

A Biblical Model for Giving, Part 4

2 Corinthians 8:4-8

47-58

Well, this morning we return to our study of 2 Corinthians chapter 8, with some apology to those of you who are visiting with us who haven't been a part of this series, knowing you're going to come in on the tail end, really, of our series on a model for Christian giving. But I think you'll be able to hear what the Spirit of the Lord says to us in this great passage.

We're studying 2 Corinthians. We find ourselves in chapter 8. The first eight verses address the subject of Christian giving, how we give to the Lord. Certainly, that is a fitting subject, isn't it, at this time of year when we are probably more conscious of giving than at any other time. Giving is on everybody's mind. We're spending our time, aren't we, foraging around in all the stores to try to find just the right gift to give to someone. Or we're spending our time dropping hints to folks of what we'd like to have given to us, knowing that they're probably going to do that. Giving is both a privilege born out of love and a duty born out of expectation and, perhaps, even some reciprocation. But nonetheless, we're all about giving and thinking about giving at this time of the year.

But the One's whose birthday is celebrated should be the most gifted One, namely the Lord Jesus Christ. So giving to Him should be for Christians the all-consuming preoccupation even at this time of year. And in view of that, it's fitting that we find ourselves in a study of how we are to give. As Christians, how we are to give to the Lord and to his purpose, very, very pertinent. Now Paul is going to cover this subject in two chapters, chapter 8 and chapter 9. So we're going to go through a lot of material before we're done.

But he begins with the first eight verses of chapter 8 with the first principle that he wants to get across. And the first principle is simply this, giving is the behavior of devout Christians. Where you have devout Christians you have givers. All they need to have is an opportunity and they will respond. Christian devotion, Christian dedication, Christian commitment results in Christian giving and generosity.

So Paul is calling on the Corinthians in this chapter to give, particularly the issue is the saints in the church at Jerusalem are very, very poor, they are without resources and their needs are vast. Paul wants the Corinthians to give to the saints in Jerusalem. Now remember, it's not a one-time offering; it's a systematic weekly offering. In chapter 16 in verse 2, he says that these offerings are to be collected every week. He says every one of you is to give every week.

Over a period of at least a year they have known about this offering, and Paul wanted them, systematically and weekly, to be giving so that there would be accumulated a large amount of money that when he came he could then take back to the needy saints in Jerusalem. He is instructing them here, in chapter 8, regarding this matter of the collection, regarding the matter of their regular weekly giving.

And to begin with he uses this main principle that giving is the behavior of devout Christians to sort of launch his motivation. And to make his point he uses an example, and the example is the Macedonian churches mentioned there at the end of verse 1. The churches of Macedonia were basically three churches: the church at Philippi, the church at Thessalonica, and the church at Berea. They were givers.

They were devout Christians and they behaved in a very generous way in the matter of their giving. And so they serve as the illustration or the example. He wants to instruct both the Corinthians and all Christians through all time to give following the pattern of the Macedonians. And so as we look at these eight verses we've been very careful to see the elements of their giving. What was it that made them exemplary? How did they give? With what spirit did they give? In what manner did they give? And all of that is delineated down through verse 8.

Let me remind you of what we have already discussed. First of all, we said that giving was initiated by God's grace. Verse 1 reminded us that it was the grace of God given to the Macedonians that so totally transformed their lives that turned them into givers. It's not just a human act; it's not just what noble humans do. We're talking about a level of giving and a level of sacrifice that is unique to those who have been transformed by God's grace, who have been saved and sanctified by the power of God and His gracious work.

Secondly, we said their giving transcended difficult circumstances. You wouldn't think it would be a time or an occasion when they would be able to give because of the tremendous difficulty of their circumstances, namely persecution and economic deprivation. And yet in verse 2 it says "they gave in a great ordeal of affliction."

Thirdly, we said their giving was joyous. Verse 2 again he talks about "their abundance of joy." Fourthly it was not hindered by poverty. He mentions in verse 2 their deep poverty. Fifthly we said their giving was generous, it overflowed in the wealth of their liberality or generosity.

So we looked at the fact that this giving was initiated by grace, transcended difficult circumstances, was joyous, not hindered by poverty and was generous. Then we came to verse 3, you'll remember, and in verse 3 we saw three other elements of their giving. Their giving was proportionate, that is they gave according to their ability, according to what they were capable of giving in proportion to what they had.

Secondly, in this little list their giving was sacrificial. He says it was beyond their ability. That means they gave more than they were really capable of giving. And then he says it was voluntary; they gave of their own accord. So that gives us eight principles of the giving of the Macedonians. And the last three, it was proportionate, sacrificial and voluntary, are so important that we digressed a little bit to talk about those. They really sum up the concept of free will giving. You give what you can proportionate to what you have; you give sacrificially and you give voluntarily or willingly.

You give in a manner of exercising your own freedom in response to God. Those three elements then really are very important, proportionate, sacrificial, voluntary giving sum up the concept of free will giving, or giving from the heart. And you remember I told you that there is no prescription in the Bible for what percentage we are to give. There is no prescription in the Bible for what amount we

are to give. We are to give proportionate to what we have; we are to give with a measure of sacrifice, and we are to give voluntarily. That's what we call free will giving.

Now once we had established that, we digressed into the Old Testament last time because the Old Testament established two kinds of giving. One is required giving and the second is free will giving. Required giving and free will giving. Now required giving basically boils down to taxation. Prior to Moses, required giving was prescribed in Egypt to fund the national government for a time of famine, and the amount of that was set at twenty percent.

During the time of Moses, God ordained tithes. The first tithe went to support the Levites who ran the nation. It was a theocracy and they were basically the government workers. They were the people who led the nation. There was a first ten percent and that went to support the Levites, to pay their salaries and provide their livelihood.

Secondly, there was another ten percent every year that every Jew had to pay and that was the festival tithe. That ten percent went for the national festivals, the national holidays, the great religious conclaves and occasions and convocations. And then every third year there was a third tenth which was for the welfare tithe to give to the poor and the orphans and the widows and so forth.

So if you break that third one into three parts, it's three and a third per year or so. Ten percent, ten percent, three and a third percent, there at 23 percent. You throw in the corners of the field and the gleanings which they couldn't harvest, a kind of a profit-sharing plan, throw in the temple tax which they paid every year, and you have about twenty-five percent of a Jew's income went to fund the national government. That's what the tithes related to.

No Jew gave ten percent. He gave ten percent, ten percent, and ten percent every third year, plus. So if you're talking about tithing, you're talking about that amount and you're talking about the funding for the national government. You're talking about supporting the theocracy, that was taxation. Now when you get into the Old Testament and you talk about free will giving, that's a completely different issue. Free will giving was from the heart, voluntarily, willingly, sacrificially, whatever you wanted to give whenever you wanted to give it, with generosity motivated by gratitude and love for God. You always gave the best, the firstfruits, and you gave it with all your heart. That's what the Old Testament calls free will giving.

So we saw then in the Old Testament, required giving had to do with funding the national government; government being ordained by God for the preservation of society, the well being of those who do good and the punishment of those who do evil. God wants government supported, it's supported by the people. We still have that system in terms of taxation today. The second kind of giving was free will and that was to God. Giving to God then was free will giving. That was the Old Testament pattern. We went into detail last time on that.

Now, let's ask the question for this morning initially. Is the New Testament pattern of giving the same? Answer: Yes. In the New Testament, again you have reiterated two kinds of giving, two ways in which we give our wealth. The first is to pay our taxes and the second is to give to God. In fact, the New Testament is explicit and exact in comparison with the Old Testament. There is no difference at all. Teaching on both of these kinds of giving, required and free will, is clear in the New Testament.

Now, let me say at this point just by way of a footnote. I know that this is new to some of you who perhaps were raised in a church or been in a church where they hammered on tithing and they said that the way Christians are to give is to give ten percent because that's the way the Jews give. I know that that is something that is taught commonly. That is not what the Bible teaches. The Bible does not teach the Jews gave ten percent. As I pointed out it teaches that they gave about 25 percent. It was not their giving to God, it was their payment to the theocracy, to the government.

It had to be brought into the temple treasury and not to bring it was to rob God, according to Malachi 3:8, of His due tithes and offerings. That was taxation. I know that that is perhaps new to some of you but that is clearly what the Scripture teaches. It's what I've taught for many, many, many years. We just haven't been able to cover it recently. But it is clearly what the Scripture teaches as you saw last time. If you didn't get to come last time, pick up the tape and it will be of help to you.

So let's continue to see if this stands up in the New Testament. As we come to the New Testament, we find two kinds of giving, again just two. There is required giving and free will giving. What does the New Testament say, let's say, about required giving first of all? What does it say in the New Testament about paying taxes? Is that a New Testament issue? The answer. It is absolutely an issue. And when you come into the New Testament and you come into the gospels and you come into the life of Christ, you realize that the Jews are still living in a theocracy.

They have the temple. The Levites basically run the operation of the nation. Those people who have all the political power are religious people. They are Pharisees; they are Sadducees. They are the people who lead in all areas of life and so they are funded by the typical taxation system that's still in place, given by Moses, which we have delineated to you. They had to pay their taxes to run their nation.

The temple ground itself had a courtyard, and on the wall of that courtyard were thirteen trumpet-shaped receptacles into which the people dropped their taxes. They were careful to do that as their duty and responsibility to the government. And so they were paying taxes. The taxation system as ordained in Moses was still in place.

Now in addition to that they had been burdened with even greater taxation because they were under Roman occupation. The Romans came in, as you know, and occupied the land of Israel and exacted further taxes from the Jews, exorbitant taxes which they despised and hated. And, of course, that was one reason why they had such animosity toward Rome. That gave rise to a group called the Zealots who went around stabbing Romans clandestinely, some sort of terrorists. Taxation was what they hated and despised as much as anything.

The Romans also conscripted Jews to be their tax collectors, and they would collect whatever Rome required, and anything else they could collect went into their own pockets. And so they became corrupt and took from the people what was not even rightly theirs. So the people were under a heavy burden of taxation in the land of Israel.

And it well could have been that some would expect Jesus would come in and say, "Hey, you guys need to have a tax revolt. You need to go stab all of the tax collectors and you need to throw off this yoke of Roman taxation," et cetera, et cetera. But Jesus never ever said anything even remotely close to that; never even commented on whether taxation was fair or unfair; never involved Himself

in that at all. What He did teach was pay your taxes. He upheld the Old Testament requirement.

For example, listen to these words. "And when they had come to Capernaum, those who collected the two drachma tax came to Peter and said, 'Does your teacher not pay the two drachma tax?' " Being a reference to Jesus, he asks Peter, "Does Jesus pay His tax?" And he said yes. That's very important. Jesus paid His taxes. Well, later on when they came into a house, Jesus starts up a conversation with Peter. And He says to him, "From whom do the kings of the earth collect customs?" or taxes, "from their sons or from strangers?"

Well, of course, Peter answered from strangers, because everybody knew that no king taxed his own kids. You got around that some way. No king took tax from his own children. He taxed somebody outside his own family. And what Jesus was saying was in a measure from one perspective, "I shouldn't have to pay taxes since the King who ordained this is My Father. Since I'm a child of the King, and frankly, Peter, you're a child of the King and all of these disciples are children of the King, we really shouldn't have to pay taxes that have been ordained by the King." It's a good reminder that God ordained the taxation system.

That is exactly what Jesus is implying here. And He's saying, theoretically, on the human standard you wouldn't expect that we would have to pay taxes to our own Father who is behind all human government. Romans 13 says government is ordained by God. But, Jesus said, "Lest we give them offense, lest we offend them, we must pay our taxes." And then I love how He did it, He says, "Go to the sea and throw in a hook and the first fish that comes up, when you open its mouth you'll find the tax payment." That's Matthew 17, verses 24 to 27, "Take that and give it to them for you and Me." That will cover us, Peter.

Jesus said we have to pay our taxes. But He certainly had a novel way of getting what He needed. If that was the way we were still doing it, around April 1 the coasts of California would be fairly occupied. It doesn't happen that way anymore, but the point being Jesus paid His taxes and had Peter pay his as well.

Now the point of the passage is simply to say that. Jesus paid His taxes. We have another passage in Matthew chapter 22 which I find interesting as well. Verses 15 to 22 of Matthew 22 says, "Then the Pharisees went and counseled together how they might trap Him in what He said." They were always trying to do this, to trap Jesus in His words, always trying to do it in a public place so that somehow He would incriminate Himself publicly, and people would hear it and it would start some kind of a reaction that would bring Him down. They spent...well they spent endless hours trying to figure up the questions that would do this and they never succeeded at it. So they come and they're going to try to trap Him.

They send their disciples to Him, along with the Herodians. So you've got the Pharisees and the Herodians; you've got the people who are the religious leaders; you've got the political leaders there. And they say to Him, and this is very condescending, "Teacher, we know that You are truthful and teach the way of God in truth and defer to no one." You know, this is just...just sort of saccharine flattery that is not from the heart at all. "They say, 'We know that You have all the answers. Tell us therefore, what do You think? Is it lawful to give a tax to Caesar or not?' " Should we pay our Roman taxes or not?

Now, if Jesus says, "Pay your Roman taxes," the Jews immediately would be down on him as a pro-Roman traitor. If He said, "Don't pay your taxes," the Romans would be after Him for being an insurrectionist and breaking the law. So the Jews were sure that they had Him between a rock and a hard place. The text of Matthew 22 says Jesus perceived their malice or their evil. "And He said, 'Why are you testing Me, you hypocrites? Show Me the coin used for the tax.'

"And they brought Him a denarius which is what the Romans required as the coinage of the poll tax, which was a tax that every individual had to pay every year. And He said to them, 'Whose likeness and inscription is this?' And they said to Him, 'Caesar's.' " Caesar's face was pressed on the coins. "And then He said to them, 'Then give Caesar the things that are Caesar's and God the things that are God's.' " That is an absolutely crucial statement. What Jesus was saying was pay your taxes and give to God. He was upholding the same two things. Required giving, you give Caesar what Caesar demands, and you give God what God asks for. Give Caesar what is his, give God what is His. "And after hearing this they marveled and leaving Him they went away."

Now, in Matthew 23 we have another reference to this matter of taxation, this required giving. Jesus called the Pharisees hypocrites, by the way, for the fifth time in Matthew 23:23, and He still had three more to go. But in verse 23, He says to them, "You pay tithe and you pay tithe of mint and anise and cumin." What he's talking about here are little things, seeds. And you remember in the Mosaic Law they were required to give a tenth of all their seed. Remember that?

And He's saying, "You do that. You pay your tithe of all your seed. You're to give one out of ten to the Levites, to the priests, and you've done that." And then He says, "But you have omitted the weightier matters of the Law, like judgment, mercy and faith." Now mark it, Jesus did not criticize them for paying that tithe. In fact, He simply stated that they did it and in a sense it is a commendation. "You're doing that right, but what you're not doing right is far more weighty." Jesus acknowledged that it was right for them to pay the tax on their seeds, but they ignored the things that really mattered. That's why He calls them hypocrites.

There's only one other mention of tithing in the gospels, only one, and it's in Luke 18. And there the hypocritical Pharisee is boasting. You remember the publican is beating on his chest saying, "God be merciful to me, a sinner." But the hypocritical Pharisee is boasting and he says, "I fast twice every week and I give tithes of all that I possess." Now paying your taxes isn't anything to boast about; it's only what you're supposed to do. But he was affirming that he was still paying his tithes, paying his taxes. That wasn't wrong. There wasn't anything wrong with that.

There really isn't anything wrong with fasting. Fasting is a right thing as well. Praying is a right thing. What was wrong with that man was that he assumed that in the doing of these things he had gained salvation. Now listen. After the gospels which referred to the taxation in Israel and under the Romans, there is no further mention of tithing except one reference in Hebrews chapter 7...and you don't need to turn to it. In Hebrews 7 the statement is made that Abraham gave a tithe to Melchizedek.

You remember that story, how that Abraham meeting Melchizedek who is a priest of the Most High God, Abraham coming back from having defeated five kings and having all this booty and all this loot that he had gained in that battle and God had given him the victory; wanted to express his thanks to God and so he gave a tenth of the top of the heap, a tenth of the best to Melchizedek.

In Hebrews 7, there is merely a reference to that historical event. It is not a directive. It is not a command. It is not instruction for the church. It is simply a recollection of an Old Testament event and the writer uses it to make a very important point with regard to the priesthood of Jesus Christ. It has nothing to do with tithing. The point he's making relates to the priesthood of Christ who is a priest after the order of Melchizedek.

So between the gospel mentioning of tithes which were related to the Jews giving their seeds and all those things, and the mention of a tithe in the book of Hebrews, which is merely a recollection of a historical event, there is no instruction about tithing. The church is never told to tithe. Christians are never told to tithe. Why? Because tithing has never been giving to God. It has always been what? Taxation.

You say, "Well does the New Testament say anything then about taxation?" Yes, Romans 13, "Let every soul be subject to the higher powers for there is no power but of God, the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever resists the power resists the ordinance of God," that's government, "for this cause pay you tribute also, for they are God's ministers." Or put it this way in the New American Standard, "Pay taxes for rulers are servants of God."

God ordained government. Pay your taxes to support God-ordained government. "Render therefore to all their dues, tribute to whom tribute is due, tax to whom tax is due, custom to whom custom is due, honor to whom honor is due. Pay your taxes." Pay your taxes. That is required giving. The New Testament demands that.

"Submit yourselves – " 1 Peter 2:13 – " for the Lord's sake to every human institution, to the king as one in authority, to governors as sent by Him for the punishment for evil doers and the praise of those who do right." Pay your taxes. State tax, federal tax, sales tax, inheritance tax, capital gains tax, whatever tax. You pay your taxes. That's required giving. And we as Christians should be the most cooperative of all in this because we are not just under government mandate, we are under divine mandate. That is required giving, pay your taxes.

Now what about free will giving? What does the New Testament say about free will giving? It says giving amounts are personally determined. Give whatever you want. Look at chapter 9, verse 6, 2 Corinthians. Here's how to give, "He who sows sparingly will reap sparingly, he who sows bountifully will reap bountifully. Let each one do just as he has purposed in his heart." You give whatever you want, realizing that whatever you sow is what you're going to harvest. "Give and it shall be given unto you." You can't out give God; all of those principles that we have given.

Luke 19 has got to be one of the most humorous stories in the Bible. It's the story about Zacchaeus, the short little guy who was the regional head of the tax collectors. He wasn't just a local Jericho tax collector; he was the chief among the tax collectors. And being a tax collector was the kiss of death. Being a publican meant you were an outcast from your own people, a traitor of the worst ilk, hated by your own countrymen, exacting taxation for the Romans and beyond that, and using all the Roman force and the Roman sword, as it were, to rob your own people. Zacchaeus had gotten rich by overtaxing his people.

He was curious about Jesus. Heard that Jesus was coming through town one day, and he wanted to

see him. So he was down there to see him but there was a huge crowd and he was a little short guy and so he climbed up a tree. This is sort of a...sort of a sacrifice of dignity, I imagine, to be hanging out of a tree when you're the regional tax collector and you really would rather be inconspicuous, than conspicuous. So he was probably hiding behind some leaves if he could.

And as Jesus came along He looks up at Zacchaeus and says, "Zacchaeus, hurry up and get down out of that tree, I'm coming to your house." Oh, what a shock. All he wanted to do out of curiosity was see Jesus. He went to Zacchaeus' house. Do you remember, they had a great time. And Zacchaeus put his trust in Jesus Christ as his Lord and his Savior, and immediately after that, here's what he said, "Behold, half of my goods I give to the poor."

Now, immediately, this converted man became a 50-percent giver. Now that's my kind of giver, a 50-percent giver, that fast, the same day. I suppose Jesus could have said, "I don't think you understand; we only require ten percent." Jesus didn't say that. Jesus never gave him any prescription at all, never restricted him, didn't say, "Hey, hang on to the 40, Zacchaeus. It's not necessary. Zacchaeus gave 50 percent of everything he had. And Jesus could have stopped him but He didn't. He would have robbed Zacchaeus of the sowing bountifully principle and, therefore, reaping bountifully.

And then he went further. He said, "If I have taken anything from any man falsely, I'll pay it back fourfold, 400 percent. I'll pay it back four times." The point is, giving is spontaneous. It is whatever you want to do in your heart. It is out of love and gratitude, not out of law. It has nothing to do with the tithe and the taxation system. In fact, Jesus Himself becomes the example of New Testament, giving in verse 9 of our text, which we'll look at in our next study, "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that He was rich yet for your sakes He became poor."

Now I'll tell you, if you're rich and you become poor, you're giving more than ten percent. He gave everything, that you through His poverty might become rich. He was rich. He became poor that you might become rich and then the Father gave Him all of everything. So He became rich again as well. That's how God works. That's the pattern. We'll get into that when we look at that verse.

So the amount is up to you. Whatever you purpose in your heart, whatever you desire to give, whatever you want to give voluntarily, generously, sacrificially, proportionately, that's the way you give. Now let's sum it up. The giving of the Macedonians was initiated by grace, transcended difficult circumstances, was with joy, not hindered by poverty, generous, proportionate, sacrificial and voluntary. That is the way we are to give.

Now I'm not done. Quickly we're going to finish this. Listen carefully. We come to a ninth point, giving was viewed as privilege not obligation. Giving was viewed as privilege not obligation. Look at verse 4. This is a wonderful reality. He says of the Macedonians, "They were begging us with much entreaty for the favor of participation in the support of the saints." Now there's some wonderful words in that verse, giving us the main point. Begging, a very strong word, a very pleading word. It's used in Luke 8:28 of the words of the demoniac who was pleading with Jesus, twice it's used of him.

It's used elsewhere in the New Testament to speak of strong pleading. So the Macedonians are pleading and begging. As if that's not enough he adds, "With much entreaty," that's the word for exhortation. "with much exhortation, with much importunity, with much aggressiveness." Literally, it's

the word “coming alongside earnestly, begging for the opportunity.” And what are they begging for? For the favor; that’s the word *charis*, the word grace. For the favor of participation. That’s the word *Koinonia*, the word fellowship.

So these people are pleading with much exhortation to the apostle for the special grace of being able to have fellowship by supporting the saints. You know what they’re doing? They’re begging for the privilege of giving, for the *charis*, for the blessing, the grace, the benediction of being partners sharing in the support of the saints. The word support, *diakonia*, the ministry of the saints.

They viewed giving as a privilege, not an obligation. They viewed giving as a way to express their generosity on behalf of the fellowship, their love of the brotherhood that they’d never even met. They viewed giving as a way to be partners in a shared life. They viewed giving as a way to express grace and blessing and to receive it in return from God. Giving was a way to support the ministry. So they were literally begging for the personal blessing of sharing in the needs of the saints they had never met, not because of any other thing than their generous hearts.

That’s just the way they were. They were devout Christians and giving is the behavior of devout Christians. No reluctance, no resistance, no lack of joy. They were willing to give, eager to give, they gave hilariously, as they are defined in chapter 7, verse...or chapter 9, verse 7, “God loves a cheerful,” or a hilarious, “giver.” Now you know your heart is right in giving when you’re looking for places to give, when you’re eager to give, when you see it as a privilege, when you beg for the opportunity to give. That’s the kind of giving that is exemplary giving.

Number ten, their giving was an act of worship; their giving was a part of worship, verse 5, “And this,” let me go further, he says, I’m not done, there’s more to their example, and this is another thing, this is the next reality in their giving, beyond everything else, get this, we didn’t even expect this, “Not as we had expected but they first gave themselves to the Lord.” We’ll stop there for a moment. He says we couldn’t have asked for this. I mean, this was more than we could have hoped for, more than we could have expected, more than we could have anticipated. What? “They first gave themselves.”

In other words, it was total dedication. We were hoping for an offering, they gave themselves. And listen, when they gave themselves they gave everything they had. They made it all disposable. They made it all dispensable. They made it all available because when you give yourself, everything with you comes with the giving. They first, first meaning not first in time, but first in priority; it’s...sometimes, this word *prōton* is translated “leading.” Their first priority, the leading issue was they gave themselves to the Lord.

And, beloved, that is the supreme act of worship, isn’t it? That is *the* supreme act of worship when you give yourselves. Go with me to Romans chapter 12 because there is the very important text which teaches this. In Romans 12:1-2 we read, “I urge you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice,” your bodies meaning yourselves, of course, “present yourselves a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God which is your spiritual service of worship.”

Yes we worship on Sunday, and God is pleased with that. Yes we worship when we praise Him, and God is pleased with that. But we worship most, and most importantly, when we give ourselves as the offering, when we offer ourselves, all that we are, have and ever hope to be, unconditionally and

unreservedly, to Him. And that is what the Macedonians had done. That is what Romans 12:1 is calling for. "We're to present ourselves a living and holy sacrifice."

In other words, we're to lay ourselves on the altar and say, "God, I give it all up, everything I am, everything I have, everything I hope." That's what a sacrifice is. That is our spiritual service of worship. That's where worship starts. And once you give yourself as a sacrifice and all that you are and have as a sacrifice, everything else follows. When you say, "I am Yours, Lord, I'm all Yours, I'm completely Yours and everything I possess is Yours," that's where the Macedonians were. Once you've done that you have really worshiped.

And I found in my life that it's not a one-time deal. You do it over and over and over again because as somebody said, "No sooner do you put yourself on the altar than you crawl back off again." These Macedonians first gave themselves, and then everything followed. That is the supreme act of worship. And it involves, verse 2, "Not being conformed to this world." You can't be sucked up in the materialistic realm and do this. You can't be consumed with the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life and do this. You have to be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

You have to think in another worldly way. You have to have the mind of Christ. You have to set your affections on things above and not on things on the earth. Then you will be able to prove what the will of God is and you will do what is good and well pleasing and perfect. What pleases God is total sacrifice of yourself. We are a royal priesthood, 1 Peter 2 says, offering up holy sacrifices, the first of which is ourselves and all that we have. And they did that.

It required non-conformity to the world. It required transformation of the mind to a spiritual godly way of thinking, rejection of the world, acceptance of the mind of Christ, commitment to His will, His plans, His purposes and His pleasures. And that is exactly what the Macedonians did. They gave it all. It was all the Lord's and they were just stewards of everything they were and everything they possessed. And that produced the generous sacrificial giving.

Number eleven, their giving was in submission to their pastors. You'll notice at the end of the verse there is a statement made that is very important. It's that little statement "by the will of God" there at the end of verse 5. It is the will of God that they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God. They not only gave themselves to the Lord, they gave themselves, Paul says, to us, to the apostle Paul and to Titus and to Timothy, to their pastors, to their spiritual leaders. They were submissive to them.

In fact, their devotion to the Lord, these Macedonians, their devotion to the Lord led them to easily and eagerly submit to the leadership of their pastors. They realized that these men were under-shepherds of Christ, who stood in the place of Christ giving direction and leadership to the church, and they responded to their leadership. God wants His people to respond not only to Him but to His leaders as well. That's pretty clear, isn't it?

First Peter chapter 5 in verse 5, "Be subject to your pastors or elders." You have the same thing at the end of the book of Hebrews chapter 13, verse 17, "Obey your leaders and submit to them." You have the same thing in 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13 that you are to honor and esteem and regard highly those who are over you in the Lord. And the Macedonians were like that.

When the apostle Paul told them about this issue, they responded. No matter who they heard it from...I don't know who they heard it from. I don't know if they heard it first from Paul; it may have been from Timothy; it might have been from Titus. They responded. And as further word reached them, they responded again. They were submissive to their leaders. And that is the will of God.

Further discussing this, look at verse 6, "Consequently, based on the example of the Macedonians," is what he's saying. "Consequently because of the tremendous example of the Macedonians' submission, we urged Titus that as he had previously made a beginning so he would also complete in you this gracious work as well." Now sometime in the past Titus had visited Corinth. And Titus had encouraged them initially to start this collection. That was over a year before this book was written.

So it's been over a year since they were informed about this and they did make a beginning. Remember now, Titus has recently returned for a second visit, carrying that severe letter that's not in the New Testament, confronting them. And on that second visit Titus was instructed, according to this verse, to tell them to complete the work which they had begun in the matter of giving. So once they had heard from Titus. Then Paul wrote...probably after Titus' first visit...Paul wrote 1 Corinthians and refers to the giving in 1 Corinthians 16.

Then after 1 Corinthians he sends Titus with another letter. Titus brings up the offering again. Titus comes back, gives a good report, now Paul writes them 2 Corinthians and again brings up the offering and encourages them to finish it. All of this simply pointing out the fact that these pastors, who were their leaders and responsible for their direction, were informing them as to what they were to do and God was expecting that they would respond. And so were these men as well.

Remember, I told you, in 1 Corinthians 16, he said, "I want an offering every Sunday, every first day of the week." I want that money set aside so that you don't have to try to collect it in a big flurry when I get there. They had begun to do the giving. About a year had passed since the original instruction and the beginning of their giving. And it was halted. Remember I told you that. They started to give and then it was halted by the insurrection and the rebellion and the false teachers and the mutiny against Paul and all of that. The church had been disrupted and the giving had stopped.

But now Titus has gone back. He brought the severe letter. He pled with them for restoration to the apostle. He told them to start the offering. The relationship has been restored now and Paul wants to reaffirm his emphasis on the giving. Through the restoration and reconciliation, Paul feels the freedom now. Even though the relationship, admittedly, is still fragile, as we'll find out in later chapters, he wants to reaffirm the pastoral authority over their need to follow the Macedonian example and continue their giving. Get back on track with your giving.

A little footnote here. Whenever people in a church become disillusioned about their leaders, their giving drops. And it happened in Corinth and it happens today. It always happens. It's happened in our church when people have spread lies and rumors and untruths about leadership in this church. It has an immediate effect on people's giving because where they have confusion and chaos or anxiety or distrust at the level of leadership, they are hard-pressed to be generous.

And people who are in churches where that is the case, where they legitimately have leaders that are not faithful, have a very difficult time expressing their giving as it ought to be expressed. We thank the Lord for faithful leadership in this church, for trustworthy people and for your confidence as

evidenced by the grace of giving which we see constantly coming from you.

So back to verse 6. "Titus previously made a beginning and I sent him to instruct you to complete this gracious work as well." It was all grace. I love the fact that he calls it a gracious work. It was the grace of God that gave them the privilege of gracious giving. This is a gracious work. You're showing grace to these poor saints. And God is going to fill back up your empty cup of grace. God will give you grace upon grace upon grace upon grace.

And I say this, any pastor who leads his people to give, leads them to experience grace. It is God's grace that moves them to give. It is God's grace in the giving, and it is God who graciously resupplies. You simply expose yourself to grace upon grace upon grace. When you teach people to give, you're not impoverishing them, you are enriching them with grace upon grace. And so he says, "We sent Titus to complete in you this gracious work as well, just like it was being completed among the Macedonians. And they responded. The Macedonians followed their leaders. That's the kind of example I want you to follow."

Number twelve, giving was in concert with other Christian virtues. Giving was in concert with other Christian virtues. In verse 7, he says, "But just as you abound in everything, in faith and utterance and knowledge and in all earnestness and in the love we inspired in you, see that you abound in this gracious work also." It's not giving in a vacuum. It's not giving in isolation. It's not giving contrary to what's in your heart. This kind of giving is in perfect harmony with other Christian virtues. You find me a heart filled with faith and utterance and knowledge and earnestness and love and I'll show you a generous heart. It's in combination; it's a network.

He says, "Just as you abound in everything" Now, that's a very complimentary statement to these vacillating Corinthians. But back in chapter 1, verse 4, he said...chapter 1 of 1 Corinthians, verse 4, "I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus that everything you were enriched in Him." He says, "From the beginning you had everything that the grace of God could give. You had it all. God gave it all to you."

Here he says, "I'm starting to see it abound in you just as you abound in everything, faith..." What is that? Strong trust in God, a saving, securing, sanctifying trust in the Lord. And "utterance." What is that? It's the Greek word *logos*. It really means doctrine. It's used for the word of truth, the word of righteousness, the word of Christ, sound word. You have doctrine. You have faith. And then knowledge. You have understanding of how doctrine applies, how divine truth applies. And you have earnestness. There's that word *spoudē*. We've seen it earlier in chapter 7. It means eagerness, it means energy, vigor, diligence, spiritual passion.

And he adds, "You have love, agape, the love we inspired in you." How did he inspire it? By example, by teaching, by preaching. "You abound in these things, in faith and doctrine and knowledge and passion and love; see that you abound in this gracious work also." See that your giving is in concert and harmony with these other Christian virtues. You overflow in these others, overflow in this one. It should go right along with everything else.

One final pinnacle, really, that marks the exemplary giving of the Macedonians, number thirteen. Their giving was a proof of love. Giving proves love, verse 8. This is so important. Here he says, "I'm not speaking this as a command." Isn't that amazing? After all this and it took him, you know, seven

verses...it's taken us four weeks. After all this he says, "I'm not speaking as a command." What? But again remember, this is in consideration of the fact...listen...that free will giving is never according to legalism. It's never according to obligation. It's never according to some prescription.

He's saying I'm not commanding you but I'm telling you prove your love. I'm not speaking this is as a command, but it is voluntary...free will, but as proving through the earnestness of others, and there he's referring to the Macedonians. He's comparing them to the Macedonians. As proving through the earnestness of others, through following their example, following their pattern, the sincerity of your love also.

I'll tell you one thing about giving. It verifies the level of your love. You can give without loving. That's required giving. But you can't love without giving. And the amount of your giving expresses the amount of your love. It proves, *dokimazō* is the word, the word for testing something to verify it.

Through the earnestness of others, that is the very earnest giving of the Macedonians, by measuring yourself against them, you can see the sincerity of your love. I want it to be the same thing. I want it to be the same as theirs. I want you to follow their example and prove that your love, your agape is sincere, literally genuine, the real thing, legitimate, true. As John says, "How can you say you love God if you don't love the brethren? How can you say the love of God dwells in you if you close your compassion to someone in need?" Fervently love one another.

Peter, in 1 Peter 1:22 says, "In obedience to the truth, purify...your souls have been purified unto a sincere love of the brethren, so fervently love one another from the heart." Whether you love the Lord, whether you love His church, whether you love those in need is evident by your giving. The true test of sincere love is not your emotions, it's not your feelings. It's your action.

And many people are under the allusion that they love because they feel things. Your love is not measured by what you feel, it is measured by your actions, and your actions may disprove your own assessment of your feelings. Giving is always the test of love and that's the...that's the *summum bonum*, that's the high point.

So the Macedonians are our model. They show us that giving is to be initiated by grace, that is to be a supernatural kind of giving. It is to transcend difficult circumstances. To be done with joy. Not hindered by poverty. It is to be generous, proportionate, sacrificial, voluntary. It is to be sought as a privilege not an obligation. It is a part of worship.

It is to be done in submission to pastors and leaders. It is to be in concert and harmony with other Christian virtues, and it is to prove our love to God to His church and His people. That's the Macedonian giving, the giving of devout Christians. Such giving, as we've said all along, is the path to blessing, a path I trust you are eager to walk. Let's pray.

Oh, Father, how instructive these great texts are to us and how they lead us to the path of blessing and grace upon grace upon grace. Forgive us, first of all, Lord, for how far short we fall and ennoble us to the level of these precious Macedonians, for this is what You require, this is what You ask. Thank You for the privilege and the freedom of giving.

We know that if You gave us a percentage it wouldn't measure anything, but when You leave it up to

us, oh how much it says about our hearts. So, Father, we want to give to prove our love for You, our love for our leaders, those who are over us in the Lord, our love for the people, our love for the ministry, for the advance of the kingdom.

May our affections be set so much on heavenly things, may we be so wholly given as a living and holy sacrifice that we will willingly become poor that others might be made rich. Father, we thank You for Your direction and Your leading in this area in our lives, day by day and week by week. May we be faithful to respond. In Christ's name, amen.

Available online at: <http://www.gty.org>

COPYRIGHT (C) 2017 Grace to You

You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (<http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright>).