

March 2007

## ***Second Corinthians Series***

Title: ***Example of Christian Giving***

Text: 2 Corinthians 8:1-5

Theme: A proper example of giving will encourage other believers to do the same thing.

**Introduction:** Robert Gilmour Letourneau was born in 1888 in Richford, Vermont. He was raised in Christian home and early came to trust Christ as his own Savior. He had very little formal education, and spent most of his youth helping on the family farm. It was an exciting time to live, what with all the new inventions. But when Robert was 20 Ford began to produce the Model T, and the wide-eyed boy from Vermont was captivated by cars. From 1917-1929 he ran a garage, and rode the crest of the automobile wave. With everybody using cars, there was also a need for roads, and Letourneau combined his expertise in engines with a knowledge road building. He began to design and build earth-moving equipment, and became a pioneer in the field. He formed R.G. Letourneau, Inc. and soon found himself the possessor of a huge fortune. Through all of this wealth-building, Letourneau never lost his commitment to God, and especially where his money was concerned. He kept a plaque in his office which read: ***Lord, help me to know how much of your money I can spend.***

This morning, we come in our exposition of Second Corinthians to chapter 8-9, where Paul discusses the subject of giving. There was great need among the saints in Jerusalem, and so Paul was receiving a collection for them from among all the churches he had planted.

Why? Why did these other churches, hundreds of miles away, have any obligation to the Jerusalem Christians? First, they were fellow believers, and we have an obligation to behave as a family to every other Christian. But more than that, the gospel began in Jerusalem. Every Christian in the world had an obligation to help the Jerusalem saints for the gospel's sake.

Now the Corinthians pledged themselves to contribute to this offering, but they had not followed through. This part of Paul's letter encourages them to do that.

Giving in the Old Testament is grounded on the concept of the **rsem** (*mangasar*), or the tithe, the tenth part. The first time the term occurs in Scripture is ... in Genesis 14 when Melchizedek goes out to meet Abraham. Abraham paid the high priest *tithes* of everything (verse 20, Hebrews 7:2). Without any explanation at all, reference is made to an institution – tithing – which pre-dated the Mosaic Law. Even Jacob vowed to give God a tithe following his dream at Bethel (Genesis 28). The Egyptians tithed to their gods, as did also the Akkadians. The first place a tithe is referred to in the Law is in Leviticus 27:30, and you can tell by what is written there that the Israelites already knew what a tithe was.

Giving for the Jews was not limited to a simple 10%. Leviticus 27:30-33, Numbers 18:21-32 and Deuteronomy 14:22-29 describes three different tithes<sup>1</sup> which the law-abiding Israelite had to pay: one for their pilgrim feasts at Jerusalem, one for the Levites, and another one every third year for the poor. So you worked your land and tended your animals, and 23% of everything you made was set aside for the Lord. This is giving in the Old Testament.

When we come to the New Testament, no set amount is commanded by Jesus or the apostles as a specific amount for giving. The tithe is certainly a starting point, because it transcends even the Mosaic Law. But instead of percentages to give, we are given principles to follow in our giving, and many of those principles are contained in the next two chapters of 2 Corinthians.

Paul opens this section of his letter with the example of the Macedonians in giving. He is also going to point to the example of Timothy, who gave his time, his very life, for the cause of the gospel. And he will point to the giving of Christ just down in verse 9. In fact, he is going to close this whole discussion at the end of chapter 9 by pointing to the example of God the Father in giving. But first, we

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<sup>1</sup> The position that there were three different tithes was held by Jewish rabbins. This does add weight to the position, since their traditional practice was based on the OT revelation. It seems that the primary problem with that position is the amount of food that would need to be consumed before the Lord at a single sacred feast – an entire tithe (so Thompson, Kalland). However, neither proposes any suitable alternatives (both alluding to Modernistic rubbish).

will note the example of the Macedonians, that their giving was **extraordinary, willing, and consistent**. “*Moreover, brethren, we do you to wit of the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia; 2 How that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality. 3 For to their power, I bear record, yea, and beyond their power they were willing of themselves; 4 Praying us with much intreaty that we would receive the gift, and take upon us the fellowship of the ministering to the saints. 5 And this they did, not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God.*”

### **Their Giving was Extraordinary** (verses 1-2)

1. “*We do you to wit of*” is one of those outdated expressions I was speaking of just a few moments ago. What does it mean? It means, *We want you to know about*.

2. What does Paul want the Corinthians to know about? He wants them to know about the grace which God had given (**dedome, nhn**, perfect passive participle) to the Macedonian Christians. This is not the grace of God that saved them, but the grace of God which is motivating them to do good works. In this case, that good work is giving generously to the need of the Jerusalem saints. When you give as unto the Lord, when your giving is characterized by the virtues mentioned in these two chapters, it is an evidence that God’s grace is actively working in your life.

3. Here is God’s grace working in these Corinthian Christians in an extraordinary way, and verse 2 is going to explain just how God’s grace did work in them. “*How that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality.*” Paul points to three things that made their giving supernaturally extraordinary:

a. They gave even though they were going through great trials: “... *in a great trial of affliction ...*” We assume that this is speaking of the persecution they were undergoing for Jesus’ sake. Paul speaks about this in the Thessalonian epistles and in Philippians (two Macedonian churches). How did they meet these trials? Did they feel sorry for themselves? No, they gave! Did they focus on their own sufferings? No, they thought of the needs of others and gave! This sounds very much like what Jesus Himself did.

b. They gave even though they were poor: “... *their deep poverty ...*” We might think, *What could they do? They have very little themselves*. But remember what Jesus said about the widow’s two mites? “*This poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury: 44 For all they did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living.*” (Mark 12:43-44) God has a way of multiplying gifts that are sacrificially given beyond human comprehension.

c. They gave joyfully: “... *the abundance of their joy ...*” We live in a world which says, *you are happier if you receive, than if you give; and if there is any happiness in giving, it is the happiness of knowing that you are a good person*. This thinking is rubbish. The Christian is filled with joy when he is most like his Master, and no one ever gave like God has.

Transition: Joyful, sacrificial, selfless giving is a genuine mark of God’s grace at work in our lives: “... *while passing through great trouble, their boundless joy even amid their deep poverty has overflowed to increase their generous liberality.*”

### **Their Giving was Willing** (verses 3-4)

1. In Exodus 36 we read: “*Then Moses called Bezalel and Aholiab, and every gifted artisan in whose heart the LORD had put wisdom, everyone whose heart was stirred, to come and do the work. 3 And they received from Moses all the offering which the children of Israel had brought for the work of the service of making the sanctuary. So they continued bringing to him freewill offerings every morning. 4 Then all the craftsmen ... 5 ... spoke to Moses, saying, ‘The people bring much more than enough for the service of the work which the LORD commanded us to do.’ 6 So Moses gave a commandment, and they caused it to be proclaimed throughout the camp, saying, ‘Let neither man nor woman do any more work for the offering of the sanctuary.’ And the people were restrained from bringing, 7 for the material they had was sufficient for all the work to be done—indeed too much.*” Here is an example of giving willingly.

2. “For to their power, I bear record, yea, and beyond their power they were willing of themselves; 4 Praying us with much intreaty that we would receive the gift, and take upon us the fellowship of the ministering to the saints.” The word that Paul uses (and it is only here and in verse 17 in the NT) combines two words meaning *to choose for oneself*. There is no emotional pressure put on them, no guilt feelings imposed on them for not giving. They are choosing to give for themselves.

3. Two things underscore the freeness, the willingness, of their giving:

a. They were willing to give more than could have been expected of them, or beyond what would have been thought possible (*kata. du,namin ... kai. u`pe.r du,namin*). This is the giving of a small assembly that was not expected to give much, or of a poor assembly that was not expected to give much.

b. They were willing to give with much encouragement and desire: “*Continually imploring us with much encouragement that they be allowed to serve the saints in this way.*” Their willingness was excessive. Perhaps Paul somehow discouraged them from giving because of their circumstances, but the Macedonian Christians were urgent that they be allowed to *fellowship* in this service for the saints (*th.n koinwni,an th/j diakoni,aj th/j eivj tou.j a`gi,ouj*).

Transition: Their hearts stirred them to give, and they gave more than enough. This is what happens when God works in the hearts of His people, because this kind of giving is like God’s giving.

### **Their Giving was Consistent** (verse 5)

1. Let’s go back to our widow’s mites in Mark 12 (41-44). How can verse 43 be true? Her two mites equaled a mere penny. How could that be more than what the rich gave? Because the amount is measured by God according to the heart attitude, and not according to the bank account. Your ten dollars given as to the Lord can be worth more to the cause of God than Ten Turner’s \$1 billion. God does not want our money, folks. He wants our hearts. If He has your heart, all of your money is already His, and you can ask with Letourneau: Lord, help me to know how much of your money I can spend.

2. “*This they did ..*” What? They urged us to let them give. “... *not as we hoped ...*” The attitude of these Macedonians surpassed their expectations. They went beyond what Paul and the others hoped it would be. In what way? “... *but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God.*” Their giving was the result of an entire consecration of themselves and their worldly goods to God. Which came first, the entire consecration, or the monetary gift? They *first* gave themselves to the Lord (*e`autou.j e;dwkan prw/ton*).

3. But they also gave themselves to the Apostles. In what sense? In that they were willing to be directed by them, they were willing to submit to the decision of the apostles. They were the men God had put over them, and so submitting to God meant submitting to God’s men. And why was their this profound consecration? Because it was the will of God.

4. Sometimes the giving of the saints is consistent with their consecration to God. They give little, because they love Him little. But the giving of these Macedonians was excessive, because their love for God was excessive. Their giving was consistent with their heart attitude. Both were willing, both were sacrificial, both were generous ... and that made the gift all the more precious to God.

Conclusion: Why point to the giving of the Macedonians? It serves as an example which motivates other believers – the Corinthians in this case – to give in like manner. Is our giving consistent with our dedication to God? Does our giving come from a willing heart? Is it the evidence of the grace of God at work in our hearts?