

Paul now introduces a new topic, yet not entirely new for he had reminded them of it at the close of his first letter. Despite the many necessary corrective instructions and exhortations in that letter he had ended on a note of confidence that they would heed his admonitions and be prepared to provide aid to needing saints in Judea. Having heeded, they are now ready for his reminder in chapters 8 and 9 to go through with their promised gift for the poor in Jerusalem. They were no longer hindered by open sin, and the discord and their self indulgence apparently had dwindled to such an extent they could begin to think about others less well off. And they could now give from a good conscience having judged the wicked man in their midst. So in anticipation of their forgiveness for the repentant he can boldly encourage them to reach out to others, to enlarge their narrow, "straightened" (ch. 6:11-13) hearts through the outreach of sharing their wealth. But not with Paul!!! There is no hint here of his need, although he was often cast upon working with his hands to provide for his own needs and of those with him. There is never any occasion in scripture of a servant of the Lord asking for support. What a test of faith and dependence upon the Lord to rest entirely upon His goodness and faithfulness for ones temporal needs. 3John 7, 2Thessalonians 3:8, Eph 4:28.

Paul's approach to this (surely as led by the Spirit) is interesting. He calls attention to the willing hearts of their neighboring assemblies up the coast a few hundred miles in Macedonia. Assemblies in Macedonia included saints at Philippi (the first in Europe), Beræa, and Thessalonika. We read of them in The Acts and the three letters he wrote them. They were godly, enthusiastic believers while suffering persecution for Christ's name.

Philippians 1:29 *For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him,*

2Thessalonians 1:4 *So that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure:*

Yet they are thinking of fellow saints in Judea suffering likewise at the hands of their countrymen, the Jews. Upon the founding of the Assembly in Jerusalem on Pentecost these Jewish believers had given a bright witness of their changed hearts by having all things in common and selling their possessions to share with others, Acts 2. Now they are destitute, but not because they gave away all they had (certainly in the eyes of men a foolish thing to do). They had been impoverished by a famine and by persecution they endured for their faith that Jesus is the promised Christ.

Hebrews 10:32 *Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you stood your ground in a great contest in the face of suffering. 33 Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. 34 You sympathized with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions.*

Acts 11:27 *¶ And in these days came prophets from Jerusalem unto Antioch. 28 And there stood up one of them named Agabus, and signified by the Spirit that there should be great dearth throughout all the world: which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar. 29*

Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judaea: 30 Which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.

Acts 12:25 *When Barnabas and Saul had finished their mission, they returned from Jerusalem,*
Romans 15:26 *For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. 27 They were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. If the Gentiles have shared in the Jews' spiritual blessings, they owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings.*

So we find that neither poverty or persecution deter giving heartily for the needs of others, but self indulgence and self sufficiency strangle giving. The Philippians ministered to Paul while he was imprisoned as well, though they were the only ones in Macedonia that did.

Philippians 4:15 *Now ye Philippians know also, that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church communicated with me as concerning giving and receiving, but ye only.*

The widow's two mites were her last but the Lord took note and memorialized her act for eternity, Mark 12: 42-43; Luke 21:2-5. The amount given is not what is important. It is the attitude and acts of generosity that count. As was the widow, the hearts of Macedonian saints are commended. They gave their hearts to the Lord. They are presented as an example to us and the Corinthians. Yet this is not coercion nor is it the old "band wagon" ploy often used to extract money from unwilling pocketbooks. No, Paul is only awakening and encouraging latent spiritual instincts of the new creation in them. The joy of giving.

5:17 *Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.*

He goes further. He cites the example of the Lord Himself who impoverished Himself for our sakes though obviously rich beyond all imagination before His becoming a man. Even His birth to a poor carpenter's wife in a stable as a stranger in town signals the life and ministry in poverty to follow. The "poverty" of the cross speaks for itself of the what He gave for us, Himself! He endured the forsaking of His God. No poverty is deeper than that! He held back nothing. What GRACE! But there is no particular merit before God in impoverishing one's self for poverty's sake. Giving has merit, not impoverishment. It is not a virtue to be poor. Giving has favor with God, because it is like Him. It displays His character.

1Timothy 6:17 *Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; 18 That they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; 19 Laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.*

We are never encouraged to give in order to gain favor with God, or anyone else. Contrary to popular belief, charitable acts don't gain us heaven or a higher seat there. But God desires that we give from the heart to Him and on His behalf. This results from first giving our hearts to Him, and to others as the Macedonians had. *vs 5 but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God.*

By Ron Canner, July 14, 2004