

Lesson 14

1) Introduction

- a) Before we proceed into Chapter 8, we need to consider two preliminary questions:
 - i) First, why does Paul suddenly change the subject? Does, and if so how, does the subject of giving fit in with the first 7 chapters of his letter?
 - ii) Second, how can we explain Paul's seeming obsession with the poor saints in Jerusalem? He addresses the subject in several of his letters, and we should consider the reason for his focus on that particular problem in that particular city.

2) Why the change in subject?

- a) The subject abruptly shifts in Chapters 8-9 to raising funds for the churches in Judea.
- b) This sudden turn in the argument, which seems to have nothing to do with what precedes, has caused many scholars to think that someone has inserted an independent letter or letters at this point.
- c) But the mention of Titus in 7:6-7,13-15 provides an appropriate connection to Paul's instructions for a project in which Titus is to play a major role (8:6,16-24).
- d) Switching his style to that of an administrative letter to deal with the new subject of the collection is appropriate.
- e) Paul mentions that his afflictions continued when he arrived in Macedonia (7:5) and that the Macedonians were going through a severe trial as well (8:2).
- f) The description of this affliction in 8:1-2 matches Paul's references to his afflictions in Asia in 1:8.
- g) One of the themes in this letter is his concern to explain how his afflictions could issue in "life" for others (4:12). The Macedonians' afflictions and extreme poverty that result in overflowing joy and an extraordinary desire to help others fits this theme.
- h) Cranfield comments, "The Church's need of money is a matter which it is difficult to handle with graciousness, sensitiveness and dignity." Paul handles the issue deftly, and his lengthy discussion shows how important planning and administration are to the success of any ministry.
- i) Here we see Paul the administrator, who does not shy away from handling the

essential details, delivering theological pep talks to those who have grown indifferent to the task, delegating responsibilities, and soothing ruffled feathers.

- j) Having a grand plan is important, but absent someone who knows how to get things done it will remain forever just a grand plan!
- k) The Jerusalem project offers the Corinthians the chance to participate in something greater than themselves. Generosity is not something innate to human beings. This is no less true of Christians, and in these two chapters Paul shows why and how the Corinthian Christians should contribute to this fund.

3) The Significance of the Collection

- a) Why does Paul invest so much energy in this collection for the saints in Jerusalem? Several reasons may have made it so important to him.
- b) First, it was an act of almsgiving to relieve the poverty of Christians in Jerusalem.
 - i) Although Paul hardly touches on the need of the saints in Jerusalem, he does refer specifically to the "poor of the saints who are in Jerusalem" in Rom 15:26. Paul mentions their need (lack) in 8:14 and 9:12.
 - ii) We know that famine was not unfamiliar to this area, for it prompted an earlier relief effort (see Acts 11:28). Some had voluntarily given up their property to help others in the community (Acts 4:32-37). We can guess that the church also faced persecution (Gal 1:22-23; 1 Thess 2:14-15) which compounded their poverty since they were unlikely to receive aid from the unbelieving Jewish community.
 - iii) Almsgiving was very much a part of the religious piety of Judaism, and Paul would have been deeply influenced by it (Rom 12:13; Eph 4:28). The Old Testament injunctions to care for the poor as well as the practice of the early Jerusalem church to accept financial responsibility for one another (Acts 2:43-47; 4:32-37; 6:1) would have been a sufficient motivation for him to respond to their needs.
 - iv) While Paul considers this offering to be an act of charity for those who were suffering in Jerusalem, it had a greater significance for him than that. If the need in Jerusalem was so urgent, the arrangements for the collection were taking a long time (8:10). Other reasons besides a critical relief effort must have inspired Paul's efforts.
- c) Second, some have argued that Paul carried out the collection because he was discharging an obligation.
 - i) While Paul's Jewish sensitivity to the needs of the poor and needy undergirds his concern that they receive help, his specific concern for the poor of

Jerusalem needs explanation.

- ii) Galatians 2:6-10 records a meeting between the "pillar" apostles of the Jerusalem church, James, Peter, and John, and Paul. Paul says that they did not add anything to his gospel but recognized and affirmed his ministry and extended to him the right hand of fellowship. They ask only that he remember the poor (Gal 2:10).
- iii) But Paul's expression of eagerness to help the poor indicates that he would have done so at his own initiative. Also his eagerness for the success of the collection reflected in his other letters would be inexplicable if it were an obligation that the pillar apostles laid on him. He says that the Gentiles are in debt to the church in Jerusalem (Rom 15:27), but he understands it to be a spiritual debt.
- iv) Paul's terms for the offering stress its theological significance as an occasion for the grace of God, and he emphasizes its purely voluntary nature. His fear, expressed in Rom 15:31, that the saints might not accept the offering rules out the possibility that this was some kind of tax. If this were some tax that Gentiles were obligated to pay to Jerusalem, Paul would not need to fret that it would not be accepted. How could they reject something that they had required?
- v) The word "grace" is Paul's favored word in describing the project (1 Cor 16:3; 2 Cor 8:6,7,19). "Grace" refers to "something freely given, whether it be what God gives us in Christ, or what we give to God or others," It comes undeserved and does not require others to have done something to be worthy of it before it is given to them.
- vi) The generosity of the Gentile churches with those whom they knew only by reputation was a sign of God's grace working itself out in their lives. They had indeed been blessed by them since they shared with them the gospel, but the gospel brings with it an obligation to become a blessing to others. While Paul does see this gift as repaying a *spiritual* debt (Rom 15:27), it is not the primary motive behind his efforts.
- d) Paul may have felt some sense of debt to the mother church for quite different reasons. He had violently persecuted it and tried to destroy it (Gal 1:13). But his relations with the pillar apostles as he reports it in Galatians 2 betrays no sense of any need to atone for past sins. The collection, then, is something more than simply a repayment of some kind of debt.
- e) Third, Paul's worry, expressed in Rom 15:31, that his service might not be accepted by the saints is a crucial piece of evidence.
 - i) He asks the Romans: "Pray that I may be rescued from the unbelievers in Judea and that my service in Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints

there, so that by God's will I may come to you with joy and together with you be refreshed" (Rom 15:31-32).

- ii) If this were simply an emergency relief effort for people who were starving, why does Paul need to ask the Romans to pray that poor people will find it "acceptable"?
 - iii) The answer is to be found in the long history of conflict over the acceptance of uncircumcised Gentile Christians by the more traditional, law observant Jewish Christians. The problem was that this was Gentile money. If the Jewish Christians accept this tangible sign of love and indebtedness from Gentile Christians, then they have, in effect, accepted them as their brothers in Christ and fellow heirs of the promises. The collection shows that Christian faith overcomes the deepest racial barriers that formerly separated Jews from Gentiles.
 - iv) This concern to show the solidarity between Jew and Greek in Christ is the primary motivation behind the collection.
 - v) Paul did not organize collections for other churches who also suffered persecution and poverty, and therefore he apparently saw special spiritual significance in the offering for Jerusalem.
 - vi) Paul wants to do more than send them relief; he wants to establish unity between the Jewish Christian Jerusalem church and the Gentile churches he founded. He yearns for all Christians to understand that since we all belong to Christ, we all belong together. The collection is part of his ministry of reconciliation to bring an end to the hostility between Jew and Gentile and to break down the dividing walls of hostility.
 - vii) The church will then know the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. If Paul were just sending relief aid to Jerusalem, he could have sent it on with the messengers from the churches. He decided to deliver the gift in person. Paul was fully aware of all the risks involved, but he must have felt that it was crucial that the gift be properly interpreted as evidence of the bond between Jews and Gentiles in Christ.
 - f) One final point: We have grown accustomed to receiving appeals for donations from a wide variety of sources using a wide variety of methods, but this practice was "virtually unknown in antiquity."
- 4) Verses 1-5: 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.

- a) 8:1 Paul begins his appeal by informing the Corinthians how the grace of God has been given to the churches in Macedonia, presumably, Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea.
 - i) "Grace" is a key word that appears ten times throughout these two chapters with differing nuances.
 - ii) Here it refers to human generosity, which Paul understands to be something given by God.
 - iii) Grace is God's unconditional benevolence toward us. When people are spontaneously generous toward others, Paul takes it as clear evidence that God's grace is working in and through them.
 - iv) The gift of money to others has been called "a visible sign of an invisible grace."
 - v) It is interesting that Paul understands that God's grace does not lighten the Macedonians' afflictions nor remove their deep poverty. Instead, it opens their hearts and their purse strings to others.
- b) Paul hopes that the Corinthians will take heart from the example of the Macedonians.
 - i) It may seem that he is playing one church off the other: impoverished churches over against affluent churches, churches from the north versus churches from the south.
 - ii) But Paul is not stooping to any gimmicks in fund raising. He is not trying to raise a larger amount by inciting competition between churches to see who can raise the most. The amount does not matter; the spirit behind the giving does.
 - iii) If the Corinthians want to compete with the Macedonians, they should compete for the most joyful and willing attitude, not over the amount of money contributed. Paul commends the Macedonians for their overflowing joy and willingness to sacrifice for others in the midst of their own suffering.
- c) Paul asserts, however, that the Macedonians can take no credit for this joyful, willing attitude. It all comes from God's grace given to them.

- i) Paul therefore bases his appeal to the Corinthians on the grace of God that continues to be richly poured out in the lives of Christians.
 - ii) Paul's approach to fund-raising is grounded in solid theological principles, and it should lead the Corinthians to ask themselves, Where is the evidence of the grace of God that has been given to us?
- d) 8:2 The Macedonians experienced an up welling of generosity during a severe test of affliction.
- i) The New Testament evidence suggests that they were no strangers to persecution (see Acts 16:20; 17:50; Phil 1:29-30; 1 Thess 1:6; 2:14; 3:3-4).
 - ii) The word translated "test" has a different nuance than the word for testing that is related to temptation. It "points more to the positive outcome of such a test than to the test itself." The test proved their Christian character.
- e) The Macedonians also suffered from extreme poverty that Paul vividly expresses as "down to depths of poverty."
- i) Persecution and social ostracism probably caused this rock bottom poverty. Their poverty matches that of the saints in Jerusalem that was also caused by persecution and may have generated their empathy with them.
- f) In spite of persecution and poverty, they experienced an abundance of joy, which resulted in a wealth of generosity.
- i) In the New Testament the Christian's experience of joy has no correlation to his or her outward circumstances.
 - ii) Paradoxically, Christians can experience joy in the midst of great persecution and personal suffering.
 - iii) Poverty overflowing into wealth also may seem paradoxical, but it fits the crazy-quilt logic of the gospel: joy + severe affliction + poverty = wealth.
 - iv) Here, wealth relates to a wealth of generosity and joy multiplied. Material wealth, on the other hand, may cloak spiritual poverty, as Christ's condemnation of the wealthy but tepid church at Laodicea reveals (Rev 3:14-22). That church considered itself rich and prospering, but the Lord considered it "wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked."
 - v) By contrast, Christ praises the poverty stricken church at Smyrna, also beset by affliction, as rich (Rev 2:8-11). The Macedonian churches were, like Smyrna, members of a specially blessed category in the eyes of the Lord: rich poor churches.

- vi) "Despite all their own difficulties they did not turn inwards; their concern was for others. ... What a contrast to the church at Corinth, whose internal divisions risked putting a stumbling-block in the way of the conversion of both Jews and Greeks, and even endangered other Christians."
- g) In this passage Paul is too tactful to put things quite so bluntly; but he holds up the supreme sacrifice of the Macedonian's in the face of extreme poverty as an example for the Corinthians.
- i) The Macedonians' giving to help others who were also beleaguered by persecution and poverty follows the pattern of Jesus Christ mentioned in 8:9 who willingly accepted poverty and turned it into wealth for others.
- h) 8:3-4 Paul says that they gave as much as they were able and beyond what they were able.
- i) He did not ask for any specified amount or percentage. The Macedonians had not prospered and given from their surplus, Instead, they gave out of their poverty more than could be expected or even thought wise.
- ii) Paul emphasizes that they did this of their own accord. This word could go with what precedes or with the next sentence in 8:4. If it is part of v. 3, their giving was spontaneous and voluntary. If it goes with v. 4, they urgently pleaded to participate entirely on their own. This reading would imply that Paul originally was not going to ask them to participate, which is strange, since he had been in partnership with the Philippian congregation who helped him in his work in other cities (Phil 4:15-16). But in 1 Cor 16:1-4 Paul only mentions giving directions for the collection to the Corinthians and the churches of Galatia.
- i) Paul's primary reason for emphasizing that the Macedonians responded voluntarily is to make clear to the Corinthians that he did not constrain them in any way.
- i) They volunteered, either to give sacrificially, or to participate. Since Paul encourages the Corinthians to give willingly, he may be referring to how the Macedonians gave.
- ii) The Macedonians considered it a privilege to contribute. The word translated "privilege" in some translations is the same word "grace" that rings throughout these two chapters.
- iii) They did not plea poverty to evade any obligation; they pled with Paul instead to allow them to join in this service. By contrast, Paul has to plead with the more affluent Corinthians to follow through on their first pledge.
- j) Paul gives the impression that he was taken aback by the Macedonians'

eagerness and generosity.

- i)** They gave beyond their means and did so without Paul's encouragement, let alone his insistence. If it comes from "grace," then it cannot come from coercion. They gave beyond anything he anticipated because they gave of themselves.
- k)** The quantity of what they gave does not matter to Paul, but the spirit in which they gave does.
 - i)** With God, a couple of "mites" can far outweigh a ton of gold bullion. In keeping with this divine outlook, Paul never mentions the word money when talking about this project. He cloaks the whole enterprise in language that has both a formal administrative character and a theological character. It is a "ministry."
 - l)** This ministry had major theological consequences and was something Paul was prepared to risk his life to carry out. Business language is therefore hardly adequate to describe it, and so Paul resorts to theological language:
 - i)** "grace," "privilege" (8:4,6,7,19)
 - ii)** "partnership," "sharing," "fellowship" (8:4)
 - iii)** "service," "ministry" (8:4; 9:1,12,13)
 - iv)** "earnestness" (8:8)
 - v)** "love" (8:7,8,24)
 - vi)** "willingness" (8:11,12,19; 9:2)
 - vii)** "generosity" (8:2; 9:11,13)
 - viii)** "abundance" (8:14)
 - ix)** "blessing" "generous gift" (9:5)
 - x)** "good work" (9:8)
 - xi)** "the yield of your righteousness" (9:10)
 - xii)** "service" (9:12)
- m)** In the process Paul creates a new meaning for the word translated "partnership" or "fellowship."

- i) This is the first use of the word for monetary collections.
 - ii) As the Philippians had formed a partnership with Paul in his mission work beyond Philippi (Phil 1:5; 4:15), all the Macedonian churches want to form a partnership with other Christians in Judea. They beg to participate.
 - iii) "This spontaneous recognition of charity as the essence of Christianity won them a place in his affections to which no other community could aspire, and which merited them the accolade of 'partners in the gospel.' (Phil 1:5,7). They made the good news something real and vital by demonstrating the power of grace."
- n) 8:5 The literal rendering of the Greek that they gave "not as we had hoped" suggests to English ears some disappointment on Paul's part when, in truth, what they did was beyond his hopes. They gave beyond any reasonable hope.
- i) "First" (in an emphatic position), they gave themselves to the Lord. The "first" refers to the priority of importance, not to time.
 - ii) They also gave of themselves "to us," which means that they dedicated themselves to Paul's project. This phrase betrays that Paul recognizes how important the churches' relationship to him is to the success of the project. If they are not prepared to give themselves to him, they are not likely to give to the relief fund.
 - iii) The past enmity between Paul and the Corinthians has threatened to suspend their participation. The Macedonians' eagerness to participate allows Paul to use them as a model for the Corinthians. In doing so he makes clear that this surprising turn of events stemmed entirely from their dedication to the Lord. Paul puts their generosity in the context of their Christian commitment but also brings out their loyalty to him in a subtle way.
 - iv) Again, Paul leaves the Corinthians to draw the proper inferences for themselves. Generosity stems from devotion to Christ. Have the Corinthians surrendered themselves first to the Lord? Paul implies that devotion to Christ will also issue in support for Christ's apostle.
- o) With the phrase "by the will of God" Paul makes more specific that the impetus for generosity comes from God and is related to God's grace. Paul "attributes it neither to his own successful ministry ... nor to their own selfless action. It is God working in them.
 - p) Barclay: "Paul says a very fine thing about the Macedonians. He says that first of all they gave themselves -- and so indeed they did. Two of them stand out above all the others. There was Aristarchus of Thessalonica. He was with Paul on the last journey to Rome (Acts 28:2). Like Luke, he must have come to a great decision. Paul was under arrest and on his way to trial before the Emperor. There

was only one way in which Aristarchus could have accompanied him, and that was by enrolling himself as Paul's slave. Aristarchus in the fullest sense gave himself. There was Epaphroditus. When Paul was in prison in the later days, he came to him with a gift from Philippi, and there in prison he fell grievously ill. As Paul said of him, "he nearly died for the work of Christ" (Philippians 2:26-30)."

- q) A theme of this entire chapter is Paul's contrast of the Philippians -- who turned outward -- with the Corinthians -- who turned inward.

5) Verses 6-8: Insomuch that we desired Titus, that as he had begun, so he would also finish in you the same grace also. 7 Therefore, as ye abound in every thing, in faith, and utterance, and knowledge, and in all diligence, and in your love to us, see that ye abound in this grace also. 8 I speak not by commandment, but by occasion of the forwardness of others, and to prove the sincerity of your love.

- a) 8:6 Paul now turns from the example of the Macedonians to the Corinthians' responsibility in this ministry.

- i) Their initial zeal for the venture has evidently flagged, and they need more coaxing to insure that they will do what they promised.

- ii) Their waning commitment to this ministry is attributable to the deteriorating relations between them and Paul that culminated in the painful visit and the painful letter.

- iii) Perhaps the shadowy opponents downplay the offering's necessity in hopes of undermining Paul's influence. Also, scuttling the collection would have left that money available for themselves.

- iv) Charges of some kind of fraud may also be lurking in the background. Paul's refusal to accept support from the Corinthians may have fed vicious rumors that he schemed to siphon off some of the money from the fund. He would then receive support from them surreptitiously while avoiding any obligation to them.

- v) We do not know what was the cause behind their procrastination, but Paul capitalizes on the renewed good will of the community toward him to raise the issue again.

- b) Paul has urged Titus to return to Corinth to help them fulfill their earlier promise.

- i) The verb used here means to "complete successfully something already begun" or "to bring something to conclusion."

- ii) Paul sent Titus to resume the collection, to finish what he and they started.

We cannot be sure, but it is most likely that Paul refers to the recent past when Titus delivered the severe letter and remained in Corinth to revive their commitment to Paul.

- c) Verse 6 becomes a delicate admonition for the Corinthians to follow through on their initial commitments.
 - i) Rather than scold the Corinthians for not having finished, Paul instead praises them for their initial enthusiasm.
 - ii) They remain in the beginning stages, however; and he delegates the responsibility for helping them finish it to Titus. His warm reception by the Corinthians makes him the ideal candidate to fulfill the task.
- d) 8:7 Paul continues his affirmation by praising them for excelling in almost everything: faith, speech, knowledge, earnestness, and love.
 - i) Some interpret this as barbed tribute.
 - (1) "When he is being totally sincere he compliments a community on its faith, hope and charity (1 Thess 1:3; 2 Thess 1:3; Col 1:4-5) or its partnership in the gospel (Phil 1:5)."
 - (2) Nevertheless, Paul would not risk alienating the Corinthians again with some cutting remark that they could take the wrong way.
 - (3) Hugo Grotius observed in the seventeenth century: "Paul was not ignorant of the art of rhetoric, to move people by praising them."
 - (4) People are moved to anger if they detect that they are the butt of ironic jabs. This is not irony. He genuinely gives thanks for the Corinthians that they have in "every way been enriched in every way-in all your speaking and in all your knowledge" (1 Cor 1:5).³³ They are "not lacking in any spiritual gift" (1 Cor 1:7).
 - (5) Here he attests to their abundance of gifts and wants them to match it "with an equal abundance of generosity."
 - ii) The verb translated "excel" is used in 8:2 to describe how the Macedonians' depths of poverty "welled up" into a wealth of generosity. It is better translated "overflow." The Macedonians "overflowed" with generosity, and the Corinthians "overflow" with gifts. Paul hopes that these riches in gifts will lead to the same kind of overflowing generosity, literally, "in this grace."
- e) Paul lists the gifts in two triads each beginning with "all": all faith, speech, knowledge; all earnestness, love, grace.

- i) We have discussed the spiritual gifts in the first triad in earlier lessons and will not repeat those discussions here.
 - ii) Interpreting these riches in light of Paul's discussion of them in 1 Corinthians helps us recognize that while Paul values such things, they do not top the list of what he thinks is most important for the upbuilding of the community.
 - iii) Paul interprets these gifts as tending to build up the individual rather than the community. Consequently he would prefer that they cultivate those gifts which cause them to focus more outwardly on others. The second triad does this.
- f) He can confirm their "eagerness" or "zeal."
- i) Paul may be referring to their earnestness in their response to Titus (7:11-12). He rejoices that they wanted to do what was right concerning the offending brother, and he hopes that they will show the same zeal in doing what is right regarding the collection.
- g) The next gift presents a knotty textual problem. The evidence is divided.
- i) Some texts read, "your love in (among) us"; others read "our love in (among) you."
 - ii) The two variants would have been pronounced exactly the same. Scribes making copies of the text at the same time may have heard different words as someone read from an exemplar and caused the variants. Which is the best reading?
 - iii) Some argue for the reading "our love for you" because Paul previously reproached them for having squeezed him out of their hearts and implored them to make room in their hearts for him.
 - (1) This internal evidence suggests that he could hardly presume that they overflowed in love for him.
 - (2) On the other hand, Paul does proclaim his deep love for them (6:11; 7:3).
 - (3) But Paul is speaking about the "graces of the Corinthians" and to mention his own love for them as something they excel in would disturb the sense.
 - iv) According to Paul's explanation in 7:12, Paul wrote the severe letter so that they might make their zeal for him known.
 - (1) This statement assumes that this zeal was momentarily obscured, not completely lost.
 - (2) Their positive reaction to Paul's letter and to Titus's visit permits him now

to say that they love him.

(3) In 8:8 Paul says that he is testing the genuineness of their love, so he must be speaking here about the love they possess for him, rather than the love he has for them.

- h)** The phrase "see that ye abound in this grace also" is reads literally, "in order that you abound in this grace also."
- i)** The "in order that" or "see that" may express expected consequence: "I am pointing this out so that you may excel in this gracious work too"; a wish or exhortation: "I wish or exhort that you excel in this gracious work also"; or an alternative form of the imperative: "see that you also excel."
 - ii)** This last option is the best. Paul uses this construction as "one of the least direct ways that Paul could use to express the imperative."
 - iii)** It "expressed more of a wish than a command, and people who were not in a superior or authoritative position to the recipient of the letter tended to use it."
 - iv)** It forms a marked contrast with the simple imperative in 1 Cor 16:1-2: Now about the collection for God's people: Do what I told the Galatian churches to do. On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside [literally, let each one set aside, third person imperative] a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made.
 - v)** Paul apparently no longer feels free to make such direct commands as he did earlier.
 - vi)** But he always prefers to lay out principles rather than lay down rules. In these two chapters on the collection, Paul spends most of his time explaining the principles that should motivate generosity rather than ordering the Corinthians to do what he wants.
- i)** Yet Paul is not shy about telling them that they need to abound in graciousness or charity.
- i)** It is abundance in the second triad of gifts (earnestness, love, and grace) that determines whether the abundance in the first triad (faith, speech, and knowledge) has any spiritual validity.
 - ii)** A deficiency in the second calls into question whether their faith, speech, and knowledge are in any way meaningful to God.
 - iii)** Paul has talked about the participation of the Macedonian churches in the collection as a sure sign that God's grace had been given to them (8:1). The

Corinthians' participation would reveal that God's grace is just as active among them.

- j)** 8:8 Paul is moving cautiously and does not want to leave the impression that he is giving them orders.
 - i)** He is sensitive to any charges that he domineers over their faith (1:24).
 - ii)** He also does not want them giving because of some external compulsion.
 - iii)** In his letter to Philemon, he deals with his fellow Christian in the same way and does not command him what to do.
 - iv)** Paul takes the freedom of Christians seriously. They may choose to take part or not. Their participation is purely voluntary, and voluntary collections depend on the goodwill of the donors. Consequently, Paul does not command but instead invites, encourages, and lays out divine principles gleaned from Scripture.
 - v)** He hopes that they will respond out of hearts that have been freed by the gospel and fired by God's grace.
 - vi)** This does not mean that he sits by passively in wishful anticipation that they will choose the right thing. He is their spiritual director, and he spends two chapters outlining the reasons why they should participate.
 - vii)** He does not want them giving for the wrong reasons. On the other hand, we should not ignore today that the discipline of giving, even for the wrong reasons, may eventually lead to a person giving for the right reasons. But Paul has the highest expectations that the Corinthians will give for the right reasons, and he offers a theological rationale for why they should give.
- k)** The life of faith always brings its tests, and Paul equates the collection with a test.
 - i)** He says in 2:9 that he wrote the letter of tears to see if they would stand the test (that he might know their character). They passed that test, submitting to Paul's authority.
 - ii)** Now he moves to another test. The Macedonians came through in a severe "test" of affliction and gave generously (8:2). For the Corinthians it is a test to see if their love -- something that Paul thought needed more work (1 Cor 12:31-13:13) -- is genuine and authentic. Paul leaves them with the implied question, "What will they do when faced with their test?"
- l)** "Love" in this sentence does not have an object and can refer to their love for

Paul (8:7) or their love for Christ.

- i) Paul speaks earlier of the love of Christ constraining him in all that he does (5:14).
- ii) It is possible that he intends for them to show their love for Christ and Christ's love for them by showing their love for their fellow Christians. Paul knows that words expressing love come cheaply and can be faked; genuine love will show up in the checkbook.

6) Verse 9: For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.

- a) 8:9 Paul increases the potency of his entreaty by appealing now to the example of our Lord Jesus Christ.
 - i) The sacrifice of the Macedonians for others is one thing; the sacrifice of Christ for others is quite another.
 - ii) As Cranfield puts it, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ" "denotes the utterly undeserved, royally free, effective, unwearying, inexhaustible goodwill of God, active in and through Jesus Christ, God's effective, overflowing mercy."
 - iii) It sums up God's merciful action toward humanity. When we have been the beneficiaries of such undeserved grace, how can true Christians shut their hearts or purses to brothers and sisters in need or begrudge every penny they may share with others?
 - iv) 1 John 3:17 But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?
 - v) God's lavishness in the gift of grace and the depths of Christ's sacrifice requires that Christians be liberal in their giving to others. A halfhearted response ill befits the total sacrifice that Christ made for us.
- b) Paul's description of Christ reminds us of his lengthier description in Philippians 2.
 - i) Philippians 2:5-11 Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: 6 Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: 7 But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: 8 And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. 9 Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: 10 That at the name of Jesus every knee

should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; 11 And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

- c) "Though he was rich" means that Christ did not exploit his status for his own advantage. Instead, he relinquished that status to serve others.
- d) His riches "describe that estate of the preexistent Christ which elsewhere in the New Testament is presented as 'the glory which I had with thee before the world was made'" (John 17:5), or as "being in the form of God" and having "equality with God" (Phil 2:6).
- e) The affirmation that Christ became poor for our sakes has been taken in an economic sense to mean Christ's literal poverty during his earthly life.
 - i) We do not know that Jesus was literally impoverished, however, and he was probably no worse off economically than any other Palestinian subjugated under Roman rule and their puppets, client kings and the priestly aristocracy.
 - ii) To be consistent, an economic interpretation would imply that through Christ's material poverty others were made materially rich. This hardly applies for the Macedonians. The riches therefore can only be spiritual riches which make one's material possessions irrelevant. Christ's "poverty" must refer to something other than having no place to lay his head (Matt 8:20).
 - iii) It is far more likely that "he became poor" refers to the incarnation, the state Christ assumed in taking on this mortal life.
 - iv) Becoming poor refers to his "emptying himself" (Phil 2:6; see also Rom 15:3; Heb 12:2) and suggests that this is something he did voluntarily.
 - v) Schelkle comments: "Christ renounced the divine fullness of power in which he dwelt with the Father, abandoned the heavenly glory which was his as the Son of God. He chose the poverty of human existence so that through his poverty he could impart the eternal riches of redemption to the poverty of all for whose sake he became poor."
 - vi) But how does this make us rich? Paul must also be thinking of Christ's death on the cross: "Christ became 'poor' by accepting the radical impoverishment of a degrading and humiliating death in which everything was taken from him."
 - vii) Christ's incarnation climaxed in his death, and the principle of interchange -- he became poor; we became rich -- is the same as in 5:21: "For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him."

- viii)** "Christ was made poor that we through His poverty might be rich. He took the form of a servant that we might regain liberty. He descended that we might be exalted. He was tempted that we might overcome. He was despised that He might fill us with glory. He died that we might be saved. He ascended, to draw to Himself those lying prostrate on the ground through sin's stumblingblock."
- f)** Christ's sacrifice becomes the real motive for giving, not trying to copy or to outdo some sibling community.
- i)** Paul asks them to respond to what Christ has done for them: "And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again" (5:15).
- ii)** The self-emptying of Christ for Christians should lead them to empty their pocketbooks for others.
- iii)** Paul followed Christ's example in his own way of life as one who emptied himself for others, becoming poor, and bearing great hardships to reach others with the gospel. Yet Paul is not asking the Corinthians to give as Christ has given to them, or even to give of their lives to others in the same way he has as their apostle, nor even to give out of their impoverishment as the Macedonians have. Paul asks them only to give a fair share, a proportion of what they have, and promises that they will receive blessings in return.
- iv)** But he reminds them that Christ did not give his fair share! His gift was way out of proportion, and there was no guarantee that there would be a flood of gratitude to God for this inexpressible gift. Such unmerited grace from their Lord should inspire the Corinthians to be gracious to others who are in need.
- v)** "The drama of redemption took place where we live, in history, in Jesus of Nazareth. Therefore let us express it where we live, says Paul, in the circumstances of each day's life, for example, in the sharing of one's purse with those in need."
- g)** From the examples of the Macedonians and Christ the Corinthians can learn the following:
- i)** 1. True giving requires giving of oneself, not just giving money. The gospel is not about what we can get from God but what God has given to us so that we can give of ourselves to others.
- ii)** 2. One can give out of extreme poverty, and one can give out of measureless riches. Those who are disinclined to be generous when they are poor are not likely to become suddenly generous when they are rich.
- iii)** 3. Giving is related to the grace of God experienced in Christ. The recipients

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are not required to have done anything to merit the gift except to be in need. The givers are made generous because of God's grace working on them, in them, and through them.