

Preparing Souls To Serve The Lord

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We Need More Givers Like The Macedonians!

By
Brian Kenyon

In Second Corinthians 8-9 Paul uses the example of the Macedonians as motivation for the Corinthians to financially support the needy saints in Jerusalem. When one considers the condition of the Macedonians, their giving stands in remarkable contrast to many Christians today. The church of Christ could do so much more if its members took giving seriously, like the Macedonians. This article will examine why the Macedonians were such liberal givers as revealed in Second Corinthians 8:1-5 and how following their example will benefit this lost world and all who truly love the Lord and His Cause. Why were the Macedonians such generous givers?

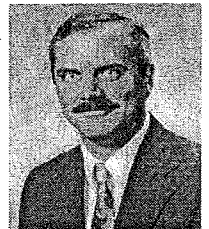
They Considered Giving A Proclamation

"Moreover, brethren, we do you to wit of the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia; How that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality" (2 Cor. 8:1-2, KJV). In making known the Macedonian example, Paul first mentions the "grace of God bestowed" on them. Indeed, the "grace of God" is a key term in this context. The Greek word usually translated "grace" (*charis*, χάρις) appears ten times in these two

chapters (2 Cor. 8:4 "gift," 6-7, 9, 16 "thanks," 19; 9:8, 14, 15 "thanks"). "Grace" may be defined as favor, good will, or undeserved gifts. The "grace" of God can refer to God's gift of salvation through Jesus Christ (Rom. 3:24; 5:14; 1 Cor. 1:4), to the collection to help the needy, as in this context, or to the undeserved apostleship Paul received to minister unto the Gentiles (Rom. 1:5; 12:3; 15:15; Eph. 3:8). Recognition of God's tremendous generosity is in the heart of all generous givers. This generosity is shown supreme by the Lord, "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" (2 Cor. 8:9). Through giving, the church has an opportunity to participate in God's grace by imitating Jesus' sacrifice.

Paul regards the liberality of the Macedonians as the result of God's grace in their lives. God is exceedingly generous (cf. Rom. 5:6-8; 8:32). Where God's grace has been truly received, experienced, and appreciated in people, the evidence will be shown in a reciprocal love and generosity (cf. Eph. 5:1-2; 1 Jn. 4:19). The Macedonians' liberality was a visible proclamation of the divine grace they had received. The

collection ("grace") resulted from God's grace in their lives.



That giving was a decisive

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proclamation by the Macedonians is evident when one examines the conditions from which they gave. Their generosity was exercised in the most adverse of circumstances (8:2). The word translated "trial [proof ASV]" (from *dokime*, δοκιμή) refers to evidence or proof as obtained through testing (also found in 2:9; 13:3). The word translated "affliction" (from *thlipsis*, θλίψις) refers to "trouble, distress, hard circumstances, suffering."¹ This word is often translated "tribulation" (Rom. 2:9; 5:3; 8:35; 12:12; 2 Cor. 1:4; Eph. 3:13).

Thus, at the very time Paul commends the Macedonians, they were enduring the trials of severe persecution. Not only that, the Macedonians were in extreme poverty. The Greek words which translate the phrase "their deep poverty" literally mean "the depth of their poverty" or "their deep down poverty." Although the cause of their extreme poverty is not explicitly stated, it seems that it was

at least partially persecution related (cf. Phil. 1:29-30; 1 Thes. 1:6; 2:14; 3:3-4; 2 Thes. 1:4-10).

Seemingly unfavorable circumstances will not keep true servants of Christ from doing, even rejoicing in, God's will. There are two significant contrasts found in 8:2. First, even though they endured "great trial of affliction," they experienced an "abundance of joy." This overflowing joy resulted from the Macedonians' commitment to the Lord and it characterized the churches in that region (cf. Phil. 4:4; 1 Thes. 1:6). Second, even though they were in "deep poverty," they "abounded unto the riches of their liberality." Their poverty led not to stinginess and/or excuse for not giving, but to the flowing out of generosity. The Greek word translated "liberality" (*haplotēs*, ἀπλότης) carries the idea of "sincerity, single-hearted devotion" (same word in Eph. 6:5; Col. 3:22).² When applied to giving, it translates into generosity, liberality which gives without grudging or having "strings attached" (cf 9:7). When Christians are "single-hearted" with God, their giving will reflect it.

They Considered Giving

A Privilege

"For to their power, I bear record, yea, and beyond their power they were willing of themselves; Praying us with much entreaty that we would receive the gift, and take upon us the fellowship of the ministering to the saints" (2 Cor. 8:3-4). Three facts prove that the Macedonians considered giving such a privilege that they would not deny themselves the blessings associated with it (cf. Acts 20:35). First, Paul "bears record" (i.e. testifies) that the Macedonians gave not only according to their ability, but far beyond their ability. The word translated "power [ability NKJ]" (from *dunamis*, δύναμις) refers to their ability, capacity, or means to

accomplish. In their case, they "gave up to the limit of their means and beyond it."³ If more Christians today would merely give up to their ability, think of how much more the church could do. Even further, imagine the work we could do if every Christian gave *beyond* his or her ability! Indeed, the Macedonians considered giving a tremendous privilege.

Second, they were "willing of themselves [of their own accord ASV; freely willing NJK]" to give in this fashion. The Greek word (*authairētos*, αὐθαίρετος) from which this is translated means "of their own initiative, voluntary."⁴ The word is found again in the NT only in 8:17, where it is translated "of his own accord." The Macedonians were willing to give. It was voluntarily, of their own initiative. Their giving did not need to be coerced (cf 9:7). They gave freely, to the full extent of their ability and beyond. All Christians are to give "as God hath prospered" them (1 Cor. 16:2). The Macedonians would put many of today's Christians to shame because they gave beyond their means. Truly they saw giving as a privilege!

Third, not only did the Macedonians give beyond their ability and not only were they absolutely willing to do so, but they also actually begged Paul to let them contribute to the good work in which he was involved. "Praying us with much entreaty" has been variously translated as "beseeching us with much entreaty" (ASV), "imploring us with much urgency" (NKJ), and "earnestly begging" (McCord). These translations bring out the urgency and insistency with which the Macedonians desired participation in Paul's work. Usually, the fund raisers are the ones who do the begging, but what a difference it makes when

Christians beg to contribute to good works!

Three key words in 8:4 indicate why the Macedonians had such an urgent desire to participate. The first word is "gift" (from *charis*, the word often translated "grace" as discussed above). Here, the "gift" is the gracious act of the Macedonians in giving money to help the saints in Jerusalem. They have acted in response to God's grace which was given them (cf. 8:1). The second word is "fellowship" (from *koinonia*, κοινωνία). This word not only denotes the sharing and gaining of fellowship with others who give and receive the funds (cf. Rom. 15:26-27), but, especially in this context, it also conveys the idea of participation in the gift itself, which represents a much larger good and service for the Lord (cf. 9:12-13). The third word is "ministering" (from *diakonia*, διακονία). The Macedonians were thoroughly convinced that Paul's apostolic mission needed support and was worthy of support. Generous giving helps spread the Gospel and save souls. Thus, there is no greater service that we can render to God or humanity than giving to the furtherance of the gospel.

The Harvesters

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TRAINING PREACHERS SINCE 1969

They Considered Giving A Priority

“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” (2 Cor. 8:5). Paul’s “hope” in collecting funds from the Macedonians was likely consistent with their impoverished condition. A small contribution would have been satisfactory, but they far exceeded Paul’s expectations! Why were they able to give so generously out of such poverty and affliction? Because they first gave themselves to the Lord and to Paul’s missionary efforts. “First” shows that their priority was the Lord and His work as carried out by Paul. The parallel attributes of giving “their own selves to the Lord” and giving “their own selves . . . unto us” are governed by the phrase “by [through ASV] the will of God.” In other words, the Macedonians recognized that giving themselves to Paul’s efforts was giving themselves to the Lord because Paul’s work was according to the will of God (cf. “by the will of God” in 1:1).

The Macedonians’ giving of their means naturally followed the giving of themselves to the Lord’s will. Paul earlier said that since Christ died for all, “they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again” (2 Cor. 5:15). The crowning point of their generosity was their complete self surrender to God and His cause. Giving of oneself is the only thing that a person can give that reaches the highest point of value (cf Mt. 16:26). When one first gives his or her own self to God, then one will have the kind of attitude the Macedonians had toward giving.

We Can Be

Like The Macedonians

Paul used the exemplary giving of the Macedonians to motivate the Corinthians. The

Macedonian example can also motivate us to be better givers in at least the following ways. First, we must realize that we can make a difference even though we may not be materially wealthy compared to our peers. The Macedonians were in poverty, but they still exercised proper stewardship over what they had (cf. Mt. 25:14-30). How many times have we heard or said ourselves, “If I had a million dollars I would do . . . for the Lord”? The question we need to ask, however, is not what we would do if we had a certain amount of money, but “What are we doing with what we have?” When considering the support we receive to operate the school, it is interesting to note that the congregations and individuals who send us financial support are average (or below) in size and wealth. Huge “mega churches” are not supporting us, nor would this writer consider most of our individual supporters as being exceedingly wealthy compared to American standards, yet they still manage to send us support, for which we are grateful. We do not have to be rich to make a difference!

Second, we must realize that we can give in addition to our first day of the week contribution. That is, it is not a sin for individuals to give to other good works in addition to the local church. The Macedonians gave beyond their ability (2 Cor. 8:3), and so can we. This is in no way minimizing our first day of the week contribution, for we must give on that day (1 Cor. 16:1-2), and shame on us if we do not! However, some people have the “I gave at the office” mentality. That is, “Since I gave on the first day of the week, I have no further obligation.” However, we must always be ready to support good

works when the opportunities arise (cf. Acts 11:29; Gal. 6:10; Eph. 2:10; 1 Tim. 6:17-19). Think of how much more good works such as the school of preaching could do if people gave beyond their ability to support them.

Third, we can earnestly seek good works to support. The Macedonians begged to be allowed to help Paul (2 Cor. 8:4). The point is not that mission works should require their supporters to beg, but that when we have such an urgent desire to help spread the Gospel, we will be willing to beg to be allowed to support Scriptural efforts which help spread the Gospel. We will realize, like the Macedonians, that our “gift” is an opportunity to reciprocate the grace of God which we have received, that there is great “fellowship” to be gained by our financial contribution, and that our participation is the carrying out of God’s ministry (2 Cor 8:4 cf. Phil. 1:7; 4:14-15). There is no greater work than advancing the kingdom of God. Are we willing to beg for opportunities to support such works?

Fourth, we must make sure that what we support is according to the will of God. The Macedonians gave themselves to the Lord and “unto us [Paul and his co-workers] by [through] the will of God” (2 Cor. 8:5). They understood that giving themselves to Paul was giving themselves to the Lord because Paul’s ministry was the Lord’s ministry. Christians today must make sure that the works they support are the ministry of the Lord. Too many times people give to works without making sure they are sound, or, perhaps at one time the works were sound, but over the years have left God’s moorings. We must not be afraid to re-evaluate the works we support and make changes if necessary. We cannot “honor the LORD with thy substance” (Pr. 3:9),

when the works we are supporting dishonor God by promoting false doctrine. Proper stewardship demands vigilance (cf. Mt. 25:14-31).

Conclusion

May the Lord give us more givers like the Macedonians! Let each reader realize that generous giving begins with each of us individually. Do we view giving as proclamation, a privilege, and a priority? Let us determine to be generous like the Macedonians and join into the ministry of the Lord!

Endnotes

¹ Barclay M. Newman, Jr., "A Concise Greek-English Dictionary of the New Testament," in *The Greek New Testament*, 4th rev. ed. (Stuttgart, Germany: United Bible Society, 1993) 83.

² Newman 20.

³ Ralph P. Martin, *Second Corinthians*, Word Biblical

Commentary, vol. 40, David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker, eds. (Dallas, TX: Word, 1986) 253.

⁴ A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, Power Bible CD. Phil Linder, Online Publishing, CD-ROM Version, 1999.



An Appeal

Since the school began in 1969, recruiting and raising funds have been our biggest challenges. The challenges are even more pressing today because of the slumping economy and the growing disinterest in Gospel preaching among many area brethren and churches. The school needs to find more men willing to train for preaching and more individuals and congregations willing to financially support the Lord's work here.

If you are not a regular contributor, please consider supporting this work. If you love the Lord, His word, and sound

Gospel preaching, look into this work. We are confident that you will find a balanced program, well-qualified instructors, a love for things spiritual, and a track record which speaks volumes about upholding the truth in love. Why not become a regular contributor and fellowship with us in this work?

There are so many ways that Christians can help, among which are the following: (1) pray regularly for our work (cf. 1 Thess. 5:25; 2 Thess. 3:1); (2) send us men of good character who are willing to devote two years of their lives in intensive training to preach; (3) financially contribute to the school and/or to the support of a full-time student; (4) remember us in your estate planning; and (5) acquaint others with our work. The Lord does not expect the world to advance His cause, but faithful brethren (3 Jn. 5-8). Please help.

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