

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST

SPREADING THE SOUL-SAVING MESSAGE OF JESUS

2 CORINTHIANS LESSON 3 (Chapters 8-10)

Introduction by narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST. Spreading the soul-saving message of Jesus. And now, Ben Bailey.

“You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich” (2 Cor. 8:9). Welcome to our study of Second Corinthians. In this third lesson in the series we will be looking at chapters 8 through 10, the overall theme being that we walk by faith, not by sight. Previously we noted that we walk by faith in the promises of God—the promises of Who He is, what He gives to us, and how we can be sure about His promises. We also examined the plan of God, and how He sent His Son to this world to die for us so that we can have salvation through Jesus. Now, however, we want to look at how we walk by faith in the purposes of God. We especially will be examining chapters 8 through 10 as Paul discusses the giving of the Christians in Corinth, and how it related directly to God’s having given us His Son.

The Macedonians are commended for their liberal giving. In 2 Corinthians 8:2-4 Paul said that

“in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty [the Macedonians] abounded in the riches of their liberality. For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing, imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints.”

These were people who, as they walked by faith in the purposes of God, realized that God intended for them to be good givers in the kingdom. God wants each person to purpose to give as he or she has been prospered. The Macedonians gave out of deep poverty to the cause of God because they realized how important the Gospel was and how much of a need there was to take that Gospel to a lost and dying world.

When we think of giving, we sometimes think of the amount we give. Suppose that someone gives “X,” and that that is a lot of money today. We think of that as being “real giving.” Yet some of the best giving in the Bible was not based on quantity, but instead was based on quality. Look at Luke 21 and notice what Jesus said about one of the best givers in the Bible. In verses 2-4 we read,

“He saw also a certain poor widow putting in two mites. So He said, ‘Truly I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all; for all these out of their abundance have put in offerings for God, but she out of her poverty put in all the livelihood that she had.’”

Jesus watched how the people gave. As people went through the line, He could hear the money dropping into the pot. Wealthy people were giving, and wanted to see how others were giving. They wanted to see who was watching them, and they wanted to make a noise when they gave. Then the widow arrived, and “clink, clink” went her two mites. Jesus said that she had given more than anyone else. Can’t you imagine the surprise on the faces of the people who heard Jesus say that? How could the widow have given more than all? She gave only two little mites. Jesus said that everyone else had given out of their abundance,

while she, out of her poverty, had given her entire livelihood. She was commended as a great giver because she gave until it hurt. Most people gave out of their abundance; she gave out of deep poverty. Giving to God is viewed in light of what God has given us. John 3:16 provides a picture of God's giving. "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." Did God give us leftovers? Did He give us out of abundance, or did He give until it hurt? God sent His own Son from the realms of Heaven to this Earth in order to live, die, and suffer as a man who was crucified by His own creation. God gave the very best, and indeed it did hurt! That is an example of how we, too, are to give. The Macedonians were perfect illustrations of what it meant to really give. They gave out of their deep affliction and deep poverty. They gave because they realized a great need. In Matthew 9:37-38 Jesus looked out on the people and said, "The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest." There are multiplied millions of people on Earth who desperately need to hear the Gospel. When we collect the funds of the saints, and when we give as we have been prospered so that the funds we give can be used to reach the lost, what greater good could we imagine than to help the Gospel be spread so that souls can be saved? This is why Paul admonished the Corinthians concerning their giving.

Giving is a command of God. It also is an act of worship (1 Cor. 16:1-2). But today I am not here to beg you for your money. I am here to explain that God commands us to give in our worship and to give locally to the congregation of which we are members. But I am not like someone else who will get on television and say, "If you will send us so much money, God will bless you." The Bible says that you need to give as you have been prospered and as you purpose in your heart. But that is to be done through the local congregation, and is to be done in line with the teaching of God. The Macedonians gave generously to God because they first had given themselves to the Lord. In 2 Corinthians 8:5 we see why these people were such good givers to the cause of Christ: "And not only as we had hoped, but they first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God." What caused these people to have the mindset to give until it hurts and to give out of deep poverty? What motivated that? There will never be a good giver who does not give himself to the Lord. Giving begins, not by putting money into the collection plate, but within each individual. There will never be a good giver to the cause of Christ who has not first given himself to the Lord. In Luke 9:23 we see what Jesus asks of us: "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me." If we deny ourselves and take up our crosses to follow Jesus, that is true giving. In Romans 12:1 Paul said, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service." That is real giving—awaking every day to give ourselves to the cause of Christ. Paul had such a mindset. He said, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me" (Galatians 2:20). It is the love of Christ that compels us to live for Jesus. In view of that love, we first must give ourselves to God so that we then can be ready to give on the first day of the week as we have been commanded to do as part of our worship to God.

The depth of our giving is evidence of how deep our love of God and others really is. Paul said in 2 Corinthians 8:8 that they could tell the depth of their love by their giving. Our giving does indeed say something about us and about our love for God. If we give grudgingly, that says that God is not our first priority, and that we have selfish motives. If we cannot give cheerfully as God wants us to (2 Cor. 9:6-7), if it is hard for us to drop our money into the collection plate, or if we have to fight ourselves to give to God, then we have prob-

lems with materialism and worldliness. But, if we can give freely to the cause of Christ and to those who are in need, that says something about how deep our love of God and others really is. One of the most beautiful passages of the Bible falls right in line with the example of giving, and shows us that how much we give is indicative of how deeply we love. In 2 Corinthians 8:9 we find what is one of the most beautiful passages in the entire Bible. "You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich." The word "grace" is a synonym in that context that is being used to represent Christ's gift. What is the gift? Paul explains when he observes that although Christ lived in the very place where we are trying to go. Heaven is the place where there is no sorrow, death, or crying. It is where God is, where the saints of old are, and where there is no lack or want. Jesus was rich, yet for our sakes He became poor. He left the bountiful realms of Heaven and came to live as a poor man on Earth. He had no place to call His own. He had no place to lay His head. He owned no property. He had no real money. Jesus gave up everything. He went about doing good and preaching the Word while He was on Earth. He lived a life of poverty. Does that mean that God did not take care of Him? No. God took care of Him. But by human standards Jesus lived in poverty. He did not have the things that most people have in this life so that we, "through His poverty, might be made rich." Look at this example. Christ left Heaven and came to Earth. He lived as a pauper. Why did He do these things? It was so that we, one day, could be rich. God's gift of Jesus was selfless because it was for others. Jesus left everything for us. We learn from 2 Corinthians 5:21 that God "made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." Jesus gave up Heaven, and then came to Earth, suffered, and died for each one of us. We are to have "the mind of Christ" (Phil. 2:5). The Word of God left Heaven (Jn. 1:1) and came to the Earth and dwelt among men. He even died for His own creation.

If we are to have the mindset of Christ in the context of giving, we ought to be selfless and sacrificial in our giving. That is the idea. We are to be selfless because we must realize that there are more important things than hoarding our money to build up a big bank account. We must be sacrificial, and we must be ready, even out of poverty, to give so that we can help spread the Gospel to a lost and dying world. Walking by faith in the purposes of God helps us realize that through our giving we show our love for God and for the lost. In 2 Corinthians 8:12 we learn that our giving is to be according to what we have, not according to what we do not have. God does not expect us to give that which we do not have. Sometimes we may give more than we are able. But God does not expect us, if we give only "X" amount of dollars, to give three times that. God does not expect us to bankrupt ourselves. But we must give what we have. James 1:17 says that "every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning." What do we have? Everything we have been given is a gift from God. We are merely stewards of the things that God has given us. With what God has given us, we ought to place our giving back to Him at the top of our priority list. We do not want to give God the leftovers. That is what the Book of Malachi says that some of God's people tried to do. They gave the lame and the blind animals to God. God then asked them, "Will a man rob God?" (Mal. 3:8). God said, "Yet, you have robbed Me." And He added, "Offer it then to your governor! Would he be pleased with you? Would he accept you favorably?" (Mal. 1:8). God's point was that the governor might laugh at the people who did that—and then put them in prison. Yet the people wanted to give such things to God, their Supreme Ruler? We need to realize that God does not deserve our leftovers; rather, He deserves the very best that we have.

We are taught in Scripture to give "as we have purposed in our hearts." In 2 Corinthians 9:6-7 we find a central passage regarding how we are to give to God.

“But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.”

What does it mean to “give as you have purposed in your heart”? We may have heard that all our lives. But what does it actually mean? How do we “purpose in our hearts”? Does that mean that I make up my mind to give, and that, then, is what God wants me to give? No, not really. God has already told us what it means. We “purpose in our hearts” based on three things. First, we use the inspired example of how others gave. In 2 Corinthians 8:2 we see the example of how the Macedonians gave out of deep poverty. They gave until it hurt. In 2 Corinthians 8:9 we see the inspired example of how God gave the very best. We also give based on the gift of Christ, as 2 Corinthians 8:9 teaches. He gave up everything and came to live on Earth for us. We also are to give according to our ability. God does not expect us to give that which we do not have—so that we end up going into debt and cannot function properly in our daily lives. We give based on inspired examples. We give based on God’s example. And we give of what we have. We always must put God first, not last. That is what it means to “purpose in our hearts.” We cannot simply sit down and pull a number out of the air. There has to be some consideration given to the amount we give. Surely, a man would want to put God first in his giving.

One thing we learn from Scripture is that God wants us to give willingly and cheerfully. We are told, “So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Cor. 9:7). We do not give “just because we have to.” God willingly gave us His Son (Jn. 3:16). Jesus willingly tasted death for every man. He willingly hung on the cross for you and for me. Our giving must not be done grudgingly; rather, it must be something we do willingly. Hebrews 12:2 tells us that Jesus “for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” We are not to give grudgingly, but willingly. We are to give with joy in our hearts. It should be a real joy to give back to God some of what He has given to us. Considering all that God has given us, how thankful we ought to be to be able to give to the greatest cause in the world. We know that this should be the case because in Acts 5 we see an example of that very thing. In Acts 5 Peter and James were instructed not to teach in the name of Jesus or to speak about Him any more. They were beaten, and then were taken before the Sanhedrin. But the Bible says that they left that place “rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name” (vs. 41). They counted it a joy to suffer just a little bit to share with others what Jesus had suffered to give them. We ought to count it a joy to be able to give back, especially since what we give is negligible compared to what God gave us. We must give willingly and cheerfully. Our giving should be motivated by the greatest cause of all—the salvation of people’s souls. In view of everything in this life, what is the most important cause that you could support financially? Is the most important thing the cancer foundation? That might be a good work, but it is not the most important thing. What about Alzheimer’s research? That might be a good thing, but it is not the most important thing. What if you could give to something that would keep people from writhing in the fire and pain of Hell for eternity? Wouldn’t that be at the top of your list? That is what giving is about. It is about giving to, and sacrificing for, the cause of Christ so that we can spread the Gospel—in the hope that we will spare souls from an eternal Hell because they have an opportunity come to know Jesus as they come to know the beauty of Heaven as they escape the horror of Hell. Could you find anything better in the entire world to which to give? People’s souls being saved for eternity is the most important thing to which you could ever give.

In view of God’s gift, we should all be able to say what Paul said in 2 Corinthians 9:15—“Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!” God’s gift is so important—because it is what

brings salvation to mankind. Hebrews 10:3-4 says that the blood of bulls and goats can never take away sin. Aren't you glad that we do not have to go to the temple, slit the throat of a bull, sprinkle its blood and ashes on the altar, and burn its flesh and entrails? How thankful we ought to be that we have the gift of Jesus and His once-for-all sacrifice! In Revelation 4 and 5 we find a great throne-room scene. God is sitting on the throne. He is in control. Someone gives a scroll to John, but there is no one present who can open it. The scroll, once opened, will unleash the wrath of God on evil. But then a lamb appears that had its throat slit from the foundation of the world. It is Jesus and His sacrifice that made it possible. When Jesus cried out in Matthew 27:46, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?," what was the answer to that question? We are the answer. Thank God for His indescribable gift. We cannot believe or imagine such a gift. It doesn't make sense. Scarcely for a righteous man one might die. For a good man one might dare to die. But God sent His own Son to die for us while we were sinners. You do not send someone to die for reprobate sinners. But God did—by sending His Son. That is the indescribable gift of our God. This shows us the nature and character of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. In fact, 2 Corinthians 10:1 goes hand in hand with this gift. "Now I, Paul, myself am pleading with you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ—who in presence am lowly among you, but being absent am bold toward you." Think about the nature of Jesus, and what it took for Him to give His life for us. Meekness is not weakness. It is not someone who is sheepish. Meekness is strength under control. Jesus exhibited exactly that. Philippians 2:5-9 teaches us that we are to have the mind of Christ "who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, and became obedient to the point of death." Could Jesus have called down multitudes of angels to keep Himself from dying? Yes, He could have. But did He? No. He was meek and willing to give His life for us. Then there is the gentleness of Christ. Even though He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, He said nothing. He went willingly, exhibiting strength under control. He was willing to go through and do those things for us. Look at what Jesus gave up for us—which is tied into the purposes of God, that we should walk by faith.

We need to understand that this physical life is not where our battle is being fought. Our battle is a spiritual battle. Part our purpose in this life is the fight the good fight of faith. In 2 Corinthians 10:3-5 Paul wrote,

"Though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ."

Yes, we walk in the flesh and live a physical, fleshly life. Our spirit is bound to our earthly tent in the here and now. But, our battle is a spiritual battle. Though we "walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh." We are not out with swords, guns, and knives in a physical battle. Our battle is a spiritual battle that pulls down strongholds and casts down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God. In our battle, which is a spiritual battle, we are to defeat that which is evil. We are instructed to "bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ." We must fight the evil, ungodliness, and false doctrines that exist in the world. But there is just as much a battle on the inward side. We must bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. The good thing is that in this battle we have the perfect Captain. Hebrews 2:9-10 tells us that Jesus is the Captain of our salvation. We know very well who our foe is. We are told in 1 Peter 5:8 that Satan is like a roaring lion that is seeking whomever he may devour. We have been given everything we need in our armaments so that we can win the battle (Eph. 6:10-18). We have the spiritual armor of God. Plus, the good news is that battle already has been won in the bigger sense. All we have to do is to step in line behind the Captain.

We must be faithful until death, and God then will give us the crown of life. That does not mean that the battle will be easy. We have to stand for what is right and oppose what is wrong. We must daily fight the internal struggle of temptation and sin so that Satan does not gain a hold in our lives. We must be careful to overcome sin. Our weapons are not physical, but spiritual. We can win the battle. Our weapons ultimately will defeat our enemy. But we must do what we can in this battle to ensure that we remain true to God.

Sometimes a question, objection, or criticism arises. Some people will say, "The Bible is a good book. I understand what you are saying about 'walking by faith in the purposes of God' and all those things. But don't you think that if Paul, Peter, or Jesus were here today, they might say things differently?" Let's look at 2 Corinthians 10:11, and we will find the answer to such a question. "Let such a person consider this, that what we are in word by letters when we are absent, such we will also be in deed when we are present." Paul was saying, in essence, that there was nothing that he had written that he would not have said if he had been present in person. What God has written to us in the Bible is the exact same thing that He would say to us today. In 1 Corinthians 14:37 we are told, "If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord." In 2 Peter 1:3 we are told that we have been given everything we need through the knowledge of God that is found in the Word in order to get to Heaven. Psalm 119:160 says that the entirety of God's Word is truth. Jesus said that it is that truth that will make us free (Jn. 8:32). The idea is not true that if Paul or Jesus were here, they might say something differently or offer different commands for our society today. Paul said that what he had written in word, he would do in deed. What God has said in His Word is the exact same thing He would say if He were standing right next to us today.

The basic lesson is that if we are going to please God, we must walk by faith in His purposes. God wants each person who is one of His children to give cheerfully and willingly based on the sacrifice of Jesus. He has clearly taught us not to get caught up in the things of the world, but instead to fight the good fight of faith and stay true to the Word and will of God. Have you obeyed the Gospel? Are you a Christian? The Bible says that you must hear the Word of God, believe in Jesus, repent of the things in your life that are not right, and be baptized for the remission of your sins (Acts 2:38). If you do those things, you can know for sure that your life is in accord with the purposes of God.

Narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST is brought to you by loving, caring members of the church of Christ. The McLish Avenue church of Christ in Ardmore, Oklahoma, oversees this evangelistic effort. For a free CD or DVD of today's broadcast, please write to:

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST
607 McLish Ave.
Ardmore, OK 73401

You may call **580-223-3289**. Please visit us on the web at www.thegospelofchrist.com. We encourage you to attend the church of Christ, where "the Bible is loved and the Gospel is preached."

STUDY QUESTIONS FOR 2 CORINTHIANS LESSON 3 (CHAPTERS 8-10)

1. According to 2 Corinthians 8:2-4, what had the Christians in Macedonia done that resulted in their receiving an apostolic commendation?
2. For what action did Jesus commend the widow mentioned in Luke 21:2-4?
3. According to Jesus' discussion in Matthew 9:37-38, what is one good reason for Christians to give generously to the church?
4. What does 1 Corinthians 16:1-2 have to say about our giving?
5. According to John 3:16, how much did God give?
6. What does 2 Corinthians 8:12 teach about how God expects us to give?
7. According to 2 Corinthians 8:5, what had the Macedonians given to God prior to giving Him their money?
8. Luke 9:23 discusses one of the ways that we are to give back to God. What is the central message of that verse for us today?
9. According to 2 Corinthians 8:9, what did Jesus Christ do for us?
10. In 2 Corinthians 8:9 we are informed that "through His [Christ's] poverty [we] might become rich." What, exactly, does that mean?
11. According to Philippians 2:5-8, what did Christ do for us?
12. What important question did God ask in Malachi 3:8?
13. According to James 1:17, what is the source of the good things we enjoy today?
14. In 2 Corinthians 9:7 we are told that we must do something "in our heart" regarding our giving. What is it?
15. According to 2 Corinthians 9:7, how are Christians **not** supposed to give?
16. According to 2 Corinthians 9:7, how **are** Christians supposed to give?
17. What gift did Paul have in mind when he said in 2 Corinthians 9:15, "Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!"
18. In 2 Corinthians 10:3-5 Paul said that Christians are engaged in a battle. What type of battle is it?
19. What specific point was Paul making when he said in 2 Corinthians 10:11, "Let such a person consider this, that what we are in word by letters when we are absent, such we will also be in deed when we are present."