

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

Certainly Japan, in the wake of the recent earthquake and tsunami and subsequent nuclear crisis, has captured the attention of the world and certainly it has captured our attention not only because of the humanitarian issues associated with these events but even more importantly because of our long-standing partnership with Hamadera Bible Church in seeking to reach the Japanese people with the gospel of Christ.

Because of this partnership the recent events in Japan with its accompanying humanitarian crisis presents our church, as well as Hamadera church, with a wonderful opportunity to advance the cause of Christ among the Japanese people, and in addition to this it also provides me an opportunity to highlight for you the perfect application of the truths that I highlighted for you that last time I spoke.

Therefore in light of this, rather than going on in our study of **2 Corinthians** to a new section of Scripture, we will be going back to where we were.

But before we do this let me, first of all, put these verses that we will once again be considering, within their broader context.

Paul in **2 Corinthians 7:2** had begun to address the repentant within the church of Corinth outlining for them certain responsibilities that still remained for them to fulfill. The first responsibility that Paul brought to their attention was their need to completely separate from his opponents. We saw this in **2 Corinthians 7:2-16**. The second responsibility that Paul brought to the attention of the repentant within the church of Corinth was their need to complete the collection that they had begun a year earlier for the poverty-stricken believers in Jerusalem. Paul then expanded on this responsibility beginning in **chapter 8**.

And it is this chapter that we have been exploring. And as we have been exploring this chapter and considering what Paul had to say about their need to complete this collection, we have learned a great deal about giving. So, what have we learned so far?

Giving should be the natural outflow of God's grace working within us (2 Corinthians 8:1-7). We learned this from the example of the Macedonians in **2 Corinthians 8:1-7.**

Let me now read these verses 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, (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.”** If the Corinthians had in fact received the grace of God as the Macedonians had received the grace of God, and if that grace was at work in them as it had been at work among the Macedonians, then giving as Paul indicated here in these verses should have been the natural outflow, very much in the same way as it should be in us as well if we like the Macedonians have received the grace of God and if that grace is in fact at work within us.

So, what else have we learned from **chapter 8?** Giving should be the natural outflow of the grace of God working within us, for as His grace works within us the life of Christ will be manifested through us, and Christ is a giver (2 Corinthians 8:8-10). This is the point Paul was making when he spelled out for the Corinthians the example of Christ in **2 Corinthians 8:8-10.**

Let me now read these verses for you 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 become rich.”** Giving should be the natural outflow of the grace of God working within us for the simple reason that as the grace of God works within us, the life of

Christ will be manifested through us, and as the life of Christ is manifested through us, giving must necessarily follow for Christ is a giver.

But this was not all that we have learned. There was one more thing and what was that? Since giving should be the natural outflow of the grace of God working within us, as the life of Christ is manifested through us, the desire to give according to our ability in order to meet the basic needs of others should not come and go (2 Corinthians 8:11-15).

We learned this when Paul spelled out his expectation for the Corinthians in respect to the collection in **2 Corinthians 8:11-15.**

Let me now read these verses for you 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.’”**

The Corinthians had a year earlier begun to give toward the collection for the poverty-stricken believers in Jerusalem, but having quenched and grieved the Spirit of God through their sinful rebellion against Paul had stopped giving. But now having repented of their rebellion, Paul expected that as the grace of God once again was actively working within them and the life of Christ was once again able to be manifested through them, that their giving to meet the basic needs of the poor believers in Jerusalem according to their ability would resume, knowing that giving should be the natural outflow of the grace of God working within them and the life of Christ being manifested through them.

When we have received the grace of God and His grace is actively at work within us making it possible for the life of Christ to be manifested through us, we should expect that our desire to give and to give according to our ability in order to meet the basic needs of others would be a constant in our lives, very much in the same way as Paul expected the Corinthians desire to

give toward the collection for the poverty-stricken believers in Jerusalem to have been a constant in their lives, which was the basis for him to assume that they in response to his encouragement would in fact resume the collection.

So do you believe these things? Do you believe that giving should be the natural outflow of God's grace working within us? Do you believe that giving should be the natural outflow of God's grace working within us because His grace working within us will result in the life of Christ being manifested through us? And do you believe that as God's grace works within us, resulting in the life of His Son being manifested through us, that we should consistently throughout our lives want to give in order to meet the basic needs of others? Hopefully you believe all these things for the simple reason all these things are true.

But now let me ask you this. What will be the practical result of these things if all these things, which we believe to be true, are in fact at work within us? We will want to give to the various needs that will present themselves to us and this certainly can become very overwhelming.

Therefore, in light of our grace-driven desire to give, it is very important in light of the sheer volume of need that is continuously bombarding us that we clearly understand the biblical parameters of our giving responsibilities. So, what are those biblical parameters?

First of all, we are responsible to supply the basic needs of those we encounter if we have the ability to do so (Luke 10:30-37; 1 John 3:17). Let me read for you **1 Timothy 3:17**. And what does it say? **“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?** And isn't this exactly what Christ described in the parable of “The Good Samaritan?” The Good Samaritan was not responsible to supply for the needs of every single person throughout the world who had fallen prey to robbers, he was only responsible for the needs of the one single person whom he had encountered.

And the same thing is true for us. If we have a family member, a friend, a neighbor, or a co-worker who is lacking for the basic necessities of life, then we have a personal responsibility before God to supply to them what they need according to our ability. But this is not all.

We are responsible to supply for the basic needs of those whom we have not encountered when asked to do so by our elders (2 Corinthians 8-9).

Isn't this in essence what took place in **2 Corinthians 8-9**? The churches of Achaia and Macedonia, which included the Corinthian church, had never met the poor believers in Jerusalem and yet Paul an apostle of Christ had asked them to contribute toward a collection for them.

But why did Paul do this? Why had Paul asked the churches to contribute to the poor believers in Jerusalem rather than to a group of poor in Timbuktu or the poor in general? There were a number of different reasons.

First of all, Paul was very familiar with the desperate condition of the believers in Jerusalem. A condition that was 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 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.

Paul then, as an apostle of Christ and as the spiritual overseer of the churches in Achaia and Macedonia, asked them to give to a collection for the poor saints in Jerusalem. And did they respond? Absolutely! If Paul had never asked them they would most likely never have done this. But Paul did ask them and because Paul, as an apostle of Christ, was in effect their spiritual overseer, they now had a responsibility to consider what the Lord would have them to give toward this very strategic offering that Paul was now encouraging to give.

We believe this example provided by Paul provides a second biblical parameter for sorting through our biblical responsibilities when it comes to giving, for just as the churches of Macedonia and Achaia had a responsibility to consider the request of Paul as their spiritual overseer, the members of a church have a similar responsibility to consider the encouragement of their elders.

This morning we are going to specifically apply what we have considered over these past two weeks. So what is that application?

Just as Paul asked the churches to give to the collection for the poor saints in Jerusalem, the elders of this church are now asking us to give to a collection for those impacted by the earthquake and tsunami in Japan.

This offering once collected and delivered will be administered by Hamadera Bible church, our long-standing partner in the work of the gospel.

So why are we as elders asking this congregation to give to this specific need at this particular time? We believe this relief offering is very strategic.

First of all, this offering is strategic because we believe that Hamadera Church would be greatly encouraged by such an offering. The church of Hamadera, though very important in the work of evangelizing Japan, is a small church, or in other words a small island set in the midst of a vast ocean unbelieving Japanese. So many things are working against them, but they have remained faithful.

But let us not fool ourselves. Sometimes when things seem so overwhelmingly stacked against us we might be tempted to become

discouraged. We need to be sensitive to this threat and continually seek by whatever means we can to let them know that they are not alone, but that we and other American churches are standing with them in their battle for the souls of men.

We believe this offering will provide such an encouragement. But why would this offering provide such an encouragement? Why would we believe this offering would make them think that they are not standing alone? This leads us to the second reason why we believe that this offering is so strategic.

We believe that this is strategic because we believe this offering will help Hamadera Church to put the love of Christ on display in a such way that there will be opportunities for the gospel to be shared (John 13:34-35).

And why is this? Let me read for you **John 13:34-35**. And what did Christ say? **“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. (35) By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”**

As we think about the devastation that Japan has recently suffered our hearts quite naturally will go out to the all the Japanese people who have suffered, but our thoughts should first and foremost be drawn to our brothers and sisters in Christ who have suffered. And it is this particular group of people that I believe that the efforts of Hamadera church will be most focused on.

And certainly we saw this reflected in the remarks of Daisuke last week when he in the announcement time referenced a church in Sendai and then quickly followed up his comments about the church in Sendai with comments about three deaf churches that had been impacted by the tsunami on the northeastern coast of Japan, churches that are in fact indirectly connected to the church at Hamadera.

By expressing the love of Christ in tangible ways to Christian brethren such as these in the midst of such a horrific circumstances can easily become the backdrop for sharing the gospel of Christ. Certainly Hamadera Church understands this and will certainly seek to administer whatever money we give them accordingly.

But this there is more. Not only is this offering strategic because we believe that it will be an encouragement to Hamadera church, and that we believe it will open up doors of opportunity for the sharing of the gospel of Christ among the Japanese people, but we also believe that this offering will help us to understand how elders can be used to direct giving to a strategic target, which was exactly what the Apostle was doing here in 2 Corinthians 8.

Paul was not about collecting offerings for offerings sake. In fact, this is the only known offering that Paul ever collected. But this offering that he did collect was extremely strategic, and when such strategic opportunities do present themselves it would seem prudent in light of the example of Paul that the spiritual overseers of a church would seize upon those opportunities.

And this is exactly what we as elders are doing now. We the elders, like Paul, believing that this is a strategic opportunity, are asking you like Paul asked the churches of Achaia and Macedonia, to prayerfully consider what the Lord would have you to give, not to the poor saints in Jerusalem, but to the poor saints in the quake and tsunami ravaged areas of Japan.

Once you know what you believe that God would have you to give, all you have to do is to put your offering into one of our offering envelopes and mark it clearly “Japan relief.”

It would be helpful if this giving were over and above what you are presently giving to church, but ultimately this decision is between you and the Lord.

We are hopeful, that as we bow before the Lord presenting our bodies to Him as living sacrifices, that His Spirit will fill us and the life of Christ will flow through us, manifesting itself in generous, sacrificial and cheerful giving.

And what is our prayer? May God use our offering to encourage Hamadera church, to open doors for the proclamation of the gospel of Christ, and to help us understand how elders can be used to direct giving to a strategic target.