



2 Corinthians 8:8-12

Greetings

Greetings, everyone! Welcome to Friday's edition of E-DiBS. It's my privilege to be with you today as we open God's Word and seek His wisdom and His will for our lives together. As we continue on today in our journey through 2 Corinthians, we will continue to see some very compelling material about the Christian life. Let's pray and go to the Scriptures.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, as we thank you for this day and for this time to be in your Word, we ask that you would give us clarity of mind and openness of heart as we study. Fill us with all wisdom and spiritual understanding as we endeavor to learn from you today. In Christ's precious name we pray, amen.

Getting Started

As we get started today, as Paul writes to Corinth with the request that they be faithful to participate in the special offering for Jerusalem, we get a bit of background on the matter that helps us to understand the reason for his teaching. Our focus: finishing what has already been started.

2 Corinthians 8:8-12

⁸I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others. ⁹For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich. ¹⁰And here is my advice about what is best for you in this matter: Last year you were the first not only to give but also to have the desire to do so. ¹¹Now finish the work, so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it, according to your means. ¹²For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what he does not have.

Do you like to be compared to other people? Some of you were regularly compared to a sibling growing up. Yuck! Some of you have been compared with coworkers and their abilities and their job performance. Also Yuck! In America we compare everything: Fords versus Chevys, Macs versus PC's, Bud versus Miller versus Coors, and on it goes. The truth is, no one likes being compared to others – generally not even in the favorable sense. We want to be known for who we are and what we do based on our own merits and our own standards, not those of anyone else. But sometimes comparison can't be avoided; sometimes standards are important; and sometimes, imitation is the best form of flattery. Even in the Scriptures we have comparisons. The Proverbs are full of them. Jesus used them. Paul used them. And in today's passage, Paul uses one that surely and easily could be taken, by some people, in the wrong way.

Verse 8: We have been talking about giving. We've been doing so for a few days now. We know at this point that Paul has been encouraging the Corinthians to give, and we know also at this point that he has been holding up the churches of Macedonia as a sterling example of what right, honorable, generous, sacrificial giving looks like. Up to now, he has not explicitly said to the Corinthians that they should be patterning their own giving after that of the Macedonian congregations, even though it's been obvious that that's the idea in all of this. But now – now in the verses before us we have the dreaded "C" word. As you can see, there's no hiding here. It's as blunt as blunt can be. "In this matter of giving," Paul says, "I'm not commanding you, not by any means." But he goes on and says this: "I do want to test the sincerity of your love." And how is he going to do that? By comparing the manner of the Corinthians' earnestness in giving to the earnestness of others who have already proved the sincerity of their hearts. How does that sit with you? Well, let's make note of a couple of things: first, giving is voluntary, not compulsory, remember? That's why Paul says here that he is not commanding the Corinthian church in this matter. Second, note that Paul gives no specific amount, no percentage, no monetary standard for what makes the gift acceptable. The emphasis here is very clearly and intentionally not on money at all, but on the attitude of the one making the gift. God loves a cheerful giver, not a sour, browbeaten one. God's not short of cash; this is a matter of heart. The comparison Paul is making here, then, is not one of choosing between two gifts and deciding which is the better of the lot, the Macedonians' or the Corinthians'. Nor is Paul trying to move the Corinthians to jealousy by

talking about how good the gift of the Macedonian churches is. Paul is establishing a comparison here to encourage the Corinthians and spur them on their faith. He's showing them the actions of the Macedonian folks as a way to assert the beauty, the grace, and the power of God. It's not "Look at the Macedonian Christians;" it's "Look at what God by His grace has done in and through the Macedonians, and which He will no doubt do in you as well!"

Verse 9: We know that's the thrust of Paul's words here because of what comes in verse 9: verse 9 is all about the grace shown to us through our Lord Jesus Christ, who though eternally and omnipotently and incomprehensibly rich as the very Creator of the universe, was willing to become poor for us...was willing to give up all so that we could have all. Isn't that an incredible thought? If there is to be any motivating factor at all in any of this, it's clear that it rests in the gift that Jesus has given to us, not in what some other church has given to Him.

Verses 10-12: With those things in mind, Paul now says in verses 10-12, "Look – here's my advice. You started on this gig a year ago with Titus. You were doing really well with it. You were leaders in the church at-large by your example. Now it's time to finish it. Bring in the offering that you first planned to bring and do it with the aim of honoring God. The amount isn't what's important; what's important is the size of your heart. The gift is acceptable according to what you have, not what you don't."

Wrapping Up

As we wrap up for the day, what do you think of this counsel from the Word of God? How does it apply to you? You know, many people ask what it was that interrupted the giving pattern of Corinth so that it needed to be revived. After all, they had started out so well! We don't know specifically, but there's a pretty good bet that a lot of it had to do with the influence of the false teachers in Corinth and the bad-mouthing they did about Paul. "Paul's dishonest. He's going to pocket the money himself. You can't trust him. Don't believe him when he says he's going to deliver it to the church in Jerusalem." Combine that with the harsh words he had spoken to them because of their sin, sprinkle in the turmoil in the church because of the lawsuits and divisions and sexual sin that was going on, add things like the abuse of the Lord's Supper, the debate and pride surrounding the use of spiritual gifts, and a hundred other conflicts, and it's easy to see how the offering for the poor got shoved off into a corner somewhere. Do we ever do this in our churches? Do we ever get sidetracked by pettiness and majoring in the minors and being territorial and prideful and arrogant? Has the mission God has given us ever come to a halt because we can't get along? Is His mission for my life or your life at a halt right now because of any of those things? That's probably a good thing to think and pray about as we close today – I'll be doing that for you and me both...would you agree to that on your end as well? Have a great day and a great weekend – I'll see you again come Monday. Much love to each of you in Christ!