

Parson to Person
2 Corinthians 8
(Giving, Serving, Love)

“Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia: that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality. For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing, imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints. And not only as we had hoped, but they first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God. So we urged Titus, that as he had begun, so he would also complete this grace in you as well. But as you abound in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all diligence, and in your love for us—see that you abound in this grace also.

I speak not by commandment, but I am testing the sincerity of your love by the diligence of others. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich. And in this I give advice: It is to your advantage not only to be doing what you began and were desiring to do a year ago; but now you also must complete the doing of it; that as there was a readiness to desire it, so there also may be a completion out of what you have. For if there is first a willing mind, it is accepted according to what one has, and not according to what he does not have. For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened; but by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may supply their lack, that their abundance also may supply your lack—that there may be equality. As it is written, ‘He who gathered much had nothing left over, and he who gathered little had no lack.’ But thanks be to God who puts the same earnest care for you into the heart of Titus. For he not only accepted the exhortation, but being more diligent, he went to you of his own

accord. And we have sent with him the brother whose praise is in the gospel throughout all the churches, and not only that, but who was also chosen by the churches to travel with us with this gift, which is administered by us to the glory of the Lord Himself and to show your ready mind, avoiding this: that anyone should blame us in this lavish gift which is administered by us—providing honorable things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men. And we have sent with them our brother whom we have often proved diligent in many things, but now much more diligent, because of the great confidence which we have in you. If anyone inquires about Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker concerning you. Or if our brethren are inquired about, they are messengers of the churches, the glory of Christ. Therefore, show to them, and before the churches the proof of your love and of our boasting on your behalf” (2 Corinthians 8).

Giving

My Uncle Carl (a pastor for over 53 years) used to tell me, “The last thing to get ‘saved’ is your wallet.” Now we know that one can be gifted eternal life without ever opening their wallet or giving a penny... however, the fact is, the statement rings true when we consider spiritual maturity.

Many things change over the lifespan of a believer. The general rule is the external sins of commission go first: drug and alcohol abuse, fornication, theft, etc. Then follows the sins of pride, gossip, deceitfulness/lying, self-will, etc. Lastly, the sins of omission: failure to carefully study the scriptures, taking time for prayer and praise, service, evangelism/outreach, church attendance, etc., but the last thing for many is “giving.” Indeed, “The last thing to get ‘saved’ is your wallet.”

American Christians are among the largest donors over all. However, the percentage of American Christian “givers” pales in contrast to believers in poorer countries.

It seems that many who are less fortunate financially give in greater numbers, and in greater percentages, than the very wealthy. The wealthy may give more in dollars overall, but the dollar per thousand is smaller. For this reason, I believe, God established the tithe: 10% of your increase. This way of giving is equitable and right.

What Could Be Better?

It is said that 80% of the money given to churches in America comes from 20% of the people. (I am sure we are doing better than that here at Candlelight.) It is also said that 80% of the work done in the churches is done by 20% of the people. For us this is still fairly accurate! Why?... because we tend to have more money than time.

We have an average of 2000 people who call Candlelight their home church. However, only an average of 350 people serve on a regular basis. That is 17.5%. Good, but we could do better!

The Wealthy and The Poor

The Corinthians were very wealthy, but needed a little coaching. The Macedonians were poor but eager to give. The poorer believers gave from their lack, but the Corinthians were dragging their feet. Therefore, Paul tested them—through comparison. He wrote, *“I am testing the sincerity of your love by the diligence of others”* (vs. 8b).

When writing, he was actually saying, ‘I am comparing your giving to that of the Macedonians’. However, he also said, *“I speak not by commandment”* (vs. 8a).

The Challenge to Keep their Word

Paul wrote, *“I give advice: It is to your advantage not only to be doing what you began and were desiring to do a year ago; but now you also must complete the doing of it; that as there was a readiness to desire it, so there also may be a completion out of what you have”* (vss. 10–11). Moreover, he wrote, *“For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened; but by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may supply their lack, that their abundance also may supply your lack—that there may be equality”* (vss. 13–14).

Herein he was simply saying, “You wealthy Corinthians should give like the Macedonians—who have little. Then there *will* be equality.”

Paul was not advocating for socialism or communism. He was simply showing the contrast between the Macedonians who had less but were generous, and the Corinthians who had much but did not give in equal proportion. Therefore, he wrote, *“as you abound in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all diligence, and in your love for us—see that you abound in this grace also”* (vs. 7).

Rising to the Occasion

The good news is that it seems the Corinthians rose to the occasion. Therefore, anticipating their gift, he sent a delegation (with Titus) to receive their *“lavish gift”* (vs. 20), and carefully transport it to Jerusalem.

And You Candlelight

I am thankful that so many of you are faithful in your giving. I am also thankful for those who serve. That said, may I ask that those of you who do not give (or do not give as you should), begin to move in the direction of maturity? May I ask that those who do not serve—begin?

Think of what we can do when we all move together! Think of all the ways we can bless the Lord—in giving and service. Consider all we can accomplish when we have the bountiful resources and “laborers for the harvest” needed. God can use us in a powerful way—more so than He is now.

He does not need our money, and does not need our help... however, this is how He has called us to serve. He uses the weak things to confound the wise.

If the last thing to get “saved” is your “wallet,” or the last things to be “saved” is your “labors of love,” then let’s see to it that Candlelight is “saved” to the utmost.

I love you all,
Pastor Paul