

## The Grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ 2 Corinthians 8:1-9

<sup>1</sup> Now brothers, we want you to know about the grace of God that was given in the churches of Macedonia: <sup>2</sup> In a severe test of trouble, their overflowing joy and their deep poverty overflowed into an abundance of their generosity. <sup>3</sup> I testify that of their own free will they gave according to their ability, and even beyond their ability, <sup>4</sup> pleading with us with an urgent request for the gracious privilege of joining in this service to the saints. <sup>5</sup> And they did this not as we had expected, but in keeping with God's will they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us. <sup>6</sup> As a result we urged Titus, since he had already made a beginning, to bring to completion this gracious gift on your part. <sup>7</sup> But just as you overflow in every way—in faith, in word, in knowledge, in all diligence, and in your love for us—see that you also overflow in this gracious gift. <sup>8</sup> I do not say this as a command, but to test how genuine your love is, by comparing it with the eagerness of others. <sup>9</sup> For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that although he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that through his poverty you might become rich.

It may be difficult preaching on the subject of Christian giving. But if we are to preach the whole Word of God, the subject cannot be neglected. The Bible says a great deal about it. Let's make sure we emphasize the word *Christian* in Christian giving. Christian pastors speaking to Christian people. God's messengers speaking to God's people about God's work. No preacher should ever feel uncomfortable speaking on the subject. And no Christian congregation should feel ill at ease in listening to such a sermon.

In our text, the Apostle Paul is writing to Christians in Corinth about a collection that was being carried on in a large number of congregations in the early church. Christians in Jerusalem were suffering greatly and were in great need. Paul had asked Christians in other parts of the world to share what they had with their poor fellow-believers in Palestine. In encouraging the Corinthians to participate in this effort, Paul held before them the example of Christians in Macedonia and asked them to follow their example. What led those Christians to be so generous. It's the same thing that makes us want to give. It's the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Paul reminded the Corinthians of that grace that was shown in Christ's poverty and is reflected in our own generosity.

Paul had proclaimed the grace of the Lord Jesus to the Corinthians. They had found peace and joy in this message. And though they had passed through spiritual struggles while faced with the many temptations of life in Corinth, God's Spirit led them back to the knowledge of Christ and his grace. Paul reminds them of that grace: *For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that although he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that through his poverty you might become rich.* Christ became poor when he entered our world. Though he was in the form of God, possessing divine power and authority, he emptied himself of that power and instead took on the form of a servant. In this Scripture Paul makes mention of the Macedonians' poverty. But that was nothing like the poverty to which Christ lowered himself. He took on death—death on a cross. He suffered the poverty of being forsaken by God. Christ died so that you through his poverty might be rich. Christ took the poverty of every individual sinner upon himself. By his grace, with his death and resurrection he bought back and brought back the riches of heaven for every sinner.

You know the grace of your Lord Jesus. He had you and me in mind when he entered this life. He knew how poor and miserable we were with our sin. He knew what objects of wrath we were to God. With every sin we've done in thought, word or deed, we have merited an eternity away from God. But God could not stand for that to go on. He sent his Son to win us back to God. While he lived a dirt-poor life, he remained sparkling pure without any stain of sin. And when the day of reckoning came, he took the guilt of all sin upon himself. Nailed to a cursed cross, he suffered God's curse for all sin. It cost him dearly—his own precious life. But God was satisfied. Sin was completely paid for. His poverty brings you and me God's forgiveness, his peace and his eternal home. We are truly rich. We are God's forgiven children and heirs of eternal life.

And while we wait to receive our eternal riches, our Lord gives us opportunity to reflect our Savior's grace in our generosity.

To encourage the Corinthians to reflect our Savior's grace in their generosity, Paul makes mention of another group of Christians. *Now brothers, we want you to know about the grace of God that was given in the churches of Macedonia: In a severe test of trouble, their overflowing joy and their deep poverty overflowed into an abundance of their generosity.* God's grace had saved them. It was grace that led Christ to humble himself to become their Savior. And now God's grace was moving them to give. Who were these Macedonians that Paul uses as examples in giving. Some lived in Philippi the first Christian church in Europe that Paul urged to rejoice always. They were happy to contribute. There were some in Thessalonica who remained true to the Gospel despite the severe opposition they faced. They wished to give as well. And those in Berea who examined the Scriptures daily, they had to be part of it. Those coming from different cities, they all shared a single-minded response to the grace of God. They were grateful. They remained joyful. In the midst of poverty and persecution, they were honored to give.

And Paul didn't have to pull any teeth to get them to contribute. Paul writes, *"I testify that of their own free will they gave according to their ability, and even beyond their ability, pleading with us with an urgent request for the gracious privilege of joining in this service to the saints. And they did this not as we had expected, but in keeping with God's will they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us."* It wasn't in response to Paul's appeal. They gave of their own accord. These weren't offerings given as "dues," or giving one's fair share or giving to fill a quota, nor to meet a budget. What Paul is holding before the eyes of the Corinthians is the joyful, single-minded, extravagant response of those who have been set free by the grace of God. In the minds of the Macedonians, it was grace to allow them to be included in this offering. The needy Christians in Jerusalem were part of the same fellowship the Holy Spirit created when he brought them to faith. The ones giving their gift and others accepting the gift were of the same spirit. To be permitted to minister to people to whom God himself has rendered the greatest service by sacrificing his only Son for them, is truly grace.

Paul makes no mention of the amount they gave. His entire emphasis is on attitude. The attitude of the Macedonians far exceeded his expectations. What our Lord looks for above all is not the contents of our wallets or purses. But it's the whole of the heart that God wants. The Macedonians received God's grace. They in turn gave themselves back to God. Paul knew

how firmly they were rooted in the Gospel. He knew that he could expect much from these churches. And Paul wanted the Corinthians to share in this blessed experience. That's why he was sending Titus back to them. Paul writes, "*We urged Titus, since he had already made a beginning, to bring to completion this gracious gift on your part.*" Titus had just returned from Corinth. Paul had sent him there to help the church clean up the mess that false teachers caused. Titus had to get the Corinthians on a straight course again. Titus had done good work in Corinth. He was trusted and respected there. His heart was filled with enthusiasm for the Corinthians. It made sense for Paul to send Titus back to Corinth to complete what he had begun. To bring the collection for brothers and sisters in Jerusalem to a speedy and successful finish.

There is no lack of confidence implied in Titus' mission. The purpose is to aid the Corinthians where help may be needed. Paul urges, "*But just as you overflow in every way—in faith, in word, in knowledge, in all diligence, and in your love for us—see that you also overflow in this gracious gift.*" The Corinthians have faith. That faith was threatened by false apostles. Their faith had been wavering. But the danger was turned away. And now their faith is reestablished. The Corinthians know how to confess their faith. They are willing to do so. They abound in the proper confession of their faith. They also abound in a correct understanding. Expressing their faith is not just a confession of mouth only. They express the blessings which their heart has found in the Gospel. There is complete eagerness in them to live their faith. The Corinthians may have once doubted Paul's love. But they had dropped their suspicions. Their hearts are again filled with warm love toward the apostle. They again acknowledge Paul as their God-sent apostle. They were ready and happy to receive his instruction. Paul urges them, as they abound in those things, they should also abound in this grace of giving.

Paul puts the genuineness of their love to the test. He explains: *I do not say this as a command, but to test how genuine your love is, by comparing it with the eagerness of others.* Paul had used the rich experience of the Macedonians as incentive. Christians in Macedonia found great joy in Christ. Even their bitter afflictions could not dim this joy. They became all the more intensive in their victory over their trials. Corinthian Christians shared the same Christ. They too had tasted his love. Their trials may have been different from those of the Macedonians, but they all received grace from our Lord Jesus Christ.

When we look at the size of our own gifts to the Lord, it would do us no harm if we would measure our giving by the standard set by the Macedonian Christians. They were poor people. They could have found very good uses for the money that they were willing to give their Lord. They must have made real sacrifices to justify the kind of language Paul uses about them. *Their deep poverty overflowed into an abundance of their generosity.* When a man talks about people engulfed in poverty but overflowing in generosity it means they have been touched. They are God's people. They've been touched by his love. So they give generously.

You are God's people. You've been touched by his love. He became poor so you might be enriched with eternal blessing. May your joy express itself in your generosity. Don't let sinful flesh stand in the way. Like the Corinthians, you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Let all others know it too with generous giving all to the glory of God.