13** had explained to the Corinthians that the command that he had given them was not for the purpose of enriching his countrymen at their expense but rather just to honor the principle of equality, he then in **2 Corinthians 8:14** spelled out for the Corinthians how this principle of equality might at some future time come back to serve them.

So now let me read for **2 Corinthians 8:14** and see if this is not so. **“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 might be equality”** So, what was Paul doing in this verse? He was helping them to see the bigger picture. And what was that bigger picture that Paul wanted them to see? He wanted them to see that the principle of equality that led him to command them to give and to give proportionately to the poor believers in Jerusalem might in time, under the right circumstances, guide those that had received their help to reciprocate toward this if at some future time they found themselves in need. And this is something that we need to appreciate as well.

Though we might today in practicing the principle of equality be the giver, in the future, based on the same principle, we might find ourselves becoming the receiver (2 Corinthians 8:14).

The principle of equality is a big deal. And it was this very principle that was at work when God provided manna for the nation of Israel as recorded for us in **Exodus 16:18**. And how do we know this? We know this because Paul points this out to us in **2 Corinthians 8:15**.

So let me read this verse for you. **“As it is written, ‘He who gathered much did not have too much, and he who gathered little had no lack.’”**

What is apparent by Paul’s use of this quotation is that those Israelites who were strong enough and healthy enough to gather more manna than they needed shared with those who were for whatever reasons unable to gather what they themselves needed to meet their basic needs. And what did this sharing that resulted in the basic needs of the Israelites being met picture? It pictured the principle of equality.

And it is this principle that will inevitably compel us to share our abundance with those in need if we are in fact indwelt by Christ and being controlled by Him.

Though now having said this I would like now to qualify what I have just said so that there might not be any confusion.

We are responsible for applying the principle of equality only when we personally encounter someone in need or when we are asked to contribute to someone in need by our elders. In other words, the biblical mandate to the church is not to go and meet the needs of the poor but rather to go and makes disciples, baptizing in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you. This is our mandate. But as we seek to fulfill this mandate we must not forget that we have God-given responsibilities to supply for the basic necessities of the poor as we encounter them or when we are directed to so by our spiritual overseers.

A case in point is the incident at hand in respect to this collection. Let me ask you this question. Were there any other poor people in the world other than these poor believers in Jerusalem? And what is answer? The answer would have to be of course there were other poor people in the world other than these poor people in Jerusalem. And yet what do we see? Do we see a collection being taken up for them? No, we only see a collection being taken up for this one specific group, or in other words the poor believers in Jerusalem.

Why was this? Why had Paul chosen the poor believers in Jerusalem as the recipients of this specific collection rather than another group of poor or for the poor in general?

First of all, Paul was very familiar with the desperate condition of the believers in Jerusalem. A condition so desperate that when Paul first met with Peter, James and John in Jerusalem after an absence of fourteen years, these apostles specifically asked Paul upon leaving Jerusalem to remember the poor. What poor? They were referring to the poor among the believers in Jerusalem. We know this because of what Paul wrote in **Galatians 2:6-10**.

But this was not the only reason. Paul beyond his familiarity of the desperate condition of the poor among the believers in Jerusalem also believed Gentiles in a spiritual sense owed something to the mother church from which the gospel was sent out. Paul made this clear in **Romans 15:27**.

And beyond this Paul hoped that when this financial gift was given to the church in Jerusalem to be distributed among their poor that certain of his Jewish brethren in Jerusalem in accepting the offering would finally acknowledge the spiritual bonds of that existed between them and their

Gentile brothers and sisters in Christ in Achaia and Macedonia and in other places as well. This is made very clear to us, I believe, in **Romans 15:31**.

All these reasons that I have just listed for you led Paul to take up this collection among the Gentile churches of Achaia and Macedonia. This collection was personal for Paul as well as very strategic. This is why he, the spiritual overseer of the churches in Achaia and Macedonia, took up this collection for this particular group in Jerusalem while choosing to ignore every other group of poor people that were scattered around the known world at that particular time. Paul made a strategic choice.

And why did the churches of Macedonia and Achaia respond to Paul's request to give toward this specific group of people that they had not personally encountered? The churches of Achaia and Macedonia responded as they did because Paul, an authoritative apostle of Christ, had asked them to give to this specific group of individuals in Jerusalem, which in essence brought this specific group of believers in Jerusalem across the path of the Gentile churches of Achaia and Macedonia.

So did the Corinthians, based on the principle of equality, have a responsibility to supply for the poor among them? Yes! Did the Corinthians, based on the principle of equality, have a responsibility to supply for the poor that they encountered in the course of their everyday lives? Yes! Did the Corinthians, based on the principle of equality, have a responsibility to respond to the request of Paul as an authoritative apostle of Christ and as their spiritual overseer when he asked them to give toward the collection for the poor believers in Jerusalem? Yes!

They were responsible for all of this, but they were not responsible for what? They were not responsible to supply for the needs of the poor in general, or in other words for the poor that they had never met or had never been asked to supply for by their spiritual overseers.

There are many Christians, even Christian leaders, who believe that we have a moral obligation, or in other words a biblical mandate to meet the needs of the poor whether or not we have personally encountered them or haven't been asked by our spiritual overseers to give support for them. But this is not what we see exemplified in the Scriptures, and neither is it what

we see exemplified in this passage that specifically addressed this very important principle of equality.

But this is not the only qualifier that we need to keep in mind in order to avoid confusion when we are seeking to apply the principle of equality. We must also keep this in mind that we are only responsible for applying the principle of equality when we have reason to believe that the person receiving our help is a responsible individual who, if able to work, is willing to work (2 Thessalonians 3:10). This was made clear to the Thessalonian church in **2 Thessalonians 3:10** when Paul instructed the Thessalonians, **“If anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, either.”**

As we give ourselves up to God so that the life of Christ might fill us and flow through us, we will invariably find ourselves giving generously, sacrificially and cheerfully, not only toward this church but also to the poor whenever we might encounter them or when we are specifically encouraged to do so by our leaders. This is not something for us to be afraid of; this is something that we should welcome as Christ fills us and lives His life out through us.

May God give us the grace to humble ourselves before Him so that the life of Christ and the generosity of Christ might flow from us to others in accordance to His Word.