

Chapter Eight

THE PROBLEM OF STEWARDSHIP — PART I (8:1-24)

IDEAS TO INVESTIGATE:

1. Does God expect people to give “beyond their means”?
2. What is the point at which one “excels” in benevolence?
3. If the “readiness” is in our heart is that acceptable whether we give or not?
4. Why should administrators of what has been given be “blameless”?
5. Paul mentions twice that giving is a “proof of love”? Is it?

SECTION 1

Commitment (8:1-7)

8 We want you to know, brethren, about the grace of God which has been shown in the churches of Macedonia, ²for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of liberality on their part. ³For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own free will, ⁴begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints—⁵and this, not as we expected, but first they gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God. ⁶Accordingly we have urged Titus that as he had already made a beginning, he should also complete among you this gracious work. ⁷Now as you excel in everything—in faith, in utterance, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in your love for us—see that you excel in this gracious work also.

8:1-2 Poverty No Problem: Call it “giving,” “benevolence,” or “finances,” the problem is *stewardship*. While Paul had no stewardship problem with the brethren in Macedonia, he may have had one with the brethren in Corinth. He gave them directions about steward-

SECOND CORINTHIANS

ship in First Corinthians (I Cor. 16:1-4). Now, in Second Corinthians, he urges them to imitate the Macedonians and *fulfill* (v. 6, Gr. *epitelese*, "complete, fulfill, finish") what they had said they desired to do and had actually begun to do in the matter of stewardship (benevolence) toward the Judean brethren.

It is one of the major problems of the ministry to get believers to actually become *stewards* of God. It is not as much of a problem to get people to "give" as it is to get them involved in *stewardship* (management) of God's grace. Stewardship and giving are not synonymous terms. The Greek word translated *stewardship* is *oikonomia*, and means literally, "keeper of the house," or "manager." It came to mean, "the discharge of a commission." We may not be able to conceive of stewardship apart from giving, but we certainly have seen giving that was not a part of good stewardship. About one-third of the parable of Jesus deal with some aspect of stewardship. In the New Testament idea of stewardship, christians are "managers" of the grace of God. They are responsible not only for what is given but also for where or to what cause it is given. They are responsible not only for what is given, but also for what is kept and how it is used. They are responsible and will be held accountable by the God of all grace.

While the precise Greek word *oikonomia* (stewardship) never comes into our text in II Corinthians 8 and 9, the principles of stewardship are clearly enumerated. Although there is something of a special nature to the offering Paul is discussing in our text, the principles stated are enduring and should be applied to every aspect of the church and the believer. What Paul is *urging* in II Corinthians 8 and 9 is simply a continuation of his "directions" (Gr. *dietaxa*, "command, ordain, prescribe, charge") in I Corinthians 16:1-4! Make no mistake, stewardship, giving, benevolence is an apostolic *command*! What Paul says in II Corinthians "*not* as a command" is how much is to be given. Nowhere in the New Testament are christians told precise amounts to be given. Tithing is *not* a New Testament ordinance. Tithing is not a worthy ideal for a christian. Stewardship involves 100 percent of a christian's "possessions" — not just one-tenth.

The christians in Judea were poor. First, they had been "plundered" by their Hebrew persecutors (see Heb. 10:32-34). Second, the land of Palestine was economically the poorest in the whole Roman empire. Third, Palestine was over-populated with Hebrew and

christian pilgrims. One of the earliest problems of the church in Jerusalem was the equitable feeding of the widows (Acts 6:1). Early in the history of the spread of Christianity, the christians at Antioch sent relief to the church at Jerusalem by the hands of Barnabas and Saul (Acts 11:29), because of a fourth circumstance — widespread famine. The leaders of the Jerusalem church asked Paul to “remember the poor” (Gal. 2:10) whenever he preached in Judea.

So, when Paul began his third missionary journey, he planned to raise as large an offering from the Gentiles in Asia Minor and Greece as he could carry back to Judea to care for the destitute christians there.

Paul’s statement to the church at Corinth (I Cor. 16:1-4) mentioning the church of Galatia, indicates his plan for the offering was already well known by the time he wrote to Corinth. Paul mentions the collection to the church at Rome in the epistle he wrote to them while residing at Corinth (Rom. 15:25-26). “Paul’s collection” was widely known. When Paul left Corinth a number of men accompanied him. The book of Acts does not say that these men were taking up the collection, but it would seem that this was the reason for their going. The “committee” consisted of: “Sopater of Beroea, the son of Pyrrhus; of the Thessalonians, Aristarchus and Secundus; and Gaius of Derbe, and Timothy; and the Asians, Tychicus and Trophimus” (Acts 20:4).

The apostle knew how destitute the Judeans were. He wanted to carry back to them an offering substantial enough to fulfill the need. Corinth was one of the wealthier cities in the Roman empire and contained some men of substance in the membership of the church. Paul was much concerned that they would respond liberally to the appeal so he holds before them the almost incredible example of the Macedonians.

It seems strange that Paul never uses the word “stewardship” in this discussion. It is apparent that he uses the Greek word *charin*, “grace” as a synonym. He uses this word “grace” nine times (8:1, 4, 7, 9, 16, 19; 9:8, 14, 15). Everything a human being has in this world is granted him by the grace of God. God owns everything but he grants each of us a portion to “manage” for his profit (glory). Whatever we “give” to others really is not ours (I Chron. 29:9-19), but belongs to God. So Paul says, “We want you to know, brethren, about the *grace*

of God which as been *given* (Gr. *dedomenen*, "has been given," not "shown" as in the RSV) among the churches of Macedonia." Whenever we give, we give the grace of God. We are "managers" (stewards) of the grace of God. In all his parables of stewardship Jesus taught plainly that the steward possessed nothing of his own — he simply managed what belonged to the "householder," or the "master."

Macedonia is generally the territory lying between the Balkan highlands and the Greek peninsula. It was both a Greek kingdom and a Roman province. The population was Indo-European, but of mixed tribal elements of which the Dorian (people from Balkan highlands north of Greece) stock was probably a strong ingredient. Plummer records the fact that the Romans had been very hard on the Macedonians expropriating their richest sources of income — the gold and silver mines — and taxing the right to smelt the minerals. They had also reserved to themselves the trade in salt, timber, and shipbuilding. All of this had reduced the territory to deep poverty. Added to the burdens of the christians were the various persecutions which they had experienced. Yet they, of all Paul's churches, were most generous in their support of him (at least the church at Philippi which was in the Macedonian province — see Phil. 4:10-19). Paul says the churches of Macedonia "gave the grace of God" during a "severe test" (Gr. *polle*, "much;" and *dokime*, "proof, trial, examination") of "affliction" (Gr. *thlipseos*, "pressure, crushing, squeezed"). Paul mentions these severe afflictions in his letter to the Thessalonians (I Thess. 2:14-16).

Under these extreme privations and tensions the Macedonians found enough of God's grace (Gr. *charas* "joy") available to them to "overflow" (Gr. *eperisseusen*, extensive abundance) "in a wealth of liberality" (Gr. *eis to ploutos tes haplotetos*). The Greek word *haplotetos* is translated "liberality" and means, literally, "unconditionally, sincerely, unaffectedly, honestly, singlemindedly." Their response was one of *honest stewards* — they concealed nothing, held back nothing. And this they did under circumstances of "extreme poverty" (Gr. *bathous ptocheia*). The Greek word *bathos* is, literally, "deep" (from it we get the English words *bath*, *bathe*, *bathometer*), and the Greek word *ptocheia* is the same word as the one Matthew used to record Jesus' statement, "Blessed are the *poor* in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:3). Paul uses the word

“poverty” (*epptocheusen*) in 8:9 to characterize the way Jesus divested himself of his heavenly glory so that believers might become *rich* (Gr. *plouteseite*, “plutocratic”). The word *ptocheia* is often translated simply, “poor,” as in the case of the “poor” widow (Mark 12:41-44), and the “poor” beggar (Luke 16:19-20). *Ptocheia* means *more* than underprivileged or unprosperous or lacking — it means “poverty-stricken,” “bankrupt,” “destitute,” and “impoverished.”

Paul urges the Corinthians to respond like the Macedonians. Not even “extreme poverty” presented a problem to the Macedonians because they responded on the basis of *stewardship* and not merely on the basis of “taking up an offering.” Whether there was a problem in this area in the Corinthian church or not, the apostle urges the example of *stewardship* by the Macedonians as the christian standard of “giving.” Only *commitment* to the New Testament *ordinance* of *stewardship* will solve the financial problem of the church — *not* “tithing,” not “collections.” And the financial problem of the church is *not* fundamentally the *amount* of money or property it does *not* have or may have; the basic problem with christians and their financial responses to Christ is in the area of *motives* — reasons and purposes for giving. Essentially, the problem is that of surrender and commitment to the will of God as he has expressed it in his Word. God’s word clearly demands cheerful, honest, wise, accountable stewardship of *one hundred percent* of one’s worldly possessions. Even the “poverty-stricken” are responsible for good stewardship!

8:3-5 Participation, the Point: The point in christian stewardship is not how much, but why! Paul *testified* (Gr. *marturo*, “witnessed as in a court of law”) from first-hand, personal, eye-witnessed knowledge that the Macedonians gave according to their *ability* (Gr. *dunamin*, power, capability, dynamic). Indeed, they gave *beyond* (Gr. *para*, preposition meaning “beyond, extended, over”) their ability! To what extent does one give in order to give “beyond” one’s ability? The Biblical answer to that may be found in the actual event Jesus observed in the Jewish temple one day when a Hebrew widow (Mark 12:41-44; Luke 21:1-4), “out of her poverty . . . put in everything she had, *her whole living*.” This Hebrew widow extended herself in giving to the Lord to the ultimate — “all that she had to live by.” She gave “two mites” (about 60 cents in American currency today) while the rich put in “bags” (probably hundreds of dollars worth) of coins. Yet

she put in more than all of them put together, in God's eyes, because she gave up her livelihood so far as she was able, at that moment, to sustain it (see *The Gospel of Luke*, by Paul T. Butler, pp. 467-470, pub. College Press). Is that not extreme? Is that not exceptional? Is that not beyond what Christ requires of the normal christian life? Did the widow of Elijah's experience (I Kgs. 17:12-16) think so? Did Jesus think so? (see Matt. 19:23-30; Luke 14:33). Did the Macedonians think so? Did Paul think so? (see Phil. 4:10-13, etc.). Of course, the Bible says the laborer is worthy of his hire. And the Bible says the one who will not provide for his own (family) is worse than a heathen (I Tim. 5:8). It also says we are to "earn our own living" (II Thess. 3:12). There were other rich followers of Jesus who were never specifically challenged to "sell all they had" in order to give to the poor. When Judas insisted that a costly vial of myrrh could have been sold and the proceeds given to the poor, Jesus rebuked him and said, "the poor you have with you always . . ." (Matt. 26:6-13; Mark 14:3-9; John 12:1-8). But Jesus does teach us that we should be *ready*, at any moment, to give *everything* we have, including our very lives, upon demand, in his service. He does command us that we are to live one day at a time without anxiety (divided-mindedness) and to pray daily for our bread (Matt. 6:1-34). Whatever a christian has left over from daily needs he must *commit* (surrender), as an honest and wise steward, to the Master's use. It is normal (Biblically speaking) that the christian *not* lay up for himself treasures on earth, (see Matt. 6:19-21; I Tim. 6:17-19; Luke 16:8-9; 12:13-21). The Macedonians were following the *normal* requirements of christian stewardship when they gave, "of their own free will" (Gr. *authairetoi*), and beyond their ability. They gave when they "couldn't afford it" because that is what a christian steward is to do when the Lord's service requires it. They gave what they had and trusted the Lord to supply what they needed.

What is so incredible about the giving of the Macedonians (8:4) is expressed in the Greek text, *meta polles parakleseos deomenoi*, literally, "with much begging, requesting. . . ." They *begged* to give! In circumstances of affliction and severe poverty, they begged and requested "the favor" (Gr. *charin*, "grace") of giving! They were not doing Paul or the destitute Judeans a favor — they were asking *for* a favor — TO GIVE! They really believed Jesus' promise, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:38). They plead with Paul for

the privilege to give because they wanted to *participate in* (Gr. *koinonian*, share, commune, participate, fellowship) the “relief” (Gr. *diakonias*, ministry, deaconship) toward the “saints” (Gr. *hagious*, holy ones) for Judea. Perhaps more christians would “beg” to give if it could be communicated to them that they actually were *sharing in* the ministry of Christ through those “full-time” servants (preachers, missionaries, teachers, and others) who administer the gifts and grace of God.

What the Macedonians did was beyond the expectations of Paul and his co-laborers. Paul was *surprised* that these brethren could give beyond their ability out of “deep poverty.” People, in deep poverty themselves, begging for the favor of giving, giving beyond what they could afford to give, will surprise almost any christian today! If it were not written by a man (Paul) whose veracity is unquestionable and under the claimed inerrancy of the Holy Spirit of God, what the Macedonians did would be unbelievable! While such stewardship is the theological norm taught in the New Testament, it is *not* the *practiced* norm in the church today! And that is so because most christians have not fully given themselves to the Lord.

The *secret* of such unimaginable giving of one’s possessions is that *first* (Gr. *proton*, firstly) they gave *themselves*. There was not one iota of selfishness in these Macedonian christians because they had given up *self* to Jesus. They considered themselves as no longer belonging to themselves, but unto Christ who had purchased them. They were his, totally, for he had bought them with his atoning death. They were “sold out” to God’s will. It was not ever what they wanted anymore, but what Christ wanted (see Gal. 2:20-21; 6:14). They could behave as their Judean brethren had earlier when, “. . . the company of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had everything in common,” (Acts 4:32). That kind of total surrender of self requires dauntless, courageous faith in God’s veracity. It is important to notice that the Macedonians *gave* themselves. God did not force them to surrender to him to any degree. God worked no irresistible power to overwhelm their will. *They* gave themselves. They could have done otherwise. But they chose to give themselves to the Lord and to Paul *through* (Gr. *dia*) the will of God. That is, *they chose the will of God in place of their own will*. And that is the very essence of salvation in

Christ. Men must be saved from their own willfulness by surrendering in faith to the will of Christ which is revealed inerrantly, completely and finally in the Scriptures. Until a man surrenders his will to Christ he lives enslaved to the exercise of his will directed toward eternal rebellion, falsehood, and banishment from God. Until he surrenders his will to Jesus he follows “. . . the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit now at work in the sons of disobedience” (Eph. 2:1-2). Christ accepts no half-hearted, double-minded, hypocritical relationships. Those who wish to inherit his promises must give themselves completely to his grace. Since few ever enter by this “narrow” and “difficult” gate (as the Macedonians evidently had) it is so extraordinary the rest of mankind can hardly believe it.

8:6-7 Perfection, the Purpose: Titus had already started this “faith promise rally.” Now he would be sent back to Corinth to bring this “ministry” to its *completion* (Gr. *epitelese*, from *teleioo*, “to finalize, to bring something to its goal or aim, to fulfill”). This request for an offering from the Corinthians had as its “goal” a “work of grace” upon the Corinthians themselves. Actually, the Greek text does not have the word “work” in verse 6; it literally reads, “. . . he should complete among you the grace, this one.” “Gracious work” is a proper translation — but “this act of grace” might be an even better translation. The “goal” of giving in such a totally unselfish way is to cultivate the virtue or *character* of grace in the giver. Giving out of extreme poverty, begging to give, in order to participate in the ministry of God to destitute people, is *character-building*! Such giving is at the very core of spirituality. There is no possibility of any mercenary greed as a motive. There is no hypocrisy involved in such selflessness. There is nothing more spiritual than stewardship surrendered to Christ as it was demonstrated by the Macedonians helping the Judeans.

One of the major problems a preacher faces in the ministry of the gospel is Christians who criticize him for emphasizing stewardship. Some Christians think such emphasis is “worldly” and “unspiritual.” But it is doubtful, in the light of so much teaching in the New Testament about it, that anyone can be spiritual unless he faces up to and fulfills Christ’s calling to honest, total, cheerful, and wise stewardship.

Paul insisted the Corinthian Christians “see to it” that they *excel*

(Gr. *perisseuete*, present tense, “continuing action,” “abounding”) in the christian virtue (“grace”) of benevolence. Paul had earlier reminded the Corinthians of God’s grace bestowed upon them. “I give thanks to God always for you because of the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus, that in every way you were enriched in him with all speech and all knowledge . . . so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift” (I Cor. 1:4,7). The Corinthian christians spent a great deal of their time boasting about and making comparisons concerning these spiritual gifts. They desired to “excel” in them (especially the more spectacular “tongues” see I Corinthians chapters 12, 13, 14). Paul insisted he could show them a “more excellent” way to practice their faith and glorify God — LOVE (I Cor. 12:31). So in these two chapters (II Cor. 8 & 9) he specifies how the “more excellent” way of love might be expressed — STEWARDSHIP! (II Cor. 8:8, 24). Christians should strive to excel in giving, in stewardship, rather than clamoring after the “showy” (really, immature) demonstrations. How many “excellent” givers are in your congregation? What is an *excellent* giver? In the church today we have “excellent” singers, preachers, teachers, callers, prayers, administrators, attenders, and a dozen other “excellencies” — but *few* “excellent” givers. To be an excellent giver one has to *exceed the norm*. Paul is talking about being *extraordinary* in giving. And, remember, he is talking about the Macedonians, who, in circumstances of extreme affliction and deep poverty, were examples of “excellence” in giving! The apostles left everything they had and followed Jesus (Matt. 19:27); the widow of Zarepath gave all she had to live on to Elijah (I Kgs. 17:8ff); Jesus left everything he had in heaven and became poor for our sake. It *was* done. It can still be done! But it requires extraordinary faith! And extraordinary faith is God’s goal for all believers. He wants to transform every believer into the image of his son (Rom. 8:29).

SECTION 2

Credibility (8:8-15)

8 I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine. ⁹For you know the grace

SECOND CORINTHIANS

of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich. ¹⁰And in this matter I give my advice: it is best for you now to complete what a year ago you began not only to do but to desire, ¹¹so that your readiness in desiring it may be matched by your completing it out of what you have. ¹²For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what a man has, not according to what he has not. ¹³I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened, ¹⁴but that as a matter of equality your abundance at the present time should supply their want, so that their abundance may supply your want, that there may be equality. ¹⁵As it is written, "He who gathered much had nothing over, and he who gathered little had no lack."

8:8-9 Piqued: Paul wants the Corinthians to give credibility to their professions of christian faith and love. They have promised to send financial help to their destitute brethren in Judea. Now the apostle asks them to "prove" their love, to prove their credibility. He begins by stating that *he* is not *ordering* (Gr. *epitagen*, *epi* and *tasso*, "ordering or regulating") them to do as the Macedonians did. When Paul says, "I say this not as a command . . ." he certainly is not removing christian stewardship from the realm of divine commandment. As we have already pointed out, he *directed* the Corinthians to take up offerings in I Corinthians 16:1ff. In the Gospels are clearly recorded the *commandments* of Christ about stewardship of all areas of life. What Paul does not want to *order* or *regulate* is the *amount* (see 8:12). Regulating the amount is what the Law of Moses did. Of course, it is also true that in the New Dispensation, stewardship must have love as its motivation — not law. But since love is not self-defining, there must be "commandments" from Christ and the apostles to provide definitive guidance as to what pleases God. God's word therefore "commands" us to give to help any brother who is in need (I John 3:15-18; 4:19 — 5:3). In his *commands* God *defines* love. He cannot love him outside his commandments! Paul is, therefore, not saying here that giving is not commanded. Our motivation for loving, or giving, is because God loved (and gave) to us first (I John 4:19). The apostle stated at the first of this letter (1:24) he did not want to give the impression that he was "Lording it over their faith." He

does not issue a command (although stewardship is commanded by the Lord and his apostles) he *piques* their desire to give by reminding them of the Lord's graciousness.

The Lord Jesus, anointed (Christ) by God for the purpose of becoming poor, is the supreme example of the grace of giving. How rich was Jesus before his incarnation? Paul says he was, in his pre-incarnate existence, "equal with God" (Phil. 2:5-6) but he "emptied" himself of that divine status and took the form of a human servant (Phil. 2:7-9). Speaking of the identity of Christ, Paul said to the Colossians, "he is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation; for in him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities — all things were created through him and for him." (Col. 1:15-16). Paul added, ". . . in him all things hold together." (Col. 1:17). In Jesus dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead, bodily! (Col. 1:19, 2:9). The riches Christ has to offer are "unsearchable" (Eph. 3:8). Moses valued even the poverty ("reproaches") of the Christ "greater riches than the treasures of Egypt" (Heb. 11:26). The Son of God, heir of the majestic glory and absolute riches of heaven, divested himself of all he owned and came to earth and *impoverished* (Gr. *ep-tocheusen*) himself in order that (for the very purpose) by the instrumentality of his *poverty* (Gr. *ptocheia*) we might become rich. While birds had nests, and foxes had dens, the Son of man had no place "to lay his head" (Matt. 8:20; Luke 9:59). Ray C. Steadman writes, "Remember how he (Jesus) constantly borrowed everything? We may reverently say that he was the greatest scrounger of history. He was always borrowing. He had nothing of his own. He borrowed food, he borrowed clothing, he borrowed a coin to give an illustration, a donkey to enter into the city of Jerusalem, and he finally had to borrow a tomb in which to be laid. On one occasion the disciples all went to their own homes but he went to the Mount of Olives." All these things were his by right of having been Creator of them — yet he gave them all up (not because he had to) in order to fulfill the will of God on our behalf. For the *glory* that was set before him, Christ endured the cross, contemptuous of the shame (Heb. 12:1-2). The glory the incarnate Christ anticipated was the glory he had with the Father before the world was made (see John 17:1-5). And he left it all, to take on human form, and suffer the humiliation of human rejection,

SECOND CORINTHIANS

rebellion and crucifixion, in order to become a substitutionary atonement for sinful mankind. Thus, in his impoverishment, he made man rich. After his humiliation he was raised from the dead, ascended to heaven and the right hand of God the Father, there to inherit all his former glory plus the glory accrued from his incarnate work of redemption. And he made us "joint heirs" (Rom. 8:12-17) of *his* glory! Paul had already told the Corinthians that God was preparing for them "an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison" (II Cor. 4:16-18). If the unsearchable, inexpressible selflessness of Christ in his abdication of divine riches to accomplish our redemption does not pique our desire to give to others, nothing will!

8:10-12 Proved: It is one thing to *talk* about "love" and another to actually "love." It is one thing to admire, be awed by, and praise the divine demonstration of Christ's love, and another to emulate it! Paul exhorts the Corinthians to demonstrate their integrity. Let them prove their credibility. While he will not, on his own, make his suggestion as an apostolic commandment. He gives his apostolic "wisdom" (Gr. *gnomen*, from *ginosko*, meaning, "to know, mind, wisdom, opinion"). Apostolic "opinion" or "wisdom" in any matter, while not a direct commandment, is to be highly respected and obeyed, so long as it does no violation to divine commandments.

Paul "gives" his opinion, and then suggests it is probably "expedient" (Gr. *sumpherei*, "bring together for profit, profitable, beneficial, advantageous") for the Corinthians that he give an "apostolic suggestion" rather than an arbitrary commandment. The RSV is wrong to include the clause, "it is best for you." in one large clause of verse 10. "It is best for you" stands as a separate clause on its own in the Greek text and reads literally, "for this for you is expedient." That being the case, it is difficult to establish the connection of the statement. Does Paul mean "it is expedient for them" to finish the giving they started a year ago, or does he mean "it is expedient for them" that he gives only a suggestion and not a commandment? Plummer paraphrases, "To offer an opinion, and not give a command, is the method which is suitable to people like you, who were to the front, not only in doing something, but also in desiring to do something, as long ago as last year." Plummer thinks the clause, "it is expedient for you," connects to Paul's "advice." This connection of the clause is more in keeping with the intent of verse 8 and with the at-

itude of the Corinthians expressed in the following clause. The Corinthians had already expressed their desire to give and had begun to do so a year earlier. Those who have never expressed any willingness to do what is clearly a christian duty must be commanded. Those who have not only wanted to do their duty, but have already begun, need only "advice." This may be true of many 20th century church members! Perhaps the "willingness" is already there in their mind and heart — but they need some apostolic "advice" on when to give, how much to give, and what their giving will accomplish. Away with all the slick, secular promotions! Give christians *scriptural* "advice" on giving!

Paul's "advice" is, *ou monon to poiesai alla kai to thelein pro-enerxasthe apo perusi*, literally, "not only the to do but also the to will, previously you began from last year..." The infinitive *poiesai* is aorist but the next infinitive *thelein* is present tense. Plummer says, "This may perhaps intimate that the acting has ceased, and that only the wishing remains. They had been first in both, but now others were before them in acting." The RSV supplies, in verse 10, the word "complete" — it is not a part of the Greek text in verse 10. Paul is not emphasizing in verse 10 the completion, but the eagerness and the earliness. In verse 11 the Greek text uses the word *epitelesate*, "completion," twice. The verb *proenerxasthe* is a combination of three Greek words, *pro*, meaning "before," *en*, meaning "before" and *archomai*, meaning "begin, first," thus we have an emphatic verb. Paul is emphasizing that the Corinthians had been the very first congregation to express their desire and had begun to give before any other group. But at some time after the beginning they had ceased to give and their intended offering was incomplete.

The RSV has taken the first part of the Greek text in verse 11 (*nuni de kai to poiesai epitelesate*, "and so now the to do, complete") and transferred it back by translation into verse 10. Actually, verse 11 begins, "and so now the to do, complete." The verb *epitelesateis* is aorist. It is a combination of *epi*, a prepositional prefix emphasizing intensity, and *teleioo*, meaning "perfect, complete, fulfill, bring to a goal, end." Paul is exhorting the Corinthians to bring what they expressed such eagerness to do, and had actually begun to do, to fruition! He advises them that their eagerness (Gr. *prothumia*, "passionate forwardness") of a year ago should be matched by their

finishing what they started. *Prothumia* is translated "readiness;" *thumia* is from a word in Greek which means "passionate, or hot-tempered." The Corinthians had passionately expressed their desire to contribute to the hungry saints in Jerusalem. It would be a sad thing that those who were foremost in willingness should be last in fulfilling it! Jesus rebuked the church at Sardis because he had "not found their works perfect (completed)." Even though they "had the *name* of being alive" they were dead (Rev. 3:1-2). It is a serious reflection on the integrity and stability of Christ and Christianity for congregations to be "alive" with grandiose projects and plans, but "dead" to the *completion* or *fulfillment* of their promises. Thus Paul urges them to "match" their passionate willingness and their beginning actions with a *completion* of the project. And they need to make the completion "out of what they have" (Gr. *ek tou echein*). Paul means they should give in *proportion* to what they have (see I Cor. 16:2; II Cor. 8:14). To prove their integrity they do not need to give beyond their ability, but according to a proper proportion of their means as they have determined. The New Testament is filled with exhortations to personal integrity. A christian's actions must match his words. Jesus even warned would-be followers to "count the cost" of carrying through, finishing, or completing before professing discipleship (see Luke 14:25-35). Christians must not love in word or speech but in deed and in truth (I John 3:18; 4:20-21). Love must be proved.

8:13-15 Prudential: At the same time Paul gives "advice" about proving their integrity, he also suggests that the Corinthians be prudent and sensible about their responsibilities in how much to give.

First, he advises, give in *proportion* (Gr. *katho ean*, "according to whatever") to what one *has* (Gr. *eche*, has, possesses, etc.). He promises that such giving is *acceptable* (Gr. *euprosdektos*, "very favorable acceptance") to Christ. There are a few examples of believers and worshipers giving all they had to the Lord's treasury (see Mark 12:41-44; Luke 21:1-4); there is at least one incident where the Lord commanded a rich, covetous man, to give all he had to the poor (see Matt. 19:16-30; Mark 10:17-22; Luke 18:18-23). These are exceptional cases and not the general rule. Jesus' purpose in these exceptional incidents was to break the idolatry from the soul of the covetous. The general rule of stewardship and giving in the New Testament is proportionate — relative to one's ability — to one's

possessions.

The first century Hebrew christians, had all things common (Acts 2:43-47), and were so generous they sold property and laid the money at the feet of the apostles for distribution to the needy (Acts 4:32-37). But such great generosity was not a requirement! When Ananias and Sapphira lied about their generosity, they were reminded they were not expected to give as much as others if they did not want to — but they were expected not to lie about their giving! (Acts 5:1-11). In every parable of Jesus about stewardship the teaching is that a steward is to be faithful in what he has, not in what he does *not* have.

But what is the “proportion” of a christian’s possessions he should give? Should it be a “tithe” (10%)? Should it be “tithes and offerings” (more than 10%)? If so, how much? *The New Testament does not legislate specific “proportions”!* The New Testament does not teach “tithing” — it teaches stewardship of 100% of a christian’s “possessions.” There are principles in the N.T. which should offer guidelines for christian giving. Christians are not to be covetous. They are not to be greedy. They are not to be *anxious* (double-minded) worrying over food, clothing and shelter (Matt. 6:25-34). They are to remember they brought nothing into the world neither can they carry anything out and so be content with food and clothing (I Tim. 6:6-10). They are not to set their hopes on *uncertain* riches, but to do good, be rich in good deeds, liberal and generous (I Tim. 6:17-18). Christians are to provide necessities for their own families (I Tim. 5:8). The Lord expects christians to maintain their personal lives financially and materially in such sufficiency as permits them to minister to Christ’s kingdom and the needy to the best of their capabilities (II Cor. 9:8-13).

Each christian must decide what “proportion” he should give directly to the church. Each christian must study God’s word and decide for himself how much he keeps to be fed, clothed and sheltered; to care for his own family; to conduct his personal ministry in the name of Christ; to keep from becoming a “burden” on others (see II Cor. 8:13). All beyond these necessities, he should give to the work of the Gospel, clearly understanding that he is accountable for faithful, frugal and wise stewardship of what he has kept back for himself. The true follower of Christ is not permitted the luxury of waste or self-indulgence. There are too many cries for help — too

many evangelistic opportunities begging — christians dare not squander what God has given them or pamper themselves.

A christian does not have to be rich to give. Every christian, even the poor, is to give and act responsibly toward whatever stewardship the Lord has given him. If a poor christian is “passionately” eager to give, and gives in “proportion” to what he has to fulfill the principles stated above, his gift is “very favourably accepted” by the Lord.

While the Lord expects us to “renounce all that we have” (Luke 14:33), and to be willing, should he demand it, to give up everything we own, the normal rule of christian giving is “in *proportion* to what one has, not according to what one does not have.”

Paul’s explanation of “proportionate” giving is intended to keep some from being eased and others burdened. There must have been those in the Corinthian congregation accusing Paul of discriminating against the rich. Perhaps they thought he was expecting a few “well-to-do” people to carry the whole “burden” of the collection of Judea. Paul clears that up. Everyone is to give something. Let it be according to everyone’s ability. Every christian at Corinth (even a slave) is to make some contribution. The *pressure* (Gr. *thlipsis*, “burden, affliction, pressed-down”) of giving must be on every member’s conscience.

In verse 14, the principle of *equality* (Gr. *isotetos*, “equal, same as, fair”) is applied to christian giving. “Proportionate” giving makes the burden of giving *equal* upon all in the congregation. Everyone is to give something — in proportion to what he has. Those who had little were to give “as they had been prospered” (I Cor. 16:2), and those who had much were to give “as they had been prospered.” However much each had, that “much” would be required (Luke 12:48). It is not the amount, but the eagerness, the equality, the total sharing of every christian to give that pleases the Lord.

Abundance and prosperity, by the grace of God, is dispensed by the Almighty in ways and places incomprehensible to man — but always according to God’s will. The abundance of those he prospers is willed to them so they may supply the *lack* (Gr. *husterema*, “to be in need, be inferior, deficient”) of any one. Christian giving is not to supply what people “want,” but what people “need.” According to the providential shifts in prosperity, those who “have” are to help supply needs to those who “do not have.” Those who give are to do so

freely, without coercion, not of compulsion, not by legislated amounts, but proportionately. Evidently, many people of Corinth had been prospering while the people of Palestine had been suffering drought, famine, earthquakes, plundering of their possessions by persecutors (see Heb. 10:32ff), and other depredations. So, Paul reminds the Corinthians, their *abundance* (Gr. *perisseuma*) was providentially given them by God that they might learn to give to the needs of those not thus blessed.

In the latter half of verse 14 the interesting principle of expected reciprocation is put forward. At the time Paul wrote II Corinthians, the Greeks were prospering and the Jews were impoverished. Paul says to the Corinthians, “. . . but that as a matter of equality your abundance at the present time should supply their (Jews) want, so that their abundance (Jews) may supply your (Corinthians) want, that there may be equality.” While the Corinthians supply the needs of the Jewish brethren at the present, there may come a day when the Jewish brethren may have to supply the needs of impoverished Corinthians! And, if the Corinthians never become impoverished, and the Jewish brethren should some day supply the needs of brethren in Rome, the principle of “equality” is still carried on so the Corinthian brethren participate in the relief to the Romans because they helped the Hebrew Christians. Paul verified the principle of indirect participation when he wrote to the Philippian Christians concerning their support of his ministry (see Phil. 4:15-17). “Cast your bread upon the waters, for you will find it after many days” (Eccl. 11:1; Deut. 15:10-11; Prov. 19:17; Matt. 10:42).

Verse 15 is a quotation from the Old Testament illustrating equality. In the O.T. it was commanded (see Exod. 16:18). Each Israelite was commanded to gather only as much manna as he could eat. Some gathered more. Some gathered not enough. However, when they came to measure the manna, each man's gathering weighed exactly the same! That is the will of God for his kingdom! Even in this imperfect world where Providence decrees that some have more material goods as their stewardship than others, everyone is to join in being faithful to his stewardship — whether it be small or large. Let there be equality (not in the amount) in *participation*! God does not need amounts! All the cattle on a thousand hills are his and if he were hungry he would not ask us. But God does desire equal *participation* in his kingdom —

and he desires it because all kingdom-people *need* participation. They can never have a "servant's heart" until they do participate in giving according to what they have.

Usually, the *emphasis* in church stewardship programs is to produce a certain *amount* of income. Usually, people are urged to give to meet a specific need. But the *emphasis* of Paul's instructions to the Corinthian church has to do with the *needs* of the *giver* while the amount of the gift and the need it is to meet are secondary! Would to God that the modern Church would understand Paul's teaching here and make it a priority in its call to stewardship. Christian people cannot be edified and spiritually matured until they have been taught that giving is primarily for their own spiritual growth and not to meet needs. Paul will have more to say on this in succeeding verses.

SECTION 3

Carefulness (8:16-24)

16 But thanks be to God who puts the same earnest care for you into the heart of Titus. 17For he not only accepted our appeal, but being himself very earnest he is going to you of his own accord. 18With him we are sending the brother who is famous among all the churches for his preaching of the gospel; 19and not only that, but he has been appointed by the churches to travel with us in this gracious work which we are carrying on, for the glory of the Lord and to show our good will. 20We intend that no one should blame us about this liberal gift which we are administering, 21for we aim at what is honorable not only in the Lord's sight but also in the sight of men. 22And with them we are sending our brother whom we have often tested and found earnest in many matters, but who is now more earnest than ever because of his great confidence in you. 23As for Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker in your service; and as for our brethren, they are messengers of the churches, the glory of Christ. 24So give proof, before the churches, of your love and of our boasting about you to these men.

8:16-19 Of Administration: In this text we have an apostolic admonition concerning *carefulness* in our giving. Christian stewardship involves more than merely giving. It demands careful, discriminating, prudent and conscientious giving. Ray Stedman writes:

The combined amount of Christian giving in the United States alone has been estimated at well over half billion dollars a year. . . . That is a lot of money, and yet much of it is wasted. Much is given to causes that ought not to be supported, or given in ways that are foolish and spendthrift. Much of it goes to line people's pockets, to be used for the enrichment of a few and the exploitation of many. We desperately need to be helped in our giving, learning to give responsibly with intelligence and care, so that the money goes to the right purposes and is used in the right way. (*Expository Studies in 2 Corinthians*, pg. 158)

Paul reports to the Corinthian church that the administration of the money they are collecting for the brethren in Judea will be done properly, honestly and openly. The Corinthians may rest assured their money will go to serve the purpose for which they gave it.

First, it will be administered by more than one person. Paul, alone, will not be handling the money. Accompanying Paul to Jerusalem with the offering will be Titus, Paul's co-worker, "the brother who is famous among all the churches for his preaching of the gospel," and "our brother whom we have often tested and found earnest in many matters," (8:16, 17, 18, 22). Second, the two unnamed brethren were "appointed" (Gr. *cheirotoneis*, "elected by show of hands," 8:19) or were "messengers" (Gr. *apostoloi*, "apostles; one's sent") of the churches. Titus' veracity and integrity had been tested and is verified by Paul. He says that "God put the same earnest care into the heart" of Titus as was in Paul's heart for the Corinthians. Titus' "earnest care" (Gr. *spouden* "diligence") for the Corinthians was not forced. He gladly responded to Paul's request for help in this matter "of his own accord" (Gr. *authairetos*, comb. of *autos*, "self," and *haireomai*, "choice, option"). The RSV translates verse 18, ". . . the brother who is famous among all the churches for his preaching . . ." but the word "preaching" is not in the Greek text. Literally, verse 18 reads, ". . . the brother of whom the praise (Gr. *epainos*, "praise, applause, honor, commendation") in the gospel is throughout all the churches. . . ." It may be that this brother's "fame" was for *living*

SECOND CORINTHIANS

the gospel rather than "preaching" the gospel. That would be more apt to commend him to the Corinthians as worthy of administering the collection than merely his preaching. The point to emphasize, however, is that two of the administrators of this offering were specifically chosen by the churches. This provided safeguards for Paul's reputation. It provided the churches with assurance as well as satisfaction that they were personally involved in administering the offering by having chosen these administrators. It is the responsibility of all christians to insist on the practice of this principle of "more than one hand" administering the funds they give for the Lord's work. The christian who gives to a christian organization not following this principle is not being a good steward. It is the individual giver's responsibility to see that it is so. That is why Paul was reporting this to the Corinthians church! "More than one hand" administering is not fulfilled in christian organizations where one "founder" or one administrator controls the financial operations and accounts. Nor is it being practiced in organizations operated by nepotism (family members in all administrative positions). That is why Paul called for those appointed by the churches to help him rather than confine the administration of the offering to himself and his immediate co-laborers.

In verse 19 Paul calls the work of taking the Corinthian offering to the saints in Judea, "this grace being ministered by us." All of Paul's "works" were "works of grace" "works" motivated by "grace" which are in reality, human grace in grateful return for the free grace given first by God. What the Corinthians gave to the Judeans was by their grace. Man, the recipient of divine grace, is to cultivate the virtue of "graciousness" in his own character. Both the offering and its administration were by virtue of human graciousness in the Corinthians and in Paul. The apostle uses the Greek word *diakonoumene*, often translated, "deacon," and the RSV translates it, ". . . the work which we are carrying on. . . ." The NASV is better, translating *diakonoumene* "administered." Paul had two motives for involving himself in the "administration" of the offering from Corinth to Judea. First, to glorify (bring honor to, to praise, to give rank to) the Lord Jesus Christ. Second, to show his own "passionate" readiness (Gr. *prothumian*, see 8:11, 12) to serve the Corinthians in their spiritual pilgrimage. He had written much about his willingness and

desire to serve them — now he wishes to show it by seeing that their offering is responsibly delivered to the Judean brethren.

8:20-24 Of Accountability: Verse 20 is the pivotal sentence in this text. Paul intended that no one should find fault (Gr. *momesetai*, “blame”) with his (and his co-workers) administration of the funds to relieve the Judean christians. To avoid any hint of scandal he “took precaution” (Gr. *stellomenoi*, present tense, middle voice, of “to place, set in order”) or “made arrangement” to make his administration of the offering fully accountable to both the Lord and to men. The RSV translates *stellomenoi*, “We intend.” The NASV translates it, “taking precaution.” The latter is the better translation. It was not merely Paul’s intention to make his work accountable, he *made arrangements* that it would be so!

It was the apostle’s “aim” (Gr. *pronooumen*, “take thought for”) to be accounted “honorable” before the Lord and before men. His “aim” was not some generalization, it was specific — he gave it thought, he reasoned out an arrangement to make it come to pass. He arranged to be accounted “honorable” (Gr. *kala*, “good”) “in the sight of” (Gr. *enopion*, “before,” “in the presence of”) the Lord and of men. Every christian is “accountable” for his stewardship before the Lord (Matt. 18:23; Luke 16:2; Rom. 14:12; Heb. 13:17; I Pet. 4:5) and before men (Matt. 5:16; John 15:8; Phil. 2:14-16; I Thess. 4:9-12; II Thess. 3:10-13; I Tim. 5:7-8; Rom. 14:18; I Pet. 2:12).

All christian churches, missions, and para-church organizations, whose very existence depends on the “gracious stewardship” of individual christians, are obligated by scriptural command and apostolic precedent to make an accounting in the presence of the Lord and the presence of men. It must not only be their aim to do so, they must “make arrangements” or “take precautions” to do so. Those who give must be given an open, honest, “good” report of the administration of their gifts. It is the responsibility of individual christians to support only those christian works which are willing to make arrangements for sound financial auditing, accounting, and reporting. Such financial responsibility is “honorable” (good) before the Lord and men.

In verses 22 and 23 Paul discusses again the character and credentials of those who will be helping him deliver the collection to Judea. The “brother” whose name Paul did not mention, was not his blood-

brother, but a brother in the Lord. He had been tested (by circumstances) many times and in many ways as he labored with Paul, and the apostle had always found him "earnest" (Gr. *spoudaion*, "diligent"). Now, he was "much more diligent" to help Paul because somehow he had gained great "confidence" (Gr. *pepoithesei*, assurance, trust, persuasion, obedience) in the spiritual aims of the Corinthians. Perhaps he had visited Corinth and heard the christians there "passionately" expressing their desire to help the needy Judeans; perhaps he saw that they all participated "equally" in the offering. This brother joins Paul's ministry of the offering under the auspices of the churches. Paul is willing to testify as to the brother's character and capabilities. But he wants it remembered that the "brother" was accredited *by the churches* for this ministry.

Titus gets special mention by Paul. Titus is called, "my partner" (Gr. *koinonos*, "sharer, participant, communicant, partner") and "fellow worker in your service" (Gr. *eis humas sunergos*). And, while Titus was Paul's "child in the faith" (Titus 1:4), he was still a "messenger of the churches" for which Christ was to get the glory — not Paul.

In light of all Paul has said thus far about the offering from Corinth, he now summarizes (8:24); by saying, "So give proof, before the churches, of your love and of our boasting about you to these men." In light of the motives Paul has given them, in light of the method ("equality") he advises, and in light of the management (accountability) he promises, nothing should stand in their way of "completing" what they had so eagerly started a year ago. They had said much about how they loved their Judean brethren and how they were eager to help — now let them "give proof" (Gr. *endeixin*, from *deiknumi*, "to show, to point out, to demonstrate, to make a token") of their "love" (Gr. *agapes*, God-like love). Paul wants the Corinthians to *demonstrate* their love, not to him, but to the churches. Paul had boasted to other churches of their love — now he asks them to *prove* that what he had been telling others was so.

The stewardship of giving, according to apostolic motives, methods and management, is proof of a christian's love! There is no getting around that. We may equivocate and rationalize all we wish but that will not erase these words from the pen of the inspired apostle! Paul stated this earlier (8:8) and will state it again (9:13). Proving

our love for Christ and for men can only be done by giving (I John 3:16-18; 4:19-21; Matt. 25:31-46; Luke 10:29-37; 16:1-9; 16:19-31; 18:18-30; etc.). Perhaps this is why Jesus spent so much time telling parables and teaching about GIVING — it is the one, undeniable way to *prove* one's love; not just giving, but CHRISTIAN STEWARDSHIP.

APPREHENSIONS:

1. What problem was Paul having with the Corinthians about their giving?
2. Why was Paul asking for an offering from the Corinthians? What was he going to do with the offering?
3. How widely known was this effort of Paul to take up such a collection?
4. How "extreme" was the poverty of the Macedonians? Why?
5. How seriously were the Macedonians about wanting to give to Judean brethren?
6. Why didn't Paul "expect" the Macedonians to give as they did?
7. If Paul does not "command" the Corinthians, is any christian giving or stewardship to be "commanded"?
8. Why does Paul mention the poverty of Jesus? How poor was Jesus?
9. What is "readiness"? How is that acceptable?
10. Why is "completing" what one has started so important to Paul?
11. What is "equality" in this text? How is it to be accomplished?
12. Why does Paul mention Titus and the "brothers" who are going to help him deliver this collection?
13. Why is it important that these "brothers" were "appointed" by the churches?
14. What does Paul mean by saying he "intends" no one should blame him?
15. What has giving or stewardship to do with "proving" one's love?

APPLICATIONS:

1. How often do you remind yourself that you are a *steward*, respon-

SECOND CORINTHIANS

- sible to God, for everything in your life? What is a “steward” anyway?
2. Do you know any christians as destitute as the Macedonians? Do you think they should be giving to help others?
 3. If poor people give “beyond their ability”, who will take care of them?
 4. How much does the Lord expect christians to give?
 5. Have you ever begged the church to take your money? Have you ever known anyone who did?
 6. Have you ever been surprised to learn the sacrifices some people make to give? Why were you surprised?
 7. Do you have any “excellent” givers in your church? Who is an “excellent” giver?
 8. What approach moves you to give — command or example or advice? Are there certain approaches which irritate you?
 9. Have you ever been guilty of deciding to respond to a plea for help and never completing it? Why? Is completing a “work” important?
 10. Do you practice “proportionate” giving of that with which God has entrusted you?
 11. What “proportion” should christians give?
 12. Should every member of the church contribute to congregational offerings? Why? Does every member in your church? How may this ideal be attained?
 13. Do you determine the integrity of those administering funds received before you give? How?
 14. Is it possible that some money sincerely given has been misused? Who is responsible? What is the giver’s responsibility?
 15. Should the giver be concerned if those administering his gifts offer no public accountability? Why? What should the giver do?
 16. Have you ever thought that you prove your love for Christ and others by *how* you give more than what you give?