

Introduction

1. The early church cared for one another through generous giving:
  - a. READ Acts 2:42-45 and 4:32-35:
    - 1) An isolated reading of 2:42-45 might suggest a form of communal living
    - 2) However, 4:32-35 shows that many still owned possessions (“**anything belonging to him**”)—they simply didn’t consider them their own and sold them as needed to help meet the needs of the poor
  - b. READ Acts 5:1-11:
    - 1) In 4:34 it says that believers would sell their land or homes and bring the “proceeds”, or more literally the actual price of the sale, to the apostles
    - 2) Ananias’s and Sapphira’s sin wasn’t keeping some of the proceeds for themselves, but claiming that they gave **all** of the proceeds to the apostles—see 5:8-9
    - 3) Peter told Ananias that prior to the sale, and even afterwards, he could have done whatever he wanted to do which implies that there was no requirement or expectation that believers sell everything and give it to the church
  - c. The New Testament nowhere commands the re-distribution of wealth (nor did the early church practice it):
    - 1) The church has always been a mix of rich and poor as evidenced by the book of Acts and the Epistles
    - 2) Jesus indicated that there will always be those in need (Matthew 26:11)
  - d. However, God has always expected that His people care for one another through their generosity:
    - 1) The OT Law commanded that the Jews not to harden their hearts toward those in need, but rather to provide for his or her need (READ Deuteronomy 15:7-11)
    - 2) The NT also contains explicit examples and commands regarding caring for those in need
      - a) We have the examples in Acts (above) along with the care of widows in Acts 6
      - b) We have James’ statement that genuine religion is caring for widows and orphans (James 1:27) and his warning against giving lip service to those in need (e.g. “**be warned and be filled**” (James 2:16)
2. We see this reflected on two very specific occasions where Paul collected money from local churches and delivered it to the elders at Jerusalem to help the saints in need:
  - a. The first is found in Acts 11:27-30 and referenced in Galatians 2:10:
    - 1) Shortly after Paul’s conversion, while he was still traveling with Barnabas and before his first missionary journey
    - 2) There had been severe persecution in Jerusalem after the stoning of Stephen and many believers scattered from Jerusalem
    - 3) There was then a severe famine all over Judea as prophesied by Agabus
    - 4) So, the disciples took up collections and sent it to the elders in Jerusalem via Barnabas and Saul

- b. The second time was on Paul’s third missional journey—this is referenced in Romans 15:25-26; 1 Corinthians 16:1-2; and 2 Corinthians 8-9
- 3. Today we are going to look into 2 Corinthians 8-9 where Paul uses the example of the Macedonians generosity to encourage the Corinthians to fulfill their previous promise to help the saints in Jerusalem:
  - a. In chapter 8 (our passage today) we see probably one of the greatest examples of giving in the NT and will discover the principles that should motivate and shape our giving
  - b. In chapter 9 (next week) we will see how giving relates to our relationship with God

A. Paul reflects on the generosity of the Macedonians (8:1-5)

Paul shares at least FIVE principles that were behind the Macedonians generosity

1. The Macedonians gave as an expression of God’s grace (1):
  - a. Most likely the churches in Philippi and Thessalonica
  - b. There are two slightly different renderings of verse 1:
    - 1) NAU and ESV: **“Now, brethren, we wish to make known to you the grace of God which has been given in (among; ESV) the churches of Macedonia”** (Dative of Reference or Respect)—e.g. **“which has been given in relationship to the churches of Macedonia”**
    - 2) NET and others: **“grace of God given to the churches of Macedonia”**
  - c. I believe the context better supports the NAU and ESV—that the Macedonians giving was an expression of God’s grace toward others through them (e.g. the saints in Jerusalem), rather than the NET, etc. which implies that their giving was an act of God’s grace toward the themselves
2. Their generosity came at a time when they were struggling themselves (2): **“that in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality.”**
  - a. According to the book of Acts (16:20; 17:50) and the letters of Philippians (1:29-30) and 1 Thessalonians (1:6; 2:14; 3:3-4) the Macedonians faced significant persecution themselves—Paul refers to it here as **“a great ordeal of affliction”**
  - b. They were experiencing **“deep poverty”** themselves—much like the saints in Jerusalem to whom they were giving
  - c. Yet, in spite of their own affliction and poverty, they had an **“abundance of joy”** which **“overflowed in the wealth of their liberality”** (or generosity)
3. They gave according to their ability, and even beyond their ability (3a): **“For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability...”**:
  - a. **“according to their ability”** implies that each gave what they could—which is the Biblical standard
  - b. **“beyond their ability”** implies that some even gave more than what seemed wise or reasonable (e.g. making sacrifices or giving something up so that they could give)
4. They gave because they were eager to give (3b-4): **“they gave of their own accord, 4 begging us with much urging for the favor of participation in the support of the saints,”**

- a. Their giving was voluntary meaning they didn't need to be coerced or guilted into giving: **"they gave of their own accord"**
  - b. In fact, Paul says that they **begged** him to allow them to participate in the support: **"begging us with much urging"**—it may have been that Paul was reluctant to include them because of their own poverty and hardship
  - c. They considered it a gift and an act of ministry to be able participate: **"for the favor of participation in the support"**
    - 1) Favor (Greek charis "grace")
    - 2) Participation (Greek koinonia "fellowship")
    - 3) Support (Greek diakonia "ministry")
5. They gave as part of their commitment to the Lord...and to Paul (5): **"and this, not as we had expected, but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God."**

B. Paul calls on the Corinthians to fulfill their promise to help support the saints in Jerusalem (8:6-15)
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Paul gives at least THREE reasons why it was important for the Corinthians to give

- 1. Paul sent his letter to Corinth via Titus because he hoped Titus would be able to complete the collection that he had started previously (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."**
- 2. **FIRST**, it was important for them to give because giving is a Christian virtue (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."**
  - a. They abounded in faith
  - b. And utterance (e.g. prophecy)
  - c. And knowledge
  - d. And earnestness
  - e. And love
  - f. Why not **"in this gracious work also"**?
- 3. **SECOND**, it was important for them to give because Paul was testing the sincerity of their love toward others (8): **"I am not speaking this as a command, but as proving through the earnestness of others the sincerity of your love also."**
  - a. Just as the Macedonians gave of their own accord, Paul was not commanding the Corinthians to give
  - b. However, he was **"proving"** (e.g. testing) their love for others by comparing their giving with the **"earnestness of others"** (e.g. the Macedonians)
    - 1) He wanted them to reflect the grace that Jesus Christ offered to them (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."**
    - 2) He wanted them to finishing what they started as the ultimate proof of their love (READ 10-12)
      - a) They were the **"first to begin a year ago"** and should therefore **"also desire to do it"**
      - b) It was now time to make good on their promise (11): **"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."**

4. THIRD, it was important for them to give because it would help bring about equality in the Church (READ 12-16):
- a. Paul was not asking them to give beyond their means, but rather according to what they had (12): **“For if the readiness is present, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have.”**
  - b. His intent was not that they should suffer while providing relief for others (13): **“For this is not for the ease of others and for your affliction...”**
  - c. Rather, Paul was interesting in bringing about a sense of equity or equality among God’s people (13b-15): **“but by way of equality--<sup>14</sup> 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; <sup>15</sup> as it is written, “HE WHO gathered MUCH DID NOT HAVE TOO MUCH, AND HE WHO gathered LITTLE HAD NO LACK.”**
    - 1) Paul is not talking about the redistribution of wealth here—he’s not saying here that we need to pool all our possession and paychecks and live communally
    - 2) He is simply stating that when God provides abundance for one he should share it with those who have need
    - 3) Then, when the one who was in need has been blessed by God with more than he needs, he in turn can share with others who are in need

Giving the extra \$100 to a female college friend for her mission trip after the money was stolen