

## 2 Corinthians 8:8-15 More About Rich Generosity

Most of us probably do not enjoy hearing appeals for money at church. One of the biggest criticisms people have about church is that they are always asking for money. We admit that money is necessary for the work of the church to continue. If we want to have a pastor, support missionaries, run programs, and keep the heat up and the lights on, we need money. And these funds come from the generous giving of the people who attend the services of the church. The only way for a church to function and to grow is for people to give of their resources to support the work of the church.

In the life of *our* church, we've gone through financial ups and downs over the years. For a while, we were barely hanging on financially. But then things changed and we started doing better financially, thanks to the generous, sacrificial giving of the people of our church. The church has benefitted from the rich generosity of our people.

The theme of 2 Corinthians 8-9 is rich generosity. Paul was collecting an offering to help the poverty-stricken Christians at Jerusalem. He had collected funds from several of the churches already, and he expected the people at Corinth to participate in this offering as well. In fact, the people had previously committed to collect an offering, but they had not yet made their contribution. In this passage, Paul is exhorting them to stop procrastinating and collect this offering.

The theme in today's passage is rich generosity (vs. 2). We've already seen several truths about this great theme from the previous section of the text, and this part of the passage tells us more about it.

Let's learn a few more things about rich generosity.

I. Rich generosity is a test of sincere love. .8

A. .8a Generosity is voluntary—not a commandment.

Paul had apostolic authority and could have commanded these people to contribute to this offering. But he didn't want to force them to give; he wanted them to give freely and voluntarily, not because he was compelling them. He's trying to encourage their generosity, not force it.

**App:** No one can force you to be generous. I know that some churches pressure their people to give generously, but you really can't force generosity; we should not try to do so. If it's forced, it's not really generosity; it's not grace giving. It's important that we give for the right reasons and motivations.

B. .8b Generosity is exemplary.

1. He's testing the Corinthians "by the diligence of others." The "others" in view here are the churches of Macedonia. He's testing the generosity of the Corinthians by the standard set by the Macedonians. They had been "diligent" – i.e., eager, earnest, enthusiastic to participate in this offering.
2. If their Macedonian brethren could give out of their deep poverty, surely the Corinthian believers could give generously out of their prosperity.

C. .8 b Generosity expresses sincere love.

1. The word "sincerity" (γνήσιος) means "genuineness, truth, loyalty."
2. Love should be the primary motivation for generosity. Participating in this offering would demonstrate sincere love for Paul and for the suffering saints in Jerusalem. It also shows our love for God, his people, and his work.

**App:** Jesus said that we cannot love both God and money. He also said that where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Spending decisions reveal what we love/treasure. If we treasure material possessions, that's what we'll spend our money on. If we treasure ourselves, we'll spend our money on ourselves. If we sincerely love God, his church, and his mission, we'll spend our money—at least some of it—on that.

**Quote:** Words expressing love come cheaply and can be faked; genuine love will show up in the checkbook.<sup>1</sup> Your spending reflects your value system.

**Trans:** What does your spending show about whom and what you love? I'm afraid some people love other things far more than they love God or his purposes. If we love God and his people sincerely, we will be richly generous.

## II. Rich generosity is Christ-like. .9

The supreme example of rich generosity is Jesus' sacrifice of himself for us. Jesus demonstrated his love for us through sacrificial giving. Christ-likeness should motivate us toward rich generosity.

A. Christ was *gracious* in his giving—"the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ." Because Jesus is full of grace, he's richly generous. Grace leads to generosity.

Grace, of course, is the undeserved, unmerited, free, goodwill of God toward undeserving sinners. God's goodness, kindness, and benevolence are expressed through the person and work of Jesus Christ.

**App:** I wonder if you can affirm what Paul is saying here—do you know the grace of God as expressed through Christ? Have you experienced that grace? Eph 2:8-9

Have you accepted the grace of God in salvation? Maybe someone here today would have to admit, "I don't know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ."

B. Christ was *sacrificial* in his giving. He was rich, yet he became poor.

1. Jesus enjoyed all the riches of heaven. As God, he owns all created things. He enjoyed equality with God in authority, power, glory, and honor. Cf. John 17:5—glory with God in heaven

2. In the incarnation, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Person of the Trinity left the glories of heaven and assumed the form of a human. He lived as a humble carpenter. This was the poverty of earthly human life in contrast to the glories of heaven.

Philippians 2:7 *[He] made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men.*

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<sup>1</sup> David E. Garland, 2 *Corinthians*, vol. 29, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 376.

3. He was condemned and died a humiliating death. Probably the very lowest point in Jesus' earthly life was when he was suffering on the cross for our sins—he became sin for us—and endured the wrath of God. Jesus' cry, "Why has thou forsaken me?" – his "cry of dereliction"—is likely the lowest point of his poverty.

*Philippians 2:8 And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.*

**Quote:** He left the throne to become a servant. He laid aside all His possessions so that He did not even have a place to lay His head. His ultimate experience of poverty was when He was made sin for us on the cross.<sup>2</sup>

- C. Christ was *generous* his giving.

Those who are poor can become rich through Christ. He's not talking about earthly wealth or money in this case. He's talking about spiritual enrichment. The poverty of Christ brings believers spiritual enrichment.

In what senses are believers rich through Christ?

1. Salvation makes us rich.
  - a) Before salvation we are in spiritual poverty; we are spiritually bankrupt. We are lost and dead in sin.
  - b) But when we get saved, we become joint-heirs with Jesus (Rom 8:17). We enjoy the riches of God's mercy, grace, joy, and peace.
2. A life of godly service makes us rich. A life of humble service to God and to his church is a blessed, joyful, abundant life.
3. Heaven itself will provide the ultimate wealth. We stand to inherit all the blessings God has for his people. We'll have all eternity to enjoy all the richness of the entire universe; God will give us all things to enjoy.

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<sup>2</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 656.

**Trans:** Jesus is the primary example of rich generosity, and the point here is that we should follow that example. If you are saved, you have received rich generosity, and we are now obligated to extend rich generosity to others. This is a call to generous, sacrificial giving—like Christ’s generous giving to us.

The Macedonians gave when they were desperately *poor*. Christ gave when he was extremely *rich*. Both are good examples of sacrificial, rich generosity that we can follow. Most of us are somewhere between rich and poor.

### III. Rich generosity is practical. .10-12

Paul offers his “advice” or opinion here rather than issuing a command. He’s encouraging the people to give, but he wants them to give for the right reasons, not merely out of obedience to his command. They should give because they want to give, not because they are pressured into it.

They had expressed their desire to give, but that desire had not resulted in actual giving. Their good *desires* had not led to good *deeds*. The time had come for them to *produce*, not just *promise*.

A. .10b Rich generosity is *advantageous* (συμφέρει, KJV “expedient”)—to be good or better, for one’s advantage or benefit; to be fitting. How is rich generosity beneficial/advantageous/fitting?

1. It benefits those who receive your rich generosity. In this case, the poor saints in Jerusalem would be able to eat instead of starving.

**App:** Through your generous giving, people hear the Gospel and are saved. Churches are started and carry on the Great Commission. People in need benefit through your generous giving.

2. It also benefits those who give. There is a joy in giving. Vs. 4—fellowship of ministering to the saints.

*Ac 20:35 ... remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.*

3. Ultimately, generous giving glorifies God. We worship and honor God through our giving.

*Php 4:18 I have [received] ... the things sent from you, a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God.*

B. Rich generosity is *timely*. Notice the time sequence here:

1. a desire (.10end), a readiness to desire it (.11b), a willing mind/readiness (.12a): they had previously been eager to participate in this offering. Paul had told them about it, and they wanted to participate. They made the commitment to give.
2. .10b You began—Perhaps they had collected some money, or some of the people had contributed. But they did not finish the collection; the project fizzled out.
3. .11nd You must now complete the doing of it—i.e., “finish what you started.” They had postponed it, procrastinated, forgotten about it. Now there must be a completion—it must be completed, accomplished, brought to an end.

They had the *intention*; now they needed *completion*.

Talk is cheap. It’s easy to say that you’ll do something, but actually fulfilling a promise is a different matter.

- C. .11end-12 Rich generosity is *proportional*—based on what one has. “Out of what you have” means “according to your means/resources.” Paul doesn’t expect them to give something they don’t have. You don’t give based on future income; you give based on what you are currently earning.

The Bible teaches proportional giving—we ought to give a portion of our income. I don’t believe we are absolutely *required* to give 10%, but I think the tithe is a reasonable, biblical level of giving. If you are self-disciplined and orderly in your affairs, you should be able to give at least a tithe. That should be within your means.

God takes our individual financial circumstances into consideration. He does not expect anyone to go into debt to give. Our giving might be sacrificial, but it should not drive us into bankruptcy. We give generously out of what God has provided, not out of what we don’t have.

.12 And when we give in proportion to what we have, it is acceptable to God. We don’t have to worry that we didn’t give enough if we are giving a reasonable proportion of our income to God. We give as God prospers us (16:2).

**App:** As I mentioned before, most people who attend church give a very low proportion of their income to the church. The average is \$17/week. Only 5 out of 100, on average, tithe. That shows where people's treasure is. Rich generosity, I believe, would suggest that we give at least a tithe—that's a reasonable goal.

**Quote:** God sees, not the *portion*, but the *proportion*. If we could have given more, and did not, God notes it. If we wanted to give more, and could not, God also notes that. When we give willingly, according to what we have, we are practicing grace giving.<sup>3</sup>

- D. .12a Rich generosity is *voluntary*. Paul is emphasizing the idea of willingness here—"a willing mind." Rich generosity extends naturally from a willing heart, a personal desire to serve God and to serve God's people. Rich generosity cannot be forced or compelled; it must be voluntary.

But that willingness must lead to the performance of the rich generosity. That is, at the end of the day, you have to give something; you have to write the check, put the cash into the offering plate, or send the funds. Good intentions are no substitute for actual, physical, financial generosity. Even a small actual gift is better than generous intentions that never materialize.

IV. Rich generosity provides an equality. .13-15

- A. .13 The "others" in view here are the poor saints at Jerusalem; they will be the recipients of this offering.
- B. .13 Paul's intent is not to burden the people of Corinth in order to ease others. This offering was not supposed to be a burden/hardship. Giving generously was a hardship for the Macedonians, but not for the Corinthians.
- C. .14a His expectation is that things would equal out. His intent is that fellow believers share the burdens among themselves as they share their resources.
- D. .14b "at this time" – on this occasion, in this case. Right now, you can supply resources for those in need. In the future, their abundance might supply your need. Everything would be equal and fair.

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<sup>3</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 657.

- E. .14 He mentions “your abundance,” so that seems to indicate that the Corinthian believers were fairly well off, especially compared to the poor saints at Macedonia and at Jerusalem. Their surplus—if they gave some of it—would supply the deficiency/lack for those who were suffering.

**App:** When we give richly to supply someone else’s need, it often turns out that others give richly in our time of need. On this occasion, your generous offering will supply their need, and in time, if the situation reverses, others will give generously to supply your need. That’s the equality that he’s talking about.

I don’t know if you’ve ever experienced that, but I have. When I’ve given generously, I often receive generously.

*Luke 6:38 Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you.*

Do we give in order to receive? That’s often what the health and wealth preachers say. “If you contribute to my TV ministry, the Lord will pay you back 100 fold.” But we should not be giving with the expectation that we’d receive back more than what we gave. Our purpose in giving is not selfish; we don’t give in order to get. We give because we care; we give for the benefit of others; we give in service to God.

- F. The church at Corinth had been enriched spiritually by the Jerusalem church as it sent out missionaries with the Gospel. Now the Jerusalem church was in need, and the Corinthian church had the financial resources to help them. Giving a financial offering is a way of showing appreciation for spiritual benefits.

- G. .15 The example/illustration: Ex 16:18, in which the Israelites gathered manna in the wilderness.

1. God provided that resource freely, and everybody had enough for themselves. Some gathered more and some gathered less, but there was enough for all.
2. What happened if the people tried to hoard manna? It went bad; it decayed; it spoiled. Likewise, if we hoard our wealth, it might turn out the same way.

3. The point of rich generosity is that those who give still have enough for themselves, and those who need get what they need. We can share generously with others and still have enough for ourselves. Don't be greedy; don't hoard everything for yourself, especially when others are in need.
4. In our sin-cursed world, some people may not have enough. That's the reason for this offering. The Corinthians had an abundance, and the poor saints at Jerusalem had a need. So equality would suggest that the Corinthians share their abundance generously.

To summarize the principles we find here:

If we love God and his people, we will be richly generous.

If we are striving to be Christ-like, we'll be richly generous.

If we want to enjoy spiritual and practical benefits, we'll be richly generous.

If God has provided an abundance for us, we should be richly generous.

The intent/desire to give must follow through with actual giving. If you see the need, don't procrastinate or forget about it. Follow the example of Jesus' rich generosity.