

International Bible Lessons Commentary
2 Corinthians 8:1-15

International Bible Lessons
Sunday, August 31, 2014

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The **International Bible Lesson** (*Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series*) for **Sunday, August 31, 2014**, is from **2 Corinthians 8:1-15**. NOTE: Some churches will only study **2 Corinthians 8:1-14**. **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further** follow the verse-by-verse *International Bible Lesson Commentary* below. **Study Hints for Thinking Further**, a study guide for teachers, discusses the five questions below to help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion; these hints are available on the **International Bible Lessons Commentary** website. The weekly *International Bible Lesson* is usually posted each Saturday before the lesson is scheduled to be taught.

International Bible Lesson Commentary

2 Corinthians 8:1-15

(2 Corinthians 8:1) We want you to know, brothers and sisters, about the grace of God that has been granted to the churches of Macedonia;

Paul wrote about Christian giving and the collection of money for the church in Jerusalem in 2 Corinthians 8:1 through 9:15; and in 1 Corinthians 16:1-4, and a few years later in Romans 15:25-28 (these verses should all be read in their context). Paul wrote that the desire to give and the spirit of giving in the Christian's life was the result of God's grace in their life. Christian giving is a vital aspect of Christian living. The churches in Macedonia had the spirit of giving because of the grace of God in their lives.

(2 Corinthians 8:2) for during a severe ordeal of affliction, their abundant joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part.

The churches in Macedonia had not used their afflictions or their poverty as an excuse not to give to meet the needs of others. Their poverty was "extreme poverty;" therefore, they gave because of God's grace and not because they had been commanded to give or because someone had told them that they needed to give if they wanted to be saved or go to heaven. Because they gave generously in spite of their poverty, Paul wrote that their offering "overflowed in a wealth of generosity," not that they gave what those who were wealthy could easily give.

(2 Corinthians 8:3) For, as I can testify, they voluntarily gave according to their means, and even beyond their means,

Paul wrote that what he was going to write about them he would be willing to say under oath in a court of law: he could testify to what they did because he saw them give with his own eyes. They gave voluntarily and without compulsion. They not only gave what they could afford to give; they gave sacrificially beyond what they could afford to give.

(2 Corinthians 8:4) begging us earnestly for the privilege of sharing in this ministry to the saints--

Because of the grace of God, the Christians in Macedonia had committed their lives to Jesus Christ as Lord and they knew the joy of salvation that God had given them as a free gift. They knew that the Church of Jesus Christ had spread from the first church in Jerusalem and those who had sent the gospel to them were suffering. Therefore, they begged Paul to allow them to give: to them giving to help other Christians was a privilege not simply an obligation. They gave joyfully, not with resentment.

(2 Corinthians 8:5) and this, not merely as we expected; they gave themselves first to the Lord and, by the will of God, to us,

Before they begged for the opportunity to serve others, they first gave themselves to the Lord Jesus Christ: they first consecrated themselves to the service of Christ and this included service to the body of Christ wherever those in the body of Christ had need. The grace of God moved them to understand and seek to do the will of God, which

included their commitment to follow the example of those who preached the gospel to them in giving to help the needy saints in Jerusalem.

(2 Corinthians 8:6) so that we might urge Titus that, as he had already made a beginning, so he should also complete this generous undertaking among you.

Paul wrote to the Corinthians and told them how the Christian churches in Macedonia had responded when they learned of the believers' needs in Jerusalem. Titus had been raising money in Macedonia, and with his letter Paul was sending Titus to the Corinthians in order to receive from them the rest of the offering for the church in Jerusalem. Paul encouraged them to be generous and trust Titus and him to take their gift to Jerusalem as they promised they would.

(2 Corinthians 8:7) Now as you excel in everything--in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in utmost eagerness, and in our love for you--so we want you to excel also in this generous undertaking.

As Paul turned his attention directly to the Corinthians, he expressed some of the joy he felt because of Titus' report to him about them. Though they were not perfect, from where they had been to where they had come, Paul could write that they excelled in faith (in right belief that led to right obedience to God) in speech (in their ability to share

the gospel rightly) in knowledge (in their ability to know and do what was right as the Holy Spirit led them), in utmost eagerness (in the desire to do what they knew to be right immediately and without hesitation), and in possessing the love of Paul and Titus for them. Therefore, Paul wanted them to also excel in giving generously to the offering for the suffering church in Jerusalem.

(2 Corinthians 8:8) I do not say this as a command, but I am testing the genuineness of your love against the earnestness of others.

Though Paul could have commanded them to give because he was an apostle, Paul chose to teach them the principles of Christian giving and he used the Macedonians as an example of how consecrated believers in Jesus Christ give to help others. Genuine love will motivate generous giving. When someone genuinely loves another they will often give sacrificially to bless them, bring them happiness, or meet their perceived needs. When presented with the real needs of others and how others of like faith are giving to meet those needs, those with genuine love and understanding will want to join in the giving to help others. Therefore, no command to give was needed to move them to give.

(2 Corinthians 8:9) For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich.

After Paul wrote about the Macedonians who gave by the grace of God for the right reasons, he described the primary reason for genuine, loving, generous giving. Believers give primarily because the Lord Jesus Christ has given generously when, as the owner of everything, He came from heaven to earth. Because Christ has created all things and everything was created through Him, Christ possesses all of creation. Though possessing all things, Christ became poor when He came to earth (He was born in a stable and buried in a borrowed tomb) in order to give forgiveness and eternal life to all who would believe in Him. He rose from the dead so He could share His riches (all of creation) as an inheritance with all those He came to save from spiritual poverty, sin, and death. Because Christ has made believers spiritually rich and someday they will receive the inheritance Christ has prepared for them, believers give generously from all they possess on earth in order to bless others in need.

(2 Corinthians 8:10) And in this matter I am giving my advice: it is appropriate for you who began last year not only to do something but even to desire to do something--

With Jesus as the primary example and others in the church as examples of what it means to show appreciation to Jesus by giving to help the body of Jesus Christ on earth, Paul gave advice and not a command to the Corinthians. He reviewed where they were: last year they had begun to do something; last year they had desired to do something, but Titus had reported that they had not yet

completed what they had desired and begun to do. It was time for them to complete what they had begun so well.

(2 Corinthians 8:11) now finish doing it, so that your eagerness may be matched by completing it according to your means.

Based on Titus' report, Paul advised them to finish what they had begun. Paul wanted them to do what they had eagerly desired to do a year earlier. Paul did not try to manipulate them to give a specific amount of money or give what they could not afford or give what would lead them into poverty. Paul advised them to consider their means or their ability to give and give accordingly. The Macedonians moved by love and the grace of God gave in spite of their poverty. The love of Jesus Christ often moves the impoverished to give what they can when they see the real needs of others.

(2 Corinthians 8:12) For if the eagerness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has-- not according to what one does not have.

Paul really wanted the Corinthians to be eager to give when they learned about the needs of others in the church. If a person is eager to give what he has to give that is acceptable, even though the amount may not be very much. Paul did not require, and the New Testament teaching does not require, that believers give what they do not have to give or that believers should feel guilty or inadequate because they do not have more to give.

(2 Corinthians 8:13) I do not mean that there should be relief for others and pressure on you, but it is a question of a fair balance between

Paul wrote carefully not to put human pressure on the Corinthians to give; he wanted them to give as the grace of God and genuine love and the spirit of giving moved them to give. He did not want to pressure them to give and impoverish themselves so others would not be in poverty. He wanted them to reasonably consider what the church in Jerusalem lacked and compare their lack to what they themselves had to share.

(2 Corinthians 8:14) your present abundance and their need, so that their abundance may be for your need, in order that there may be a fair balance.

Paul knew that wealth and human life on earth can be fleeting. At the present time, the Corinthians had a measure of abundance so they could give out of their abundance to help others in need. They could give reasonably and generously and not impoverish themselves. Someday, the Corinthians might be in need, and if so, the church in Jerusalem or other churches may be able to give to help them. Paul did not write that every church should have the same amount of money; he did not write that what they all had should be divided among them equally; rather, Christians and churches should love one another and help one another so there is a balance in

giving and receiving according to the grace of God and the example and gift of Jesus Christ himself.

(2 Corinthians 8:15) As it is written, "The one who had much did not have too much, and the one who had little did not have too little."

Once again, Paul referred his readers back to the Old Testament (see Exodus 16:18). All of the Israelites who went out to collect the manna in the wilderness had what they needed when they returned to their homes. Likewise, Paul indicated that those who followed Jesus Christ should have their real needs met by the grace of God. The Israelites went out to collect the manna that God had provided, so they worked to eat when they harvested the manna in the wilderness. Likewise, Paul wrote that those who would not work should not eat: "For even when we were with you, we gave you this command: Anyone unwilling to work should not eat" (2 Thessalonians 3:10). The Bible does not urge Christians to give so others can avoid work, or responsibility, or think they do not need to serve Christ and others with the abilities and gifts that God has given them.

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. Why did Paul write about the Macedonians in his letter to the Corinthians?
2. Why did the Macedonians give?

3. What did the Macedonians give?
4. What did Paul want Titus to do when he visited the church in Corinth?
5. What did Paul say Jesus Christ had done for them? Why did he remind them of what Jesus Christ had done for them?

Begin or close your class by reading the short weekly *International Bible Lesson*.

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