

2 Corinthians 8

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[0 : 00] Now as we continue our progress through the second part of 2 Corinthians, we come to these chapters 8 and 9. Obviously we're only dealing with chapter 8 this evening, but both 8 and 9 are connecting with the same subject.

And that is the collection for the saints which the Lord is moving the churches, particularly in northern and southern Greece, to gather and to send for the benefit of the poorer Christians, you might say, particularly in Jerusalem.

Those who are particularly the Jewish church there, that's where it's being centred, that's where it's being gathered for. And the whole thrust of this chapter is that Paul is appealing to their own spiritual motivation.

He's not saying to them, this is something you should do, God tells you to do it, so get on and do it. But rather he's saying, look, we know that you were motivated to do this a year ago, and because you were motivated, others have got the idea as well, and now they've acted on it, and we really hope that you're actually going to act on it as well.

He's kind of appealing, we might say, to their better nature, their more spiritual nature. But in doing so, he is also demonstrating that even though this concerns are very practical, you might say, matter, that is the raising of funds and the sending in of funds to the poor, money is never a very popular spiritual subject.

[1 : 29] It's not exciting in that sense, but it is very necessary. And it is part of the witness of the Lord's people and how they use the money the Lord puts in their hands and how they expend it and for what purpose speaks volumes about the truth of their witness.

So there is a spiritual dimension, as we will see, first of all, to that which is a practical outworking. It is connected to the Lord by his Spirit, and it is connected by that same Spirit to their other brethren in the different branches of the Church.

Both those who are likewise raising money, as Corinth is hopefully going to do, but also those who are to be the recipients of this love gift, you might say, this monetary benefit in the fullness of time. So there is both the vertical relation to the Lord, with the Spirit moving them to do this, to gather this funding, and there is also the horizontal movement, you might say, from them outwards to those receiving and in tandem with those who are likewise raising the funds.

Now, you might think that as Paul opens this chapter, he's really scored an own goal to begin with. Brethren, we do you to wit of the grace of God. We want to remind you, to bring to your memory the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia.

[2 : 53] Now, remember, he's writing to Corinth, which was in the district that was called Achaia, which was basically southern Greece, towards the wee sort of peninsula bit at the bottom. Macedonia was northern Greece, and these were at that time two completely different regions.

Nowadays, they're all part of the same country of Greece, but in those days, they were not. And we all know that it's not exactly going to endear you to those in one church if you start saying how brilliant another church is, and that this should be the motivation.

Why don't you be more like them? You know, they do this, they do that, they do the next thing. Why don't you be more like them? You think, oh no, Paul, what have you done here? But what he's doing, of course, is that he's not simply saying, they're so brilliant, why don't you be like them? But if you see how he unfolds the chapter, he is going, first of all, with the moving of God's spirit. Brethren, we do you to wit of the grace, that is the gratis, free gift of God, bestowed on the churches of Macedonia.

By that, he means Philippi. You know, okay, there's also Thessalonica and others up there and so on, but really, it's Philippi. When it was concerning his own support and providing for himself, we

remember how he wrote to the Philippians in chapter 4, verse 15, Ye Philippians know also that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, No church communicated with me as concerning giving and receiving, but ye only.

[4 : 26] For even in Thessalonica, even when it was quite close by, he sent once and again unto my necessity, Not because I desire a gift, but I desire fruit that may abound to your account.

And he's rejoicing in the fact that Philippi is proving so fruitful, in the sense that they are really motivated. But this does not come by human nature.

Human nature is not to part with what you have hard earned. Human nature is to get what you can, accumulate what you can, perhaps expend it wisely, but as minimally as possible, so that your own cushion, your own particular resources will accumulate.

But when the Lord's Spirit moves his people, he moves them to expend, not really for the sake of expending, but rather to expend in his cause. And for his purpose, that which he has put into their hand.

So when he says, we do you the word of the grace of God, he stole them at churches of Macedonia. He's saying, well, this is a gift of God's Spirit. He has moved them to do this.

[5 : 35] It's not just because they're nice guys. It's because the Lord's Spirit has moved them. How then in a great trial of affliction, the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty, abounded unto the riches of their liberality.

That sounds like a whole lot of long words. But what it means is, look, they're a lot worse off materially than you are in Corinth. Remember that Corinth was a boom city in many ways for all the wrong reasons.

But if you wanted to put a business somewhere where it was really going to thrive, you put it on that narrow peninsula between the two seas. Where you found Corinth was at one end and Kentria at the other, and there was constant traffic going between the two to avoid shipping having to go around the southern end of that bottom peninsula, and Greece, this three-fingered sort of peninsula, which was so dangerous to sail.

Far more easy just to bring shipping in at one end, have it transported across the narrow isthmus, and then have it taken on board other shipping at the other end. And people who controlled that business made a packet.

If you wanted your business to flourish, Corinth was the place to do it. So Corinth was a wealthy place, and it followed that the Corinthian church would have far more of this world's goods than, say, Philippi would, which being a colony and its chief source of income.

[7 : 02] One of its chief sources of income would be making silver shrines and so on for false gods, and that's an emphasis for Diana as well. Philippi, it's not going to be a great big wealthy city.

Former colony settled by ex-Roman soldiers. The Philippians are not going to be super wealthy individuals. They've got the poverty of affliction. A trial of affliction, the abundance of their joy, their deep poverty, abounded to the riches of their liberality.

Look how liberal they were in giving when they had so little. For to their power I bear record. Yea, beyond their power they were willing of themselves. It wasn't just, in a sense, as God's Spirit moved them, their own will tied in with that, and they wanted to give, they wanted to share, they couldn't do enough, praying us with much entreaty that we would receive the gift, like we were doing them a favour by taking all this largesse off their hands so that it could be bestowed on the poor in Judea. Now, remember that this is the target audience for the gathering of this funding. It's not for Paul and Barbra and Barbra themselves. It's not for their own maintenance or the maintenance of the apostolic ministry.

If you remember how when Paul writes to the Galatians, how when he went to Jerusalem, after he'd met the leaders of the church, James and Sebas and John, who seemed to be pillars, only they would that we should remember the poor, the same which I also was forward to do.

[8 : 37] Now, that doesn't just mean poor people in general. It means specifically the poor in Jerusalem. It means the Jerusalem church which suffered disproportionately from poverty.

And if we go back to the Acts of the Apostles in chapter 11, for example, we see early on in Paul's Christian life, we read in verse 27 of Acts 11, In those days came prophets from Jerusalem unto Antioch, and there stood up one of them named Agabus, and signified by the Spirit there should be great dearth or famine throughout all the world, which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar.

Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judea, which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.

Now, that would be emergency relief in a time of famine that was about to come. Why specifically to the believers in Judea?

Again, we've got other instances, Romans 15 and verse 26, It hath pleased them of Macedonia and Achaia, in other words, Philippi and Colin, to make a certain contribution for the poor saints which are at Jerusalem.

[9 : 53] It hath pleased them verily, and they are debtors they are, for the Gentiles are the made partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister unto them in carnal things. So the Gentile churches, by and large, would be wealthier than the Jerusalem churches.

But why? Well, as I think we've mentioned in the past, if you think back to the beginning of the Acts of the Apostles, we need to have how anyone who had property sold it and laid the money at the Apostles' feet, whether it was fields or land or houses or whatever, they sold it, they laid the money at the Apostles' feet, and they made distribution, as everyone had need.

That's great. It's wonderful. And it was a fantastic example, but it's not sustainable. And once you have sold your house or your field or your piece of property and realised the cash and distributed it, that's it.

There's nothing more. No other source of income. There's no other means of causing that land now to earn harvest by harvest or year by year. There's no other way of putting somebody in that house now to pay rent on it year by year or whatever.

There's no way of realising an ongoing income because you've sold it. You've done it. And that was a great gesture, but it's not a long-term proposition.

[11 : 16] And partly because when the Gospel first appeared in Jerusalem and this was the immediate response in the Church, and I'm not knocking it, it was a fantastic witness and response, but it wasn't sustainable in physical terms, and it also meant that perhaps with people expecting the Lord to come back soon, it meant that they didn't have a long-term plan for how to sustain themselves when the money ran out.

Now, of course, in Jewish culture and teaching from way back in the Old Testament, there was teaching. There was commandments of God about providing for the Levite and for the priest, who while they were busy, you know, doing the Lord's work in the tabernacle or whatever, they couldn't be in their own fields.

They couldn't be providing for themselves or their families, so they had to be fed from the altar or from people's givings, their tithes and so on. So there was that provision in the Old Testament. It was part of the Jewish culture and teaching and heritage. But, of course, not many Jewish people were going to be having tithes to bring in that they're going to give to the Christians.

Then, perhaps, as now, the Christians were probably viewed as those who, having converted to follow Jesus of Nazareth, had taken themselves out of the Jewish system of any help that was going.

[12 : 37] Who's going to look after them, then, if their fellow believers don't? So this is one reason why the collection for the saints is almost like an ongoing need in the church across that part of the ancient world.

That there's an ongoing need for gathering relief and help for the saints of Jerusalem to remember the poor, as the elders had said to Paul in Galatians chapter 2 and verse 10.

We saw this in 1 Corinthians chapter 16 in the first four verses concerning the collection for the saints. As I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye.

Upon the first day of the week, let every one of you lay by him in store as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come. And when I come, whomsoever ye shall approve by your letters, then will I send to bring your liberality unto Jerusalem.

And if it be me that I go also, they shall go with me. So this was an ongoing thing. And when he talks about this collection and so on, if you look ahead to chapter 9, you see it verse 2.

[13 : 45] For I know the forwardness of your mind, for which I boast of you to them of Macedonia. In other words, I've been praising you up to Philippi, saying that this was Corinth. They were motivated.

Asia was ready a year ago. And your zeal hath provoked very many. So if a year down the line, having begun to make the gatherings in and putting aside money for this collection, and so clearly it's not emergency relief.

If it was emergency relief, then that's a hopeless failure. Because a year later on, what are the poor saints in Jerusalem meant to eat? How are they meant to survive for a year while everybody is just moseying along, gradually gathering in the money in Corinth?

Now this is an ongoing situation. The collection for the saints is an ongoing requirement, which Paul takes very, very seriously, because he wants the church as a whole to be seen to be one body. And he wants those in the Gentile world to recognize that they have a responsibility for each other, not just for the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem, but for each other.

[14:55] As he says, you know, they did not as we hoped, but they gave their own selves to the Lord and unto us by the will of God. God moved them to do it. And if we skip ahead a little bit, he says, you know, that there wants there to be an equality, verse 14, at this time, that your abundance may be a supply for their want and that their abundance also may be a supply for your want, that there may be inequality.

I don't want other men to be eased and you burdened. Some commentators take that verse 13 as being a case of, well, I'm not just saying so the Jerusalem saints can have it easy and you have to work hard in sending this money.

I don't take that verse 13 personally as referring to the recipients of the gift. I would take it as referring to other churches also raising money for the same purpose.

I'm not trying to motivate you, Colin, to extra giving so that others don't have to give so much. That's how I would understand that, verse 13. But by inequality, that now at this time your abundance, maybe a supply for their want, that their abundance also, in other words, in a future time may be a supply for your want.

In other words, you never know when you might be the one in need. You never know when the boot might be on the other foot and you might be looking to them to supply your needs.

[16:19] For now, God has blessed you with abundance. Give of it abundantly. Give of it. Share it generously because that's one reason the Lord has put it into your hand so there may be an equality, a sharing, a distribution amongst the Lord's people.

If you don't help them, nobody else is going to help them. But there's to be an equality, not just that if you help them then they'll pray for you and bless you and so on so you'll get their spiritual gifts, but you help them now because you don't know when you might be the ones in need and then they'll have motive to help you.

He wants the church as a whole to recognize that although it is in many different parts and places, whether it is in Ephesus or Philippi or Corinth or Macedonia or whether it be in Galatia or Thessalonica or wherever it should be, but the church is one body, each with responsibility for each other and the motivation for that responsibility comes from the Lord, the Lord's Spirit who moves them.

Now what he's saying to them is, you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, verse 9, going back to verse 9 for a moment, although he was rich yet for your sakes he became poor that ye through his poverty might be rich.

You've got the ultimate example of Jesus and what he gave up for us. How can we quibble about giving a little of the money the Lord has placed in our hands to help other believers in their need?

[17:50] Here I give my advice. For this is expedient for you who have begun before. It was your idea not only to do but also to be forward a year ago.

You came up with the idea, you were forward and there was the will, there was the desire. Now all I'm saying is make sure you carry that through to completion. Now therefore perform the doing of it that as there was a readiness to will so there may be a performance.

So the word performance that we have there in the authorised version really set a sense of the completion, the completion, completeness outside of that which you have. A fulfilment in other words.

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. Nobody's expecting it to be bled white so that other people can have plenty but the Lord has given you abundance is what he said.

So make sure that all that abundance you share with others who don't have. That's all he's saying. You know if there's first a willing mind it's accepted according to what a man hath what you do have

and not according to what you don't have in the parable that Jesus told about the talents.

[18:58] He didn't say to the guy with the two talents oh come on this guy made five more talents why haven't you made five more talents and he could have said well you gave him five to start with he only gave me two look I've taken my two and I've made another two talents with it I've done exactly all that I could I've done everything I could he didn't have to explain that to the master.

The master did not say oh look you I've done as well as him because he knew that he'd given the one five and he made another five and he entered into the joy of his Lord he gave another one two and he made another two it was accepted according to what a man hath what he has been given not according to what he's not been given it's not unreasonable to expect to be able to give what he hasn't given you in the first place but according to what he has given us he does expect us to think and consider how can I use that which the Lord has put into my hand that there should be as we said inequality he likens the examples we read in Exodus and he's quoting it from Exodus chapter 16 in verse 18 when the manna came down you know there was an omer that everyone was to gather a measure that everyone was to take for their own eating and he found that those who had gathered stacks and stacks and stacks had ended up doing just about as much as those who hadn't gathered been able to gather quite so much he that gathered much had nothing over and he that gathered little had no lack he's quoting from Exodus but thanks be to God which put the same earnest care into the heart of Titus for you he's now flicking back as it were to verse 6 where he was talking about Titus we exhorted Titus but he already wanted to go to you he wanted to go and carry on this work that had begun he wanted to bring it to fruition to fulfilment we've sent with him the brother whose praise is in the gospel throughout all the churches we don't know who that is as some people speculate that perhaps it's Luke the doctor the beloved physician but we don't know but not only but who also has chosen of the churches to travel with us with this grace this gift this free gift the money which is administered by us to the glory of the same Lord and declaration of your ready mind avoiding this that no man should blame us in the abundance which is administered by us in other words there has to be accountability so one of the reasons that not only is Titus who you might think is just my man

Paul is saying he's coming but there's also another brother going with him who has been chosen by all the churches to do this so it's your representative that's going with him so you can see that everything is being done absolutely above board avoiding this that no man should blame us in this abundance we are not gathering this money just for ourselves in other words he said it's for the benefit of the poor and the needy in Jerusalem we have to give an account of it providing for honest things not only in the sight of the Lord but also in the sight of men it would be the easiest thing in the world just to have one person maybe Paul's chosen man to gather up all the money and say well of course I'm being faithful in it of course I'm doing wisely and diligently it's God's money and I'm God's man of course I'm going to do that but it has to be not only in the sight of God but in the sight of men so that even the ones who are the most cynical and the least willing to perhaps take seriously Paul's faithfulness would say well okay maybe we don't trust this guy but we trust the one that we chose and he says it's okay he says all the money's there he says it's all being faithfully delivered so fair enough we'll trust him not only in the sight of the Lord but also in the sight of men and this is one of the things that Christians in all their business should be willing to be scrutinised at any time Christians in that sense ought to have no secrets in business obviously if you've got like trade secrets and things that are integral to your the actual doing of your business that's different but I mean in terms of the accountability of how they steward and use their resources we ought to be transparent so if anyone were to come along and say well what have you actually done with this where's all the columns and the figures list say oh well it's there on that page I don't understand it all but if you phone up my accountant or whatever he'll tell you and he'll show you you can go through my books anytime you can check this you can check that check the next thing I may not understand it all but it's all been faithfully discharged that is the way that every Christian should be with regard to to business and to faithfulness and to the practical things of this world because these are the things that the world does get these are the things the world does understand it may not agree with all that these

Christians believe in they may not follow the God that they worship but if they're talking about gathering in money to go to the poor in Jerusalem oh aye yeah all gathering money I bet we know what's happening with that all the more reason why it has to be transparent all the more reason why it must seem to be squeaky clean and above board we have sent with them our brother verse 22

whom we have often times proved diligent in many things but now much more diligent upon the great confidence which I have in you whether any do inquire Titus he's my partner and fellow helper concerning you or our brethren being quiet of the other messengers of the churches and the glory of Christ wherefore show you to them and before the churches the proof of your love now we've got to understand that where he uses this term proof he's not saying well you've got something to prove correct if you don't do this well it means your love is fake because you're going to prove yourself he's used this term earlier on in the chapter as well talking about the proof of their love now it doesn't mean because we don't believe you otherwise but rather it means the evidence the outworking to put into practice the love that we know you have the faithfulness that we know you have and so as you put it into practice the proof of your love the practical outworking of your love and of our boasting in your behalf we have told everybody not how great

[25 : 19] Philippi is Corinth you get yourselves together just like them as we said that can be a complete old goal but the only reason it now becomes clear that he is busy telling them about look Philippi has got on and they're doing this they've actually gathered in the money and the only reason they've done that is because we praised up you Corinth to them we said Corinth have had this brilliant idea they want to do this they want to gather in this collection for the saints they want to make sure that they give of their bounty to the poor in Jerusalem what a brilliant idea Philippi yes that's a great idea would you be willing to accept something from us and they got on and did it and Corinth had begun to sort of make its preparations they had their brilliant idea they'd begun to do it maybe it had stalled a wee bit or maybe they had actually set it all apart but they just hadn't sent it yet so what Paul is encouraging them is saying show you to them and before the churches the proof the outworking of your love and of our boasting on your behalf we said how great you were we want you to show that we were right that our trust in you was not ill founded but rather if we skip back briefly to ourselves as you abound in everything in faith and utterance and knowledge and all diligence and in your love to us that you abound in this grace also now remember what he had said in 1 Corinthians about all the different spiritual gifts that they were so proud of all the things oh we prophesy and we speak in tongues and we do this and we do that and aren't they so wonderful they said yep you are wonderful that's great but if you're so good with all these spiritual gifts then do this one too if you can do the complicated and the difficult show how faithful you are by doing the simple and the easy and the unspectacular you see this is the thing if we can use a vulgar term of the world the practical outworking that the nuts and bolts the money the fabric it's not sexy if we can use that term that worldly term but it's it's the practical outworking of our Christian faith it's putting it into practice it's where the rubber hits the road how do we actually show our love our help to needy brothers and sisters are we actually one body this is the problem that Paul is addressing in Corinth and 2000 years later it's still a problem

Christians throughout the world because spiritual gifts are far more exciting they look exciting they attract attention but if the spirit is really in us it will likewise move us we do you to wit of the grace the freedom the motivation bestowed on the churches of Macedonia parting with our money for nothing or seemingly for nothing is not human nature being made generous to others who perhaps cannot pay us back is in an earthly sense not good business it is something that originates with a spirit not our own a spirit not of this world but rather a spirit that comes from elsewhere a spirit that comes from the Lord Paul is saying I have said to others how much of this spirit you've got now put it into practice and show the world just what you've got now the implications for all of us in this day and age you know they're obvious the parallels are so obvious we don't need to spell them out too much and it's not simply about oh well this is a sermon about making us all dig deeper and so on no it's not we're just working through this section of 2nd Corinthians and we're finding that the same problems that the church has faced in every age have been a problem all the way back to apostolic times people are having to be motivated they're having to be encouraged they're having to be exhorted not because they don't care not because they're time-pisted because so often it just doesn't occur to people that if they're going to put the spirit into practice then the practice has to be spiritually motivated it has to be the outworking the physical outworking the giving the parting of what the Lord has given to us because perhaps that is why he put it in our hands in the first place let's pray