

THE GRACE OF GIVING

Christian Giving In Paul's Second Epistle To The Corinthians

by Kenneth E. Roberson, Sr.

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I. *Introduction.*

The purpose of this essay is to discuss principles of Christian giving taught in Second Corinthians 8:1-15 and 9:1-7. In those verses, Paul was writing about issues of Christian giving in an “*interchurch*” context, i.e., when *one church* gave to *another* church. For example, in the above verses, Paul was encouraging the church in Corinth to give to the church in Jerusalem. Nonetheless, as we will see, these verses provide guidance to Christian giving in the “*intrachurch*” context, e.g., when *individual Christians* give to a church they attend.

Specifically, as we will see, in 2 Cor. 8:1-15, Paul teaches that Christians are to give as part of a grace of God; when we give as part of a grace of God, our financial wealth or poverty is irrelevant; and, by giving, we can prove the sincerity of our love. Paul also teaches at these verses that we are to give based on what we have; we are to give with a willing mind; and our giving should not cause us to be afflicted.

Moreover, as we will later discuss, in 2 Cor. 9:1-7, Paul teaches that Christians are to give with a willing mind and zeal; our giving is to be a blessing; we should give, not sparingly, but bountifully; and we should give as we purpose in our hearts, not grudgingly, or of necessity, for God loves a cheerful giver.

By way of background, Paul's second missionary journey took him through parts of modern-day Turkey and Greece. The account of Paul's second missionary journey is found at Acts 15:35-18:22.¹ One of the churches Paul founded during his second missionary journey was the church in the city of Corinth (Acts 18:1-18) which, in Paul's day, was in the Roman province of Achaia in Greece. Like Paul's second missionary journey, his third missionary journey also took him through parts of modern-day Turkey and Greece. The account of Paul's third missionary journey is found at Acts 18:23-21:3. One of the reasons Paul made his third missionary journey was to strengthen the disciples whom he had converted to Christianity during his second missionary journey. (Acts 18:23.)

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¹ Unless otherwise indicated, Scriptural references are to the King James Version.

However, another reason Paul made his third missionary journey was to take up a collection for the needy church in Jerusalem, and one of Paul's destinations during his third missionary journey was, again, Corinth (see Acts 20:2). During Paul's third missionary journey, but before he arrived in Corinth, Paul wrote First Corinthians and Second Corinthians to the church in Corinth. Paul wrote First Corinthians from the city of Ephesus in the Roman province of Asia in modern-day Turkey. (1 Cor. 16:8, 19.) Paul wrote Second Corinthians in the Roman province of Macedonia in Greece.² Both epistles evidence Paul's purpose to take up a collection which would minister to the needy saints in Jerusalem. (1 Cor. 16:1-3; 2 Cor. 8:1-7; 9:1-2, 12; [see also Rom. 15:25-26, 30-31, written to the church in Rome after the collection occurred but before it was delivered to Jerusalem].) Accordingly, as we will see, Second Corinthians can offer important insights guiding Christian giving today.

We will begin with 2 Cor. 8:1-15, and proceed in two phases. In the first phase, we will identify *what Paul said* in Greek, using the process outlined below.

The New Testament, and Second Corinthians in particular, were written in Greek. The KJV translation of the New Testament is, of course, on the whole, a fine translation of the Greek but, as will be shown below, on some occasions its translation of the Greek could be more accurate. Thus, in the first phase of our discussion of 2 Cor. 8:1-15, we will endeavor to identify accurately what Paul said in the Greek. To this end, our discussion will quote those verses from the KJV. We will underline certain English words which the KJV uses in those verses to translate certain Greek words used by Paul. The underlined words will be discussed in order and, as to some, we will examine whether they accurately reflect what Paul said in the Greek. Finally, we will bring together the fruit of our discussions by quoting 2 Cor. 8:1-15 again, this time modified, where appropriate, to reflect accurately *what Paul said* in the Greek.

In the second phase, and based on our determination of what Paul said to the Corinthians about the collection for the Jerusalem saints, we will discuss the *guidance*, briefly summarized earlier, that 2 Cor. 8:1-15 provide to Christian giving today. In our later discussion of 2 Cor. 9:1-17, we will employ the same two-phase process.

II. *2 Cor. 8:1-15 And Guidance On Christian Giving.*

A. *What Paul Said At 2 Cor. 8:1-15.*

At 2 Cor. 8:1-15, Paul wrote:

² Three facts provide evidence of this. First, 2 Cor. 2:12-13, and 7:5, indicate that Paul had traveled as far as Macedonia by the time he wrote 2 Cor. Second, 2 Cor. 8 discusses Paul's collection of money from the churches of Macedonia. Third, 2 Cor. 9:2 states ". . . I boast . . . to them of Macedonia[]" (present tense in English and Greek), indicating he was in Macedonia at the time of the boasting and, therefore, at the time of the writing of 2 Cor.

“(1) Moreover, brethren, we do you to wit of the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia; (2) How that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality. (3) For to their power, I bear record, yea, and beyond their power they were willing of themselves; (4) Praying us with much intreaty that we would receive the gift, and take upon us the fellowship of the ministering to the saints. (5) And this they did, not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God. (6) Insomuch that we desired Titus, that as he had begun, so he would also finish in you the same grace also. (7) Therefore, as ye abound in every thing, in faith, and utterance, and knowledge, and in all diligence, and in your love to us, see that ye abound in this grace also. (8) I speak not by commandment, but by occasion of the forwardness of others, and to prove the sincerity of your love. (9) For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich. (10) And herein I give my advice: for this is expedient for you, who have begun before, not only to do, but also to be forward a year ago. (11) Now therefore perform the doing of it; that as there was a readiness to will, so there may be a performance also out of that which ye have. (12) For if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not. (13) For I mean not that other men be eased, and ye be burdened: (14) But by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may be a supply for their want, that their abundance also may be a supply for your want; that there may be equality: (15) As it is written, He that had gathered much had nothing over; and he that had gathered little had no lack.”

First, 2 Cor. 8:1, says, “Moreover, brethren, we do you to wit of . . .” This can also be translated (as it is in the New American Standard Bible (NASB)), “Now, brethren, *we wish to make known to you . . .*”

Second, when Paul used the word “grace” in the phrase “grace of God” at 2 Cor. 8:1, he was not referring merely to “grace” generally (e.g., 2 Cor. 1:2), or to the “grace” of God which brings “salvation to all men[.]” (Titus 2:11, (NASB).) The topic of 2 Cor. 8 is not salvation, but the collection for the Jerusalem saints. Moreover, the grace at issue at 2 Cor. 8:1 was not given to all men, but to the churches of Macedonia. As we will later see, at 2 Cor. 8:1, Paul was referring, not to grace generally, but to a very *specific* grace.³ We will later identify what that “grace” was.

³ One certainly gets the sense that Paul was using the word “grace” to refer to a specific grace when, after saying that a “grace” had been bestowed on the Macedonians (2 Cor. 8:1), Paul told the *Corinthians* that he wanted Titus to “finish in you the *same* grace” (2 Cor. 8:6), and wanted them to “abound in *this* grace[.]” (2 Cor. 8:7.) And Paul clearly had a specific grace in mind when he referred at 2 Cor. 8:9 to the “grace” of Christ. In context, that “grace” was the fact that, though He was rich, He *became poor* for our benefit.

Third, 2 Cor. 8:1, uses the phrase “bestowed on[.]” This can also be translated “*which has been given in[.]*” as it is translated in the NASB.

Fourth, 2 Cor. 8:2 contains the word “liberality.” The word “liberality” at 2 Cor. 8:2 is a translation of the Greek word “aplotetos” (Gk.: “απλοτητος”).⁴ One well-known Greek-English lexicon observes that the word “aplotetos” can convey the ideas of “simplicity, *sincerity*, uprightness, or frankness.”⁵ As we have mentioned, the KJV translates “aplotetos” at 2 Cor. 8:2 as “liberality.” But the lexicon states, “This sense is *in dispute*, however, and it is possible that the [meaning] *sincere concern* is sufficient for the passages”⁶

This is significant because if one translates “aplotetos” as “liberality” (as the KJV does), the word “liberality” can suggest that Paul was focusing, not merely on the Macedonians’ *inner virtue* of “sincere concern,” but on their *outward* expression of that “sincere concern,” i.e., their *gift*. On the other hand, if “aplotetos” is translated as “sincere concern,” the term “aplotetos” itself focuses solely on an *inner* virtue, i.e., the fact that the Macedonians were *sincere*, apart from any outward expression of that sincerity.

Of course, even if “sincere concern” is a better translation of the Greek word “aplotetos,” and even if “sincere concern” does not, by itself, imply a gift, 2 Cor. 8:2 is part of Paul’s discussion of the collection for the Jerusalem saints, and Paul is mindful of the Macedonians’ gift.

There is no need to decide whether “aplotetos” should be translated “sincere concern” or “liberality.” Even the term “liberality” implies the *inner* virtue of generosity. The point is that, whether “aplotetos” is translated “sincere concern” or “liberality” (KJV), Paul was *not* concerned merely with the *fact* of the gift, but with the *sincerity* with which it was given.

Fifth, 2 Cor. 8:4, in the KJV, contains the phrase “praying us[.]” However, the Greek word translated “us” means, here, “of us.”⁷ Thus, the phrase “praying us” is, as we will see, better translated, “praying *of* us[.]”

Sixth, 2 Cor. 8:4 contains the phrase, “that we would receive[.]” The phrase “that we would receive” is a translation of the Greek phrase “deksasthai hemas” (Gk.:

⁴ George Ricker Berry, *The Interlinear KJV Parallel New Testament In Greek And English* (Reading, Pa.: Handy Book Co., 1897; rpt. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House), p. 479.

⁵ Walter Bauer, *A Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2nd ed. (William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich; revised & augmtd. by F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979) (hereafter, BAGD), p. 85, some italics omitted.

⁶ Ibid., first italics added.

⁷ Berry, p. 479. The Greek word is “hemon” (Gk.: “ημων”).

δεξασθαι ημας”).⁸ However, the best manuscript evidence reveals that this Greek phrase is nowhere found in what Paul actually wrote at 2 Cor. 8:4.⁹ Therefore, the phrase “that we would receive” should be omitted. Accordingly, at 2 Cor. 8:4, neither the NASB nor the New International Version (NIV) contains the phrase “that we would receive,” or any other translation of the phrase “deksasthai hemas.”

Seventh, alternate translations of the Greek term translated “gift” at 2 Cor. 8:4 should be considered. The word “gift” at 2 Cor. 8:4 is a translation of the Greek word “charin,”¹⁰ a form of the Greek word “charis” (Gk.: “χαρις”).¹¹ But “charis” or one of its forms is translated “grace” at 2 Cor. 8:1, 6, 7, and 9.¹² Thus, the Greek word “charin” at 2 Cor. 8:4 can be translated “grace” or “favor,”¹³ and not merely “gift.” In fact, at 2 Cor. 8:4, “charin” is translated “favor” by the NASB.

Eighth, it should be noted that no one knows whether punctuation was used by the authors of the New Testament,¹⁴ such as Paul. This is true, therefore, of the comma “,” that follows the word “gift” at 2 Cor. 8:4 in the KJV.

Ninth, the word “and” at 2 Cor. 8:4 is a translation of the Greek word “kai” (Gk.: “και”).¹⁵ Depending on the context, the word “kai” can be translated “and,” “also,” or “even.”¹⁶ For reasons we will discuss later, we will translate “kai” as “even” in our modified translation below.

Tenth, the phrase “take upon us” at 2 Cor. 8:4 should be omitted. This phrase was added by the King James translators and is not a translation of words which Paul wrote in Greek.¹⁷ This is why, in most King James versions, this phrase in 2 Cor. 8:4 is in italics.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Kurt Aland, et al., eds., The Greek New Testament, 3rd Ed. (Germany: United Bible Societies, 1983), p. 635; Berry, p. 479, fn. p. One commentator observes that “deksasthai hemas” “is an unintelligent gloss found in . . . inferior authorities.” Alfred Plummer, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary On The Second Epistle Of St. Paul To The Corinthians, The International Critical Commentary (New York: 1915; rpt. Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1951), p. 236.

¹⁰ Berry, p. 479.

¹¹ BAGD, p. 877, no. 2.a.

¹² At 2 Cor. 8:1, 6, and 9, in the KJV, the word “grace” is a translation of the Greek word “charin” (Gk.: “χαριν”). Berry, at pp. 479-480. At 2 Cor. 8:7, the word “grace” is a translation of the Greek word “chariti” (Gk.: “χαριτι”). Berry, at p. 480. All of these are forms of “charis.”

¹³ BAGD, p. 877.

¹⁴ Friedrich Blass and Albert Debrunner, A Greek Grammar Of The New Testament And Other Early Christian Literature (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1961), p. 10.

¹⁵ Berry, p. 479.

¹⁶ H. E. Dana and Julius R. Mantey, A Manual Grammar Of The Greek New Testament (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1955), p. 250.

¹⁷ Aland, p. 635; Berry, p. 479.

Eleventh, the word “fellowship” at 2 Cor. 8:4 is a form of the Greek word “koinonia” (Gk.: “κοινωνια.”)¹⁸ “Koinonia” can convey the ideas of “association, communion, fellowship, close relationship” and “participation, sharing . . . in someth[ing].”¹⁹

Twelfth, at 2 Cor. 8:8, we find the word “forwardness.” It is a translation of the Greek word “spoudes” (Gk. “σπουδης”).²⁰ The word “spoudes” or a form thereof, is, elsewhere in 2 Cor., translated “carefulness” (7:11), “care” (7:12), “diligence” (8:7), and “earnest care” (8:16).²¹ In the NASB and NIV, the Greek word “spoudes” at 2 Cor. 8:8 is translated “earnestness.”

We can now modify 2 Cor. 8:1-15 in the KJV in light of our above discussed 12 points. Our modification will more accurately reflect *what* Paul said in Greek, and we will italicize our modifications below. At those verses, Paul said,

“(1) Moreover, brethren, *we wish to make known to you* the grace of God *which has been given in* the churches of Macedonia; (2) How that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their *sincere concern* [or liberality]. (3) For to their power, I bear record, yea, and beyond their power they were willing of themselves; (4) Praying *of us* with much intreaty the *grace even* the fellowship of the ministering to the saints. (5) And this they did, not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God. (6) Insomuch that we desired Titus, that as he had begun, so he would also finish in you the same grace also. (7) Therefore, as ye abound in every thing, in faith, and utterance, and knowledge, and in all diligence, and in your love to us, see that ye abound in this grace also. (8) I speak not by commandment, but by occasion of the *earnestness* of others, and to prove the sincerity of your love. (9) For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich. (10) And herein I give my advice: for this is expedient for you, who have begun before, not only to do, but also to be forward a year ago. (11) Now therefore perform the doing of it; that as there was a readiness to will, so there may be a performance also out of that which ye have. (12) For if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not. (13) For I mean not that other men be eased, and ye be burdened: (14) But by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may be a supply for their want, that their abundance also may be a supply for your want; that there may be equality: (15) As it is written, He that had gathered much had nothing over; and he that had gathered little had no lack.”

¹⁸ George V. Wigram and Ralph D. Winter, *The Word Study Concordance* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1972), p. 427.

¹⁹ BAGD, pp. 438-439, nos. 1, 4; italics omitted.

²⁰ Berry, p. 480.

²¹ Wigram and Winter, p. 697.

B. *Guidance On Christian Giving.*

Based on our more accurate translation of 2 Cor. 8:1-15 above, what guidance to Christian giving may we glean from those verses?

1. *Give As Part Of A Grace Of God.*

As mentioned, at 2 Cor. 8:1-15, Paul is discussing the collection for the Jerusalem saints and boasting to the Corinthian Christians about the Macedonian Christians. Yet, the striking thing is that when Paul boasts about the Macedonians in 2 Cor. 8:1-15, he emphasizes *inner* virtues, that is, not the *actual* gift, but the *inner* joy and zeal that *motivated* the gift.

Thus, Paul talks about the “abundance of . . . joy” (8:2) of the Macedonians, and the “riches of their sincere *concern* [or liberality]” (8:2). He says that the Macedonians were “*willing of themselves*” (8:3). That is, the Macedonians were not only *willing*, but their willingness *originated in them*, without external prompting from Paul. Moreover, it was obvious to Paul that *God* had touched the hearts of the Macedonians, since “beyond *their* power they were willing . . .” (8:3). They were “praying” (8:4). They were “intreat[ing]” (8:4), literally begging. They first gave *themselves* to the Lord and to Paul (8:5). And Paul spoke of their “earnestness” (8:8).

In light of the above then, what was the “grace of God” in the Macedonian churches? The above facts provide evidence that the “grace of God” which had been given to the churches of Macedonia was the *God-given inner virtues of joy and zeal which motivated* the Macedonians to give, and *which were brought to fruition* in the Macedonians’ actual *gift* to the Jerusalem saints. Doubtless Paul would boast today about Christians whose gifts of money (and good deeds generally) are motivated by the God-given joy and zeal possessed by the Macedonians and, to the extent these things were lacking, Paul would encourage Christians today to “finish in [themselves] the same grace[.]” (2 Cor. 8:6.)

2. *When You Give As Part Of A Grace Of God, Financial Wealth Or Poverty Is Irrelevant.*

At 2 Cor. 8:1-2, Paul made clear that, during a great trial of affliction, the Macedonians abounded in joy and *deep* poverty. The word “deep” at 2 Cor. 8:2, is a translation of the Greek word “bathous” (Gk.: “βαθους”).²² Our word “bathysphere” is based in part on “bathous.” The word “bathysphere” is a combination of “bathy” (deep) and “sphere.”²³ “Bathy” is based on “bathous.”

²² Berry, p. 479.

²³ Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, 10th Ed. (1995), p. 97; see entry for the prefix “bathy-”.

A “bathysphere” is a *deep*-sea diving chamber. If we keep in mind the depths of the sea, we may have an illustration of the depths of the Macedonians’ poverty.

2 Cor. 8:1-2 prove that the fact that the Macedonians became Christians did not mean that they would no longer experience economic poverty. Similarly, the fact that a person becomes a Christian today does not mean that he or she will no longer experience economic poverty. These two verses are some of the many Scriptural verses that nail the lid on the coffin of a popular teaching today that, when one becomes a Christian, affliction and economic poverty become things of the past. The churches of Macedonia were started by the apostle Paul himself during his *second* missionary journey. However, years later, they continued to experience deep economic poverty at the time of Paul’s *third* missionary journey. For it was during that journey that Paul took the Macedonian Christians’ contribution to the collection for the Jerusalem saints, a contribution given by the Macedonians in their “deep poverty.”

Parenthetically, it is well to remember that Paul not only collected money from saints in Macedonia who were in deep “poverty” (2 Cor. 8:2), but he intended to give the money to saints in Jerusalem who were “poor” (Rom. 15:26). Interestingly, the word “poverty” at 2 Cor. 8:2 is a translation of the Greek word “ptoxeia” (Gk.: “πτοχεια”).²⁴ And the word “poor” used to refer to the Jerusalem saints at Rom. 15:26 is a translation of a form of the Greek word “ptokos” (Gk.: “πτοχος”).²⁵ The Greek word “ptoxeia” is derived from “ptokos.”²⁶ Thus, the Greek word used to refer to the “poverty” of the saints in Macedonia is directly related to the word used to refer to the “poor” saints in Jerusalem.

The church in Jerusalem existed years before Paul became a Christian and, of course, before Paul founded the churches in Macedonia during his *second* missionary journey. Yet, at the time of Paul’s *third* missionary journey, there were still “poor” saints in the Jerusalem church, the church started by Jesus Christ Himself. The fact, then, that a person becomes a Christian is no guarantee that he or she will be immunized from financial poverty.

Returning to the Macedonians’ giving, we note that the spiritual principles which Paul was teaching concerning giving were applicable no matter what a person’s financial state was. When Paul wrote to the Corinthians, he did not belittle the Macedonian Christians because of their deep economic poverty, *but boasted of the abundance of their joy in the midst* of that poverty. Paul spoke of the Macedonian Christians’ “riches,” not because their gift was small or large in amount, and not because the Macedonian

²⁴ Berry, p. 479.

²⁵ Berry, p. 433.

²⁶ Wigram and Winter, p. 673.

Christians were themselves financially rich, but because of the “*riches*” of the *sincerity and generosity of spirit* with which the Macedonians gave.

Similarly, Christians today should give with an *abundance of joy*. If Paul were here today, he would boast when Christians gave, not because we gave a certain amount or percentage, and not because we were financially poor or rich, but because we gave with a *God-given joy and zeal* whatever amount we gave. Let us complete in ourselves “this same grace,” whether we are financially rich or poor.

3. *The Opportunity To Participate In Giving Is Itself A Grace.*

According to our modified translation, 2 Cor. 8:4 says, “Praying of us with much intreaty the grace even the fellowship of the ministering to the saints.” What was *this* “grace?” As we will see, Paul taught that this “grace” was the *opportunity to share, or participate, in the collection for the Jerusalem saints by giving*. Several points will make this clear.

First, the phrase “[p]raying of us . . . the grace even the fellowship of the ministering to the saints[.]” from our modified translation suggests that the Macedonian Christians wanted something *from* Paul, and that what they wanted was “the grace even the fellowship” of the ministering to the saints.

Second, as mentioned, the word “grace” at 2 Cor. 8:4 (in our modified translation) is a translation of a form of the Greek word “charis.” As we have seen, a form of “charis” was translated “grace” at 2 Cor. 8:1. Just as Paul records at 2 Cor. 8:1 that God had *given* a “grace” to the Macedonian Christians, so here at 2 Cor. 8:4, Paul may be viewed as teaching that the Macedonian Christians wanted a “grace” *from* Paul. Thus, there were two different “graces”: the one God had given to the Macedonians, and the one the Macedonians sought from Paul.

Third, as we have mentioned, the Greek word “charis” can be translated “grace” or “*favor*.”

Fourth, as we have also mentioned, at 2 Cor. 8:4, the Greek word “kai” can be translated “and,” as it is translated in the KJV. However, the word “kai” can also be translated “even.” In our modified translation of 2 Cor. 8:4, we have translated “kai” as “even,” resulting in the phrase, “the grace *even* the fellowship[.]” One reason is that the translation “the grace *and* the fellowship” suggests that the grace is distinct from the fellowship. But this translation suffers from the problem that, if they are distinct, Paul does not explain how. The translation “the grace *even* the fellowship” conveys the idea that the grace *is* the fellowship.

Fifth, as we have seen, the Greek word translated “fellowship” can also be translated “participation, sharing . . . in someth[ing].” Thus, the idea of “the grace *even* the fellowship” conveys the idea of the grace *of participating or sharing in* the ministry to the Jerusalem saints.

Thus, the NASB translates 2 Cor. 8:4 as “begging us with much entreaty for the *favor of participation* in the support of the saints[.]” The NIV translates 2 Cor. 8:4 as “they urgently pleaded with us for the *privilege of sharing in* this service to the saints.

What then was the “grace” of 2 Cor. 8:4 in our modified translation? The grace or favor was the *opportunity to share, or participate, in the collection for the Jerusalem saints*. This was the grace or favor that the Macedonians begged from Paul. Paul referred to the opportunity to participate in the collection as itself a “grace” or “favor.” The Macedonians already had a “grace of God” in their God-given joy and zeal to give, brought to fruition in their actual gift. The Macedonians sought an additional grace from Paul—the opportunity to participate in the collection for the Jerusalem saints. Christians today would do well to view the opportunity they have to give as a “grace.”

4. “*Prove The Sincerity Of Your Love.*”

It is clear from 2 Cor. 8:8-10 that one thing Paul was *not* doing was *commanding* the Corinthians to give to the collection for the Jerusalem saints. He said at 2 Cor. 8:8, “I speak not by commandment,” and said at 2 Cor. 8:10, “herein I give my advice.” Instead, Paul took the opportunity of the collection to test the sincerity of the love of the Corinthians. If Paul had commanded the Corinthians to give, he would not have been able to determine with certainty the *source of their motivation* for giving. He would not have been able to determine the extent to which the Corinthians’ giving was motivated merely by a sense of obligation, or by a sincere love. By refraining from commanding the Corinthians, Paul would lay bare the true motivations and hearts of the Corinthians, and permit them to prove the sincerity of their love.

Paul did not command the Corinthians, but challenged them. He appealed not only to the earnestness of the impassioned Macedonian giving, but to the grace of Christ Himself. The grace of Christ was, of course, infinitely greater than the grace of the Macedonians. The Macedonians were *already poor* at the time they gave *money* to the collection for the *Jerusalem saints*. But Christ was *already rich* when He *became poor* and gave *Himself* at Calvary for us *all*. And if the grace of the Macedonians towards the Jerusalem saints was replete with “abundance of . . . joy,” “riches of . . . sincere concern,” “willingness,” and “eagerness,” how much more the grace of Christ towards us?

Christians today should give, not only motivated by the example of the *earnestness* of other Christians who give (including the example of the earnestness of the Macedonian

Christians), but motivated by the example of the *grace of Christ* toward us all. By so doing, we can “prove the sincerity” of our love.

5. *Give Based On What You Have.*

At 2 Cor. 8:11, Paul wrote that he wanted “performance . . . *out* of that which ye *have*.” This reinforces our discussion about 1 Cor. 16:2 in our essay *Christian Giving In Paul’s First Epistle To The Corinthians*, where we observed that Paul wanted each Christian to set aside an amount for the collection based on how he or she had *in fact* prospered. Here at 2 Cor. 8:11, Paul did not direct the Corinthians to perform out of what they did *not* have, or to *pledge* some amount that they merely hoped they would have in the future, but to perform *out* of “that which ye *have*.” Similarly, Christians today can, first, intelligently determine what they *have*, then, second, decide how much to give.

6. *Give With A Willing Mind.*

2 Cor. 8:11-12 reflect that Paul was constantly concerned about inner motivations, and not merely about outward deeds. He wanted the Corinthians to “perform the doing of it” (8:11), i.e., give money to the collection for the Jerusalem saints, but also wanted them to do so with a “willing mind” (8:12). If the Corinthians had a “willing mind,” what they gave was accepted “according to that a man hath” (8:12), i.e., based on the resources possessed by the Christian. The fact that they did not have *greater* resources from which to give was *irrelevant* as long as what they gave they gave with a willing mind. *The gift is accepted if it is the product of a willing mind.* Similarly, Paul would commend those Christians today who not only give, but give with a “willing mind.”

7. *Giving Should Not Cause Us Tribulation.*

At 2 Cor. 8:13, Paul wrote, “For I mean not that other men be eased, and ye be *burdened*[.]” The word “burdened” is a translation of the Greek word “*thlipsis*” (Gk.: “*θλιψις*”).²⁷ One well-known lexicon observes that “*thlipsis*” can convey the ideas of “oppression, affliction, tribulation.”²⁸

To get a fuller sense of the meaning of the word “*thlipsis*,” it is useful to consider the other words which the KJV uses to translate “*thlipsis*” in Paul’s letters. In the various verses in which Paul uses “*thlipsis*,” or a form of that word, in his letters, the KJV translates that word “tribulation,” “tribulations,” “trouble,” “affliction,” or “afflictions.”²⁹ Elsewhere in the New Testament, it is similarly translated in the KJV “tribulation,”

²⁷ Berry, p. 480.

²⁸ BAGD, p. 362, italics omitted.

²⁹ Wigram and Winter, p. 376.

“afflicted,” “affliction,” “afflictions,” “anguish,” or “persecution.”³⁰ 2 Cor. 8:13 is the only verse in the New Testament in which “thlipsis” is translated “burdened” by the KJV.³¹

Paul was encouraging the Corinthians to contribute to the collection for the Jerusalem saints. But he was also telling the Corinthians at 2 Cor. 8:13 that he did not want the contributions of the Corinthians to cause them to be burdened. Paul did not want the Corinthians’ giving to cause them to experience “trouble,” “tribulation,” or “affliction.”

Paul was writing under the inspiration of God. (2 Tim. 3:16.) *God was telling the Corinthians not to give so much that it would burden them, that is, get them into “trouble” or cause them “tribulation” or “affliction.”*

Needless to say, many churches today present correct and Scriptural teaching on principles of Christian giving. But Christians today are also exposed to a variety of manipulative efforts from some pastors and churches to get Christians’ money. The manipulative techniques are as numerous as the imaginations of the greedy, and run the heretical gamut from the carrot of a false promise of instant financial reward or physical healing if you give, to the stick of instant condemnation from God if you don’t give. All too frequently, pastors and church leaders are “eased” and Christian laity are “burdened.”

One manipulative teaching is that God is not pleased with Christian giving unless Christians are giving “sacrificially,” *meaning*, “until it hurts” or until giving becomes difficult. But God told the opposite to the Corinthians when He taught through Paul that they were *not* to give so much that it would cause them to be “burdened,” that is, they were not to give so much that it would get them into financial “trouble” or cause them “tribulation” or “affliction.” Similarly, mature Christian giving does not require that Christians give to such an extent that it causes Christians to be burdened, or to experience financial “trouble,” “tribulation,” or “affliction.”

III. 2 Cor. 9:1-7 And Guidance On Christian Giving.

As we did with 2 Cor. 8:1-15, we will proceed in two phases with our examination of 2 Cor. 9:1-7. First, we will determine *what* Paul said in the Greek at those verses. Second, we will discuss the guidance those verses provide in connection with Christian giving today. As mentioned, here Paul teaches that Christians are to give with a willing mind and zeal; our giving is to be a blessing; we should give, not sparingly, but bountifully; and we should give as we purpose in our hearts, not grudgingly, or of necessity, for God loves a cheerful giver.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

A. *What Paul Said At 2 Cor. 9:1-7.*

At 2 Cor. 9:1-7, Paul said:

(1) For as touching the ministering to the saints, it is superfluous for me to write to you: (2) For I know the forwardness of your mind, for which I boast of you to them of Macedonia, that Achaia was ready a year ago; and your zeal hath provoked very many. (3) Yet have I sent the brethren, lest our boasting of you should be in vain in this behalf; that, as I said, ye may be ready: (4) Lest haply if they of Macedonia come with me, and find you unprepared, we (that we say not, ye) should be ashamed in this same confident boasting. (5) Therefore I thought it necessary to exhort the brethren, that they would go before unto you, and make up beforehand your bounty, whereof ye had notice before, that the same might be ready, as a matter of bounty, and not as of covetousness. (6) But this I say, he which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. (7) Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver.”

First, at 2 Cor. 9:2, we find the phrase “forwardness of your mind[.]” That phrase is a translation of a form of the Greek word “prothumia” (Gk. “προθυμια”).³² One well-known lexicon reflects that “prothumia” conveys the ideas of “willingness, readiness, and good will.”³³ The word “prothumia,” or a form thereof, is used by Paul only in 2 Cor., where it is also translated “readiness” (8:11), “willing mind” (8:12), and “ready mind” (8:19).³⁴ At 2 Cor. 9:2, a form of the word “prothumia” is translated “readiness” in the NASB, and “eagerness” in the NIV.

Second, the word “bounty” is used twice in 2 Cor. 9:5. The word “bountifully” is used twice in 2 Cor. 9:6. Both words rely, at least in part, on forms of the same Greek word. The word “bounty” is a translation of a form of the Greek word “eulogia” (Gk.: “εὐλογία”).³⁵ The word “bountifully” is a translation of the Greek phrase “ep eulogiais” (Gk.: “ἐπ εὐλογιαῖς”).³⁶

“Eulogia,” and the related phrase “ep eulogiais,” are used by Paul nine times.³⁷ As we have seen, a form of “eulogia” is used twice at 2 Cor. 9:5, and the phrase “ep

³² Berry, p. 481.

³³ BAGD, p. 706, italics omitted.

³⁴ Wigram and Winter, p. 655.

³⁵ Berry, pp. 481-482.

³⁶ Berry, p. 482.

³⁷ Wigram and Winter, p. 324.

eulogiais” is used twice at 2 Cor. 9:6. But “eulogia” is used five other times by Paul, including four times when it is translated “blessing” or “blessings.”³⁸

“Eulogia” at 2 Cor. 9:5 can be translated “blessing.”³⁹ The phrase “ep eulogiais” at 2 Cor. 9:6 can be translated “on blessings,”⁴⁰ and the phrase means “generously.”⁴¹

Third, the word “purposeth” at 2 Cor. 9:7 is a translation of a Greek word in the Greek perfect tense.⁴² The Greek word translated “purposeth” refers to a “deliberate choosing.”⁴³

Based on the above discussion, 2 Cor. 9:5-6 can be translated,

(1) For as touching the ministering to the saints, it is superfluous for me to write to you: (2) For I know *your readiness*, for which I boast of you to them of Macedonia, that Achaia was ready a year ago; and your zeal hath provoked very many. (3) Yet have I sent the brethren, lest our boasting of you should be in vain in this behalf; that, as I said, ye may be ready: (4) Lest haply if they of Macedonia come with me, and find you unprepared, we (that we say not, ye) should be ashamed in this same confident boasting. (5) Therefore I thought it necessary to exhort the brethren, that they would go before unto you, and make up beforehand your *blessing*, whereof ye had notice before, that the same might be ready, as a matter of *blessing*, and not as of covetousness. (6) But this I say, he which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth *on blessings* shall reap also *on blessings*.”⁴⁴ (7) Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver.”

B. *Guidance On Christian Giving.*

With the above as background, what guidance do these verses provide to Christian giving today?

³⁸ Wigram and Winter, p. 324. Those four times are at Rom. 15:29; 1 Cor. 10:16; Gal. 3:14; and Eph. 1:3. The word “eulogia” or a form thereof is, on one occasion, translated “fair speeches” (Rom. 16:18).

³⁹ Berry, at pp. 481-482; BAGD, at pp. 322-323.

⁴⁰ Berry, at p. 482.

⁴¹ Fritz Rienecker, *Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament*, ed. Cleon Rogers (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1980), p. 483.

⁴² Barbara Friberg and Timothy Friberg, eds. *Analytical Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981), p. 565. The Greek word is “proeretai” (Gk.: “προηρηται”). (Ibid.)

⁴³ Rienecker, p. 483.

⁴⁴ See Berry, pp. 481-482, who uses the word “blessing” instead of “bounty” at 2 Cor. 9:5 and “on blessings” instead of “bountifully” in his translation of 2 Cor. 9:6. As mentioned, “eulogia” is twice translated “bounty” in 2 Cor. 9:5. BAGD indicates that the first time “eulogia” is used in 2 Cor. 9:5, it can be translated “blessing,” and possibly “bounty.” (BAGD, pp. 322-323, no. 3.b.β.) BAGD indicates that the second time “eulogia” is used in 2 Cor. 9:5, it can be translated “bounty,” and possibly “blessing.” (Id. at p. 323, no. 5.)

1. *Give With A Willing Mind And Zeal.*

In our previous discussion of 2 Cor. 8:1-15, we observed that Paul emphasized, not the Macedonians' actual gift, but the inner joy and zeal that motivated their gift. Here at 2 Cor. 9:2, Paul continues to emphasize inner motivations, this time, those of the Corinthians themselves. At 2 Cor. 9:2 (in our modified translation), Paul told the Corinthians, "I know your readiness[.]" Paul commended the Corinthians for their readiness to give. And, at 2 Cor. 9:2, Paul also commended the Corinthians for their "zeal." Similarly, Christians today should give with *readiness of mind*, and with zeal.

2. *Our Giving Is To Be A Blessing.*

At 2 Cor. 9:5 (in our modified translation), Paul twice spoke of the "blessing" the Corinthians would provide. The Corinthians' contribution would be a "blessing," not because it would be large or small in *amount*, but because it would be given as a *blessing*.

Thus, the concept of "blessing" that Paul twice refers to at 2 Cor. 9:5 (in our modified translation) cannot be divorced from Paul's continuing emphasis on *inner motivations* for giving. This emphasis on inner motivations is further demonstrated by Paul's contrast of "blessing" and "covetousness." Paul says at 2 Cor. 9:5 in our modified translation that he wanted the blessing ready "as a matter of blessing, and *not as of covetousness*." Covetousness is an *inner* motivation. Paul did not want the Corinthians to give and, at the same time, covet the money that they gave. Similarly, when Christians give today, they should give what they give as a "blessing," not coveting the money that they give.

3. *Give, Not Sparingly, But Bountifully.*

At 2 Cor. 9:6 in our modified translation, Paul says, "But this I say, He which soweth *sparingly* shall reap also *sparingly*; and he which soweth on blessings shall reap also on blessings." But what does it mean to "soweth sparingly"?

It is noteworthy that Paul did *not* say, "He which soweth *a little amount* shall reap also *a little amount*[.]" If anything is clear from our discussions thus far, Paul emphasizes *inner virtues that motivate* a gift, not the *amount* of a gift. Paul's admonition against sowing "sparingly" does not change that.

The word "sparingly" is an adverb. It modifies a verb, i.e., a word describing an *action*. The word "sparingly" is a translation of a Greek word which means "'in a miserly manner.'"⁴⁵ This focuses, not on the *amount* a person gives, but on the *way* a

⁴⁵ Rienecker, p. 483, italics added. The Greek word is "pheidomenos" ("φειδομενως"). (Ibid.)

person gives. A small or large amount of money can be given in a miserly manner. As an obvious example, \$100,000 is a large amount of money, but it can be given in a miserly manner if it is given with a miserly state of mind.

The context of 2 Cor. 9:6 gives us clues as to certain motivations which might be operating in the person who sows “sparingly.” Accordingly, at 2 Cor. 9:5, Paul admonished against giving from *covetousness*. The Corinthians were not to give and, at the same time, covet the money they gave. At 2 Cor. 9:7, Paul told the Corinthians not to give *grudgingly*. He also told the Corinthians at that verse not to give “*of necessity*.” That is, the Corinthians were not to give based on compulsion or obligation. We will explore 2 Cor. 9:7 later. It is sufficient to note now that Paul suggests that Corinthians who sowed “sparingly” might give with covetousness, grudgingly, and of necessity. Clearly, Christians today should avoid sowing “sparingly.”

But what does it mean to “soweth on blessings”?

Paul did *not* say, “He which soweth *a large amount* shall reap also *a large amount*[.]” As we have seen, the phrase “on blessings” is a translation of a Greek phrase which means “generously.” This too focuses, not on the *amount* a person gives, but on the *way* a person gives. A small or large amount of money can be given generously. A dollar is a small amount of money but, as the widow who gave her two mites (Mk. 12:41-44) demonstrated, a small amount can be given generously; she willingly gave all that she had.

Of course, this does *not* mean that a person “soweth on blessings” *only* when one gives all that he or she has to a church. For example, at 1 Tim. 5:8, Paul wrote, “. . . if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.” One cannot provide for one’s own and, at the same time, give all that one has to the church.

The context of 2 Cor. 9:6 gives us a clue as to a motivation which can operate in the person who sows “on blessings,” that is, generously. At 2 Cor. 9:7, Paul writes that God loves a *cheerful* giver. Christians today should sow “on blessings.”

4. *Give As You Purpose In Your Heart, Not Grudgingly Or Of Necessity, For God Loves A Cheerful Giver.*

At 2 Cor. 9:7, Paul writes, “Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver.” As we have seen, the Greek word translated “purposeth” refers to a “deliberate choosing.” Thus, the Christian is to use his or her *mind* to *choose* what to give. Moreover, the choice is to be

the result of *careful consideration*. Accordingly, giving as one “purposeth” is the antithesis of impulse giving as a mere emotional response to tear-jerking appeals. The Christian is also to use his or her *heart* to choose what to give, since each Christian is to give as he or she purposes in the “heart.” The heart reveals what one really values; Jesus said, “for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” (Mt. 6:21.)

Paul taught at 2 Cor. 9:7 that the Corinthians were not to give grudgingly. Moreover, he taught that the Corinthians were not to give “of necessity.” The Greek word which the KJV translates “of necessity” is translated “under compulsion” by the NASB. The Corinthians were to give cheerfully, knowing that God loves a “cheerful” giver.

Many sermons and messages have been preached based on the phrase, “God loves a cheerful giver.” But not as many sermons have been preached on its context. What Paul said was, “*For* God loves a cheerful giver.” The word “for” lets one know that Paul is explaining something, and if the word “for” is included, it directs attention to what comes before the word “for.” Part of what comes before the word “for,” i.e., part of what Paul is explaining, is his admonition to the Corinthians not to give “of necessity” or “under compulsion.”

In this regard, we should note that to teach that the law of Moses requires Christians to tithe, i.e., to teach that the law requires Christians to give 10%, is to teach that Christians are to give 10% “of necessity,” or “under compulsion.” *The requirement of the law of Moses becomes the “necessity” and the “compulsion.”* Paul would encourage each Christian today to give as he or she purposed in the heart, not grudgingly or of necessity, because God loves a cheerful giver, and whether the amount given was less than, equal to, or more than, 10%.⁴⁶

IV. *Conclusion.*

As mentioned, in 2 Cor. 8:1-15 and 9:1-7, Paul was writing about principles of Christian giving in the “*interchurch*” context of one church giving to another church. However, those principles provide guidance to contemporary Christian giving in the “*intrachurch*” context, e.g., when Christians give to a church they attend. Specifically, we may glean from 2 Cor. 8:1-15 that we are to give as part of a grace of God and, when we do so, financial wealth or poverty is irrelevant. By giving, we can prove the sincerity of our love. Paul also teaches at these verses that we are to give based on what we have and with a willing mind, and our giving should not cause us to be afflicted. Moreover, 2 Cor. 9:1-7, teach that we are to give with a willing mind and zeal; we are to give what we give as a blessing; and we should give, not sparingly, but “on blessings” or generously.

⁴⁶ At 2 Cor. 9:10, Paul wrote, “Now he that ministereth seed to the sower both minister bread for your food, and multiply your seed sown, and increase the fruits of your righteousness[.]” The Greek conveys the idea that God is supplying seed to one who is sowing, i.e., it is *while one is sowing* that seed is supplied to the sower.

Finally, we should give as we purpose in our hearts, not grudgingly, or of necessity, for God loves a cheerful giver. Although Paul wrote Second Corinthians almost 2000 years ago, his God-inspired insights provide guidance to mature Christian giving today.