

☐ **Paul Sets Forth Guidelines and Models of Christian Stewardship (8:1–9:15)*** Motivating Christians and congregations not only to give but also to be fiscally responsible in their giving is a difficult enterprise even in the best of circumstances. The needs are seemingly endless, and there are so many competing voices that the average Christian is stymied. Various and sundry organizations put forth their pleas for money constantly, sometimes relentlessly.

Fundraisers are frequently in a serious quandary themselves as they face the consumerism mentality of today's society. Books on how to corner the market are on the increase. Sophisticated marketing strategies abound. Then there are those who make a bad name for fundraisers everywhere by resorting to threats (such as to go without food until a certain dollar figure is met), sensationalism (such as showing pictures of children with severe deformities) and even warnings of impending doom for the organization if funds are not immediately forthcoming.

The Jerusalem Collection Paul faced many of these same challenges in his own day. Although he did not request personal support, he spent close to ten years soliciting funds for what is commonly referred to as the Jerusalem collection. This was a collection he took up among the Gentile churches to help Judean believers who were facing harder than usual economic times as a result of a famine during the mid to late 40s. Paul and Barnabas made an initial famine—relief visit to Jerusalem in A.D. 46 and delivered a monetary gift from the church at Antioch ([Acts 11:29–30](#)). At that time the Jerusalem church expressed the hope that the believers associated with Paul would continue to remember the Judean believers, which Paul was more than eager to do ([Gal 2:10](#)).

The collection effort was successfully completed in A.D. 57, and the funds were delivered by Paul and a group of delegates chosen by the contributing Gentile churches. In [Romans 15:26](#) Paul states that the churches of Macedonia and Achaia “were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem,” but the actual list of contributing churches is much longer. Luke's list includes delegates from Berea, Thessalonica, Derbe and Asia. The church at Philippi is without a delegate, but Luke himself may have functioned in this capacity (this is a “we” section of Acts). Timothy, who is included in the list, undoubtedly represented Lystra. Corinth was also without a delegate, but they may well, in the end, have asked Paul (or possibly Titus) to represent them.

A fundraising effort of this kind requires enormous investments of time and energy. Why did Paul do it? For one, the need was genuine. The Jerusalem collection was first and foremost an act of charity. Famine on top of persistent food shortages, double taxation and overpopulation crippled an already precarious Palestinian economy. The situation was undoubtedly aggravated by a voluntary pooling of

* **8:1–9:15** In [Acts 11:28](#) Luke records that a severe famine spread over the entire Roman world during the reign of Claudius (A.D. 41–54).

The Jerusalem church's practice was not a mandatory pooling of all assets. References to Joseph's field ([Acts 4:37](#)) and Mary's house ([Acts 12:12](#)) are evidence that private ownership of property continued. A careful reading of [Acts 2:45](#) and [4:34–37](#) shows that contributions were, in fact, voluntary and occasional. From time to time a member of the church would sell a piece of real estate in order to aid the needy within the congregation (imperfect tenses, epipraskon, epheron, etithoun, diedideto).

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Page 1. Exported from [Logos Bible Software](#), 4:21 PM November 8, 2018.

assets in the early years of the church's existence ([Acts 2:44–46](#); [4:32–37](#)) and the constant need for the mother church to support the itinerant activities of its members and extend hospitality to visitors from other churches. Then too it was common, as it is today, for diaspora Jews to settle in and around the “holy city” at retirement; the result was a steady increase of widows and elderly in need of assistance.

Second, the relief fund served as an important, visible expression of the interdependence of believers worldwide. All of life is included in the shared concerns of those in Christ. For safety reasons, mountain climbers rope themselves together when climbing a mountain. That way, if one climber should slip and fall, he would not fall to his death but would be held by the others until he could regain his footing. In a similar way the Corinthians' surplus supplied the needs of the Judean churches so that the Judean churches could, in turn, meet the needs of the Corinthians ([2 Cor 8:14](#)).

Finally, the collection was a tangible representation of the heart of the gospel—that in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, not male and female ([Gal 3:28](#)). In particular, Paul may have had high hopes that the relief fund would allay any lingering fears and concerns Jewish Christians had regarding the Gentile mission. “Their hearts will go out to you,” he says, “because of the surpassing grace God has given you” ([2 Cor 9:14](#)).

An unprecedented two chapters of 2 Corinthians are devoted to the Jerusalem relief fund. The length attests the seriousness with which the collection effort was viewed. What, then, was Corinth's role in the fundraising effort? According to [2 Corinthians 8:10](#), it was the first church not only to give but indeed to have the desire to do so. Paul must have made the Corinthians aware of the relief fund on his founding visit or shortly thereafter, for a little over a year later the church asked for his counsel on the best way to go about saving up such monies ([1 Cor 16:1](#)). His advice at the time was to do as he had instructed the Galatian churches: each person should set aside a sum of money every week in keeping with his or her income. In this way no collections would have to be made on Paul's next visit ([1 Cor 16:2](#)). The assumption that each person could do this shows that most members had surplus income. But it must not have been a very great surplus, since week-by-week savings were necessary for the contribution to be a generous one in the end ([1 Cor 16:2](#); [2 Cor 8:20](#); Murphy-O'Connor 1991:77).

Between the writing of 1 and 2 Corinthians, the collection effort in Corinth fell by the wayside. In part this was due to intruding missionaries who raised questions about the legitimacy of the collection—perhaps with a view to diverting the funds into their own coffers (see the [introduction](#)). One of Titus's tasks after delivering Paul's severe letter was to rekindle interest in the relief fund. This he was able to do ([8:6](#)). But after he left Corinth, the collection effort once again came to a halt. [Second Corinthians 8–9](#) is Paul's final attempt to get the Corinthians to finish what they had pledged to do the previous year ([8:10–11](#)).

Paul's Fundraising Strategy Paul's fundraising appeal is certainly well placed in the letter. He has just expressed his complete confidence in the church ([7:16](#)). Family feeling is high: the Corinthians have such a place in his heart that come what may, he will face it with them ([7:3](#)). Titus's affection for them and their obedient response to his demands have just been pointed out ([7:13–15](#)). This last fact, in particular, nicely prepares the way for Paul's announcement of his plan to send Titus back to Corinth to help bring the collection effort to a close ([8:6](#)).

To speak of “Paul’s fundraising appeal,” though, is to employ a kind of misnomer, for no direct appeal for funds occurs in these chapters. In fact, Paul does not even once use the term “money.” His approach is much more subtle. His overall strategy is to provide the Corinthians with a number of powerful incentives for completing their offering. These incentives are for the most part tied to what he knows about the Corinthians rather than to any generic fundraising tactics. So what does Paul know about them? He knows that they are a fiercely independent and competitively minded congregation. This is why he cites the exemplary generosity of another church ([8:1–5](#)), compares the Corinthians’ sincerity to that of others (v. [8](#)) and puts before them the model of Christ himself (v. [9](#)). He also realizes that they have a strong drive to excel at what they do and consequently pushes them to excel in the area of giving (v. [7](#)). He is further aware of their fear of losing face before others. So he reminds them of the reputation that he has noised abroad about them ([9:1–2](#)), appeals to their embarrassment should visitors come and find them unprepared ([9:4](#)) and announces the forthcoming visit of one or more colleagues to make sure this does not happen ([8:6](#); [9:3](#), [5](#)).

Paul’s approach is also realistic. He is keenly aware of the practical aspects of a collection effort such as this. This is evident in his concern to provide guarantees that the delivery of the funds will be handled in a responsible manner ([8:16–24](#)), to present the church with some practical guidelines for giving ([8:11–15](#); [9:6–7](#)) and to point out the benefits they will reap ([9:8–15](#)).

In many ways the cumulative picture is not a particularly comfortable one. Is it legitimate to use comparative strategies in fundraising? Is it wise to appeal to a church’s ego to motivate giving? For all of Paul’s talk in [6:14–7:1](#) of the need of Christians to sever their ties with secular society, is he not capitulating at this point to the way the world works? Our Western capitalistic society, in particular, is so competition-oriented—be it in business, education or sports—that it may not be spiritually healthy for the church to engage in such “let’s get ahead of the next guy” tactics—or is it?

Several observations can be made. First, the strategy Paul employs is intended to motivate the Corinthians not to new giving but to follow through on a commitment already made. The distinction is important. Paul is not soliciting a pledge. In fact, it was the Corinthians who had expressed interest in the collection in the first place ([1 Cor 16:1–2](#)).

Second, Paul aims to motivate by comparing attitudes, not dollar amounts. It is the Macedonians’ joyful, willing and earnest attitude that is set before the Corinthians, not the size of their contribution.

Third, the collection will not benefit Paul personally. He is not involved because it will look good on his résumé, enhance his reputation among the Gentile congregations or improve his relationship with the Jerusalem church. Indeed, at the time he gave the Corinthians an initial set of instructions, he was not even sure that it would be appropriate for him to travel to Jerusalem with the funds ([1 Cor 16:4](#)).

Fourth, the cause is an eminently worthy one. These are Christians of his own race who are in need of the basic necessities of life—food, shelter, clothing. Moreover, they are churches that Paul had started out persecuting. And even though he had done it out of zeal for God’s honor, he never stopped thinking of himself as the worst of sinners because of it ([1 Tim 1:15](#)). A collection of this sort was a small step in rectifying the wrong that had been committed.

Finally, Paul is quick to point out that generous giving is an act of divine grace (8:1). It is only as God blesses and enables that we are able to give in the first place.

The Macedonian Believers Model Generosity (8:1–5) Instead of starting with a request for money, Paul begins with an example of sacrificial giving. *We want you to know* is the usual way he goes about introducing new information to his readers (v. 1). In this case, the new information concerns *the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches*. Edwin A. Judge (1982) describes Macedonia as a splendid tract of land, centered on the plains of the gulf of Thessalonica. It was a prosperous area. Running up the great river valleys into the Balkan Mountains, it was famous for its timber and precious metals. The churches of Macedonia had been planted by Paul on his second missionary journey—Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea. What is newsworthy about these churches is the *grace* that God has bestowed on them. The noun *charis* (“grace”) appears ten times in chapters 8–9. Even within this short span of verses, the range of usage is surprising. It is employed of a spiritual endowment (8:7), divine enablement (8:1; 9:8, 14), a monetary gift (8:6, 19), a human privilege (8:4), a word of gratitude (8:16; 9:15) and divine favor or goodwill (8:9). Here it refers to the way that despite adverse conditions, God has enabled the Macedonians to financially assist destitute Christians whom they did not personally know.

Paul seeks to motivate the Corinthians by making reference to a longstanding competitor. Greece and Macedonia (called the “barbaric North”) have a lengthy history of political rivalry. Although Philip of Macedon united all of Greece through brute force in 338 B.C., it was a union not destined to last. But now the Macedonians are put forward as a competitor of a different sort. These churches were experiencing *the most severe trial* (v. 2). The Greek is literally “a great testing of affliction.” The genitive defines the content of the testing: “a severe test consisting of afflictions.” The noun *dokimē* means a “testing” that proves someone’s or something’s worth or genuineness (compare 2:9). The term *thlipsis* (“pressure”), found nine times in this letter, is commonly used of the harassment that God’s people experience at the hands of the world. No further details are provided about the nature of the harassment or the circumstances. But this may well be the same trouble that Paul faced prior to his rendezvous with Titus (7:5). If one can gauge from the frequency with which the topic crops up in Paul’s letters, persecution was almost a way of life for these churches (Phil 1:29–30; 1 Thess 1:6; 2:14; 3:3–4; 2 Thess 1:4–10).

The severe trial that the Macedonian churches experienced was of a sort that left them in a condition of *extreme poverty*. The phrase is literally “down-to-the-depth poverty” (*heμ kata bathous ptoμcheia*; v. 2)—or, as Philip Hughes translates, “rock bottom” poverty (1962:288). James counsels his readers to consider it pure joy whenever they face trials (1:2). The Macedonian churches are a testimony that it is possible not merely to experience joy but to have it “overflow” in the midst of trials. Even more, just as persecution did not take away from their joyfulness, neither did poverty diminish their ability to be generous (Bruce 1971:220). Paul says that their poverty *welled up in rich generosity* (v. 2). The text is literally “a wealth of liberality” (*to ploutos tēs haplotētōs*). The basic meaning of *haplotēs* is “singleness,” and it denotes simplicity of character (“noble”), heart (“pure”) or intent (“sincere”; Bauernfeind 1964). Here it signifies an openheartedness toward one’s possessions (“generosity”). Sadly, it is often those having the least, rather than the most, who are the generous givers. Charles Spurgeon tells of receiving a wealthy man’s invitation to come preach at his rural church to help the members raise funds to pay off a debt. The man also told Spurgeon that he was free to use his country house, his town house or his seaside home. Spurgeon wrote back, “Sell one of the places and pay the debt yourself.”

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Page 4. Exported from [Logos Bible Software](#), 4:21 PM November 8, 2018.

It is easy to see how affluence can well up in generous giving. But how is it possible for extreme poverty to overflow in a wealth of liberality? Verses [3–5](#) provide the explanation.

First, it is because the Macedonians gave not just *as much as they were able* (literally “according to their ability”) but *beyond* (v. [3](#)*). How much beyond Paul does not say. But there is no hint that this was a reckless action on their part. The sense is that they determined what they could comfortably contribute and then went beyond this figure.

Second, what they gave, they gave *entirely on their own* (v. [3](#)). *Authairetos* (*autos* = “self” + *haireomai* = “to choose”) refers to something done of one’s own accord or by a free choice. In essence, the Macedonians were not pressured into giving. They gave willingly. In fact, they *urgently pleaded* to be involved (v. [4](#)*). The thrust of the Greek is that they begged (*deomenoi*) Paul most earnestly (*meta pollēs paraklēseōs*). This was because they considered involvement in the relief effort a *privilege* (*charis*; see v. [1](#)) and a *sharing* (*koinōnia*, v. [4](#)). *Koinōnia*, commonly translated “fellowship” in the New Testament, means “that which we hold in common or have a share in.” In Christian circles it came to denote the close union and common faith that believers have as members of Christ’s church. Implicit in this close union is a responsibility to care for those in need in the family of God.

Finally, the Macedonian generosity was possible because they gave themselves *first to the Lord* and only then to Paul (v. [5](#)*). Their preeminent concern was how best to serve Christ. It is here that they exceeded Paul’s expectations. They gave out of their poverty because of the sincerity of their commitment to Christ as *Lord* (*tō kyriō*). So great was their desire to serve Christ that they would not allow their economic situation to keep them from being involved in the Lord’s work (Waldrop 1984:38). This is why

* **8:3** *Authairetoi* (entirely on their own) could go with what precedes: “they gave beyond their ability of their own free will” (KJV, NKJ, Phillips, JB, NASB, RSV, NRSV). Or it could begin a new thought: Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us (TEV, NIV, NEB, REB). On the whole, the latter option seems preferable.

* **8:4** *Tēn charin kai tēn koinōnian tēs diakonias* is quite possibly a hendiadys (one idea expressed by means of two nouns separated by *kai*)—not “begging us for the privilege *and* sharing” but “begging us for the privilege *of* sharing.” The genitive is objective: “sharing *in* this service.” In Greek-speaking Judaism the term *diakonos* (“service” came to refer to the raising and distribution of charitable funds to meet the needs of the poor (Furnish 1984:401). The poor who received aid in Jewish society were the orphan, the widow, the destitute and the helpless. *Testament of Job* [11:1–12:4](#) offers a striking parallel in language and thought to [2 Corinthians 8:2–5](#) and [9:7](#). Those without resources “begged” to be involved “in this service,” and the “cheerful at heart” gave willingly (*hilaron ... dotēn*).

The recipients of the collection are called the saints, not “the poor.” The term is literally “holy ones”—those set apart to be God’s own possession ([1 Cor 1:2](#)). Paul typically addresses his churches in this fashion when he writes to them (as in [2 Cor 1:1](#); [Eph 1:1](#); [Phil 1:1](#); [Col 1:2](#)).

* **8:5** *Tō kyriō* in all probability is a reference to Christ. Paul’s customary practice is to distinguish Christ from Yahweh by use of the article (Zerwick 1963:no. 169).

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Page 5. Exported from [Logos Bible Software](#), 4:21 PM November 8, 2018.

Paul describes the collection as a *service* (v. [4](#)). It is not just a financial obligation. It is a ministry opportunity *to the saints* (v. [4](#))—those set apart to be God’s possession.

Paul Urges Titus to Finish the Work (8:6)* The example of the Macedonian churches encourages Paul to call for the completion of the collection at Corinth (so, v. [6](#)). To this end he announces his plan to send Titus to supervise the effort. This is a strategic move on Paul’s part. Titus is someone whom the church knows and trusts. Plus, *he had earlier made a beginning* at Corinth. *Proenarchomai* (“to begin before,” vv. [6](#), [10](#)) is attested nowhere else in Greek literature. At face value it suggests that Titus had launched the collection effort. Yet technically Paul was the initiator ([1 Cor 16:1–4](#)). The choice of words may indicate that the offering had been so completely abandoned that Titus had to start effectively from scratch.

Although a latecomer on the Corinthian scene, Titus was nonetheless an important player. He was able not only to reinforce the dictates of the severe letter but also to revive the church’s flagging collection efforts (see the [commentary](#) on [7:13–15](#)).

The Corinthians Are Challenged to Excel in Giving (8:7)* We humans are selfish by nature. Generosity is not something that comes naturally but is the result of God’s grace in our lives. This is why Paul refers to the Corinthian offering as *this act of grace* (v. [6](#)).

Charis is used both here and in the next verse of a spiritual endowment or gift of the Spirit. The Corinthians take great pride in their spiritual endowments. And well they should, since they do not lack a single one of them ([1 Cor 1:7](#)). Not only this but they *excel* in them—or at least in *faith, ... speech, ... knowledge, ... earnestness and love* ([2 Cor 8:7](#)). Paul consequently pushes them to excel in *giving* as well (*see that you also excel in this grace*). Giving is identified as a gift of the Spirit in [Romans 12:8](#), where Paul

* **8:6** *Hina* can be imperatival: “We urged Titus: ‘Bring to completion this act of grace.’” Or, more probably, it can define the content of Paul’s request: We urged Titus ... to bring ... to completion this act of grace. The double *kai* makes for a cumbersome construction (*kathoµs proenērxato houtoµs kai epiteleseµ eis hymas kai teµn charin tauteµn*). The first *kai* implies that Titus engaged in fundraising efforts on an earlier visit (since he had earlier made a beginning, to bring also to completion). The second *kai* modifies *tēn charin tautēn* (“*this gracious work as well*”). The implication is that Titus’s enforcement of the dictates of the severe letter and fundraising efforts were an act of divine grace.

The grammar does not demand a visit prior to 1 Corinthians, as Hughes (1962:293–94) and others claim. This visit could easily have been part of the mission described in [7:13–15](#). In fact, the wording of [7:14](#) seems to require the conclusion that the Corinthian visit from which Titus had just returned was his first visit (“our boasting about you to Titus has proved to be true”).

* **8:7** Both the UBS and Nestlé-Aland editions of the Greek New Testament have a slight preference for *heµmoµn en hymin* (“our love for you”; C rating) over *hymoµn en heµmin* (“your love for us”). Both readings have early manuscript support and modern advocates. But only the latter makes sense in the context.

Hina is imperatival: see that you also excel ... (*hina kai perisseueµte*; KJV, NKJV, RSV, NIV). Compare [1 Corinthians 5:2](#); [Galatians 2:10](#); [Ephesians 5:33](#); [Colossians 4:16](#); [1 Timothy 1:3](#); [Philemon 19](#) (Turner 1963:94–95).

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exhorts the Roman believers that if one's gift is contributing to the needs of others (*metadidous*), then that person should give generously (*en haplotēti*; compare [2 Cor 8:2](#)).

All things considered, the list of endowments here is a modest one. The first three are gifts of the Spirit. *Faith* is grouped with gifts of healing and miraculous powers in [1 Corinthians 12:9–10](#). So Paul is probably thinking not of intellectual assent to a set of propositions but of a belief that God can and will act in a particular situation. This kind of faith, Paul says, is able to “move mountains” ([1 Cor 13:2](#)). *Speech* and *knowledge* are two areas of gifting that Paul refers to in 1 Corinthians ([1 Cor 1:5](#)). *Speech* may be a catchall term for such oral gifts as prophecy, teaching and tongues ([1 Cor 12:10, 28](#)). Similarly, *knowledge* may refer to the gifts of discernment, word of wisdom, word of knowledge and interpretation of tongues ([1 Cor 12:8, 10](#)).

Also among the things that the Corinthians excel at are *earnestness* and *love*. *Spoudē* denotes the earnest engagement or zealous pursuit of something. Paul has already made reference to the Corinthians' earnestness in trying to clear themselves of any and all blame regarding his public humiliation during his last visit ([7:11–12](#)). *Love* must accompany the exercise of the other four, otherwise nothing of lasting importance can come of them ([1 Cor 13:1–3](#)).

Paul Tests the Corinthians' Love (8:8–9) Paul is quick to say that he is *not commanding* them (v. 8). Although he has the authority to do so, he waives its exercise here. His game plan is of another sort. He seeks rather to *test the sincerity of [the Corinthians'] love by comparing it with the earnestness of others* (v. 8). In short, he tries to motivate them by means of some friendly competition. The term *test* (*dokimazō*) carries the positive sense of examining something to prove its worth or authenticity. The something here is *sincerity*. The term *gnēsios* means “true-born” (Büchsel 1964a) and denotes what is genuine or legitimate (Liddell, Scott and Jones 1978). The Jerusalem relief fund becomes the Corinthians' opportunity to show, as the Macedonians have done, that the love they profess toward other believers is bona fide.

Paul turns not only to the Macedonian churches to test the Corinthians' sincerity but also to Christ himself, the supreme example of generosity. It has been said that no one can outgive God. There is no better proof of this than *the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ* (v. 9*). *Grace* is used in its usual sense of divine favor or goodwill to those who do not deserve it. In this case it is divine favor extended to us by Jesus Christ (subjective genitive, *tēn charin tou Christou*). For *though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor* (v. 9*). Paul is probably thinking of the riches of Christ's heavenly existence, which included equality with God and being in the form of God ([Phil 2:6](#)). But then Christ *became poor*. This was a voluntary action on his part. The aorist is most likely ingressive: Christ “entered into a state of” poverty. Paul undoubtedly has the incarnation in mind, when Christ gave up the “riches” of heavenly existence to assume an earthly state called “poverty.”

What this state amounted to is debated. Paul could be thinking of how Jesus was born into a poor family and associated with those of low social standing. “Christ chose a stable in preference to a palace

* [8:9](#) *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ* is the customary phrase Paul uses to close his letters ([Rom 16:20, 24](#); [1 Cor 16:23](#); [2 Cor 13:13\[14\]](#); [Gal 6:18](#); [Phil 4:23](#); [1 Thess 5:28](#); [2 Thess 3:18](#); [Philem 25](#)).

* The participle οὖν is concessive: though he was rich.

and consistently held to that even in death” (Macdonald 1986:5). This is, to be sure, an emphasis of Luke’s Gospel (for example, [2:24](#); [6:20–26](#); [16:19–31](#)). Or Paul could have in mind Jesus’ identification with those who are “poor in spirit”—a stress in Matthew’s Gospel (for example, [5:3](#), [6, 20](#); James D. G. Dunn). But perhaps the choice does not lie between spiritual and physical poverty. If [Philippians 2:7–8](#) is any indication, then Paul is thinking of how one to whom honor and service was due voluntarily took the form of one from whom service was expected. Indeed, he “made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant ... and became obedient to death—even death on a cross.” “Ordinary charity,” says James Denney, “is but the crumbs from the rich man’s table; but if we catch Christ’s spirit, it will carry us far beyond that” (1900:268). This is Paul’s hope for the Corinthians.

William Barclay aptly observes that Christ’s sacrifice did not begin on the cross, nor even at birth. It began in heaven, when he laid aside his glory and consented to come to earth (1954:229). Why did he do it? He did it, Paul says, so that we *through his poverty might become rich*. To put it another way, Christ went from riches to rags so that we might go from rags to riches. What are these riches? Although Paul referred two verses earlier to the Corinthians’ rich spiritual endowments, it is more likely that here he is thinking of the riches of salvation. No fewer than eight riches have been mentioned thus far in the letter: the down payment of the Spirit ([1:22](#); [5:5](#)), daily renewal ([4:16](#)), an eternal weight of glory ([4:18](#)), an eternal house in heaven ([5:1](#)), unending fellowship with Christ ([5:8](#)), new creation ([5:17](#)), reconciliation ([5:18](#)) and righteousness ([5:21](#)).

The Corinthians Should Make Good Their Pledge ([8:10–11](#))* At verse [10](#) Paul once again stresses that he is only offering an opinion rather than giving a command: *Here is my advice about what is best for you in this matter*. His advice is quite simply to *finish the work* (v. [11](#)). Two reasons are offered.

First, a considerable time has lapsed since the Corinthians first expressed interest. The year before they had been eager to contribute and had taken some initial steps to do so. But the tragedy of life so often is not that we lack good intentions but that we fail to turn them into action (Barclay 1954:229). Giving may start as a response of the heart, but it must move on to an act of the will. If the Corinthians do not finish the work, then in the final analysis all their good intentions amount to nothing.

Second, the Corinthians currently enjoy a twofold precedence over the Macedonians in that they were *the first to give and the first ... to have the desire to do so* (v. [10](#); M. J. Harris 1976:369). If they had also been the first to finish, they would have truly lived up to their reputation for excellence. But the Macedonians, who were latecomers to the collection effort, finished ahead of the Corinthians. So it is incumbent on the Corinthians now to bring their work to a speedy conclusion so that they do not lose what small advantage they still possess.

* **8:10** Perysi can mean last year (NIV, NEB, REV, TEV, NRSV) or “a year ago” (NASB, Phillips, KJV, NKJV, JB, RSV). So the Corinthians’ pledge could have been made anywhere from a scant month or two previous to just under two years earlier. The exigencies of travel make it likely that Titus’s “beginning” (v. [6](#)) occurred in the spring or summer of the previous year. While sea lanes were open from mid-March to mid-November, most travel by water occurred from the beginning of June to mid-September. Little, if any, travel by foot happened during the winter months, especially in mountainous regions or plateaus.

Paul's final strategy does not appear until [9:1–5](#), where he uses a little reverse psychology on the Corinthians. He began his appeal by pointing to the exemplary model of the Macedonian churches. At the end he admits that this sacrificial model is due in part to the boasting about the Achaian churches that he had done while in Macedonia. In particular, he had been bragging about the Corinthians' "eagerness to help" and "readiness to give since last year," which served to "stir most of" the Macedonian churches "to action" (v. [2](#)). How would it look, then, if some visitors from Macedonia should come and find the Corinthians unprepared (v. [4](#))? It would be rather embarrassing for Paul-not to mention for them (v. [4](#)).

Guidelines for Giving (8:11–15)* Most of us, I daresay, associate the proverb "It is more blessed to give than to receive" with the offering on Sunday morning—even though for Paul ([Acts 20:32–35](#)) as well as for Jesus ([Mt 10:8](#)) it is a guiding principle for the Christian worker rather than the Christian giver. And while the principle is a helpful one when we consider the matter of financial contributions, questions of how much and to whom are still formidable ones for most Christians.

The Corinthians, to be sure, asked these same questions, and Paul responds with some practical guidelines for giving in [8:11–15](#). How helpful these guidelines are today will depend on how tied a church is to the legalistic practice of the "tithe." For it is curious that at no point here—or for that matter elsewhere in Paul's writings—is the tithe put forward as a guideline for giving. In fact, no New Testament writer either encourages "tithing" or presents it as the normative or even occasional practice of the church. Yet many of our churches assume that this is the accepted New Testament standard.

Webster's defines "tithe" as "a tenth of one's income given voluntarily for the support of church or religious work." Although we commonly associate the tithe with Israel and Old Testament law, it was widely practiced by other ancient peoples and predates Mosaic times. For example, in Egypt, Joseph's family was required to give two-tenths of their harvest to Pharaoh ([Gen 47:24](#)). Samuel warned the Israelites that if they instituted a monarchy like their neighbors, they would have to give a tenth of their flocks and produce to the king ([1 Sam 8:10–18](#)).

Under Mosaic law Israel was commanded to give a tenth of its crops, herds, flocks and the fruit of its trees to support the Levites, who had no inheritance of their own ([Lev 27:30–32](#); [Num 18:21–24](#)). The tithe was to compensate the Levites for the work that they did while serving at the tabernacle. The Levites, in turn, were required to give a tenth of Israel's tithe to the priests ([Num 18:25–29](#); Thompson 1982:1205). They were permitted to pasture herds in forty-eight designated cities, to which they were forced to return during times of apostasy when the tithes were neglected ([Num 35:1–8](#); [Neh 13:10](#)). In postexilic times it was the responsibility of the Levites (rather than the head of each household) to collect the tithe in the towns where they lived and deliver it to Jerusalem ([Neh 10:37–39](#)). The Levites were not the only beneficiaries of the tithe. At the end of every three years, the tithe of that year's produce was placed in storage in each town for the alien, the fatherless and the widow ([Deut 14:28–29](#)).

Although Jesus refers to the Pharisees' custom of tithing even herbs of the land (such as mint, anise and cumin) while neglecting the weightier matters of justice and love of God ([Mt 23:23](#); [Luke 11:42](#)), he

* **8:11** Your eager willingness translates a word (ἡμεν prothymia) that can mean "readiness," "willingness," "resoluteness" or "zealousness." "Eager determination" catches the sense perhaps the best.

nowhere instructs his disciples that this is to be the practice of the church. But then would an Old Testament command tied to a largely agrarian economy and based on a theocratic form of government be applicable to an institution like the local church? The total silence of the New Testament writers in this regard is telling.

This is not to say, however, that support of the Christian worker is abandoned. Paul argues strenuously in [1 Corinthians 9](#) that Christian workers deserve their wages. But the guidelines for giving that he puts forward are more in accord with a covenant of the Spirit than with a covenant of the letter ([2 Cor 3:6](#)).

The standard proffered is, in reality, a higher one than the traditional tithe. In counseling the Corinthians on the question of how much, Paul says that they are to give, in the first place, *according to [their] means* ([8:11](#)). The text is literally “out of that which you have.” The implication is clear. We are not called to give or to pledge what we do not have. Contributions are to be based on actual income, not hoped-for windfalls or even anticipated earnings.

Giving is also to be in proportion to our earnings (*katho ean echē*, v. [12*](#)). It is not a fixed percentage but relative proportion that is key. In fact, beyond the tithe of livestock and produce to support the Levites, the standard for Israel’s giving was a proportional one. The person with many possessions is to make her gift of alms “proportionately,” and the one with few possessions is to give “according to” the little he has ([Tobit 4:8](#)). A similar guideline is given in [1 Corinthians 16:2](#), where Paul instructs the Corinthians that they are to set aside a sum of money each week “in keeping with” their income (literally, “however one has prospered”).

Proportional giving actually turns out to be a fairer standard than the traditional tithe. Whereas a fixed 10 percent would most likely be negligible for someone with an income of \$100,000, it could well cripple a person with an income of \$10,000. This is why Jesus had such high praise for the widow who contributed two small copper coins to the temple treasury. She gave that which provided for her daily necessities (“all she had to live on,” [Lk 21:4](#)), while the rich contributed out of their surplus. And while both may have given 10 percent, proportionately the widow put in more than all the others combined ([Lk 21:3](#)). This accords with Jesus’ teaching elsewhere that we are responsible in direct proportion to how God has blessed us: “From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded” ([Lk 12:48](#)).

Second, needs are to be met out of a person’s surplus, not necessary income (that which one needs for life’s basic necessities; v. [14](#)). The Macedonian churches, in giving out of their poverty, were the exception rather than the rule. The norm is the Corinthians’ *plenty* supplying what the Judean churches need, so that in turn their plenty can supply what [the Corinthians] need (v. [14](#)).

Not all agree on what the Judeans’ *plenty* amounts to. The obvious reading is that Paul contemplates the possibility of a reversal of economic circumstances. If this were to happen, then it would be incumbent

* **8:12** According to what one has is misleading (*katho ean echem*). *Katho* denotes degree: “to the degree that” or “in proportion to.”

For several centuries in the history of the church there was no such thing as a “tithe” to support Christian workers; instead, freedom in giving was emphasized. In fact, church fathers like Irenaeus argued against the tithe (see Feinberg 1976:758).

on the Judean Christians to relieve the want of the Corinthians. For some scholars, however, the possibility of the Judean churches' possessing a material surplus is too remote. Paul is thought to be pointing instead to an existing reciprocity: the Gentile churches supply the mother church with material blessings, while the Jerusalem church provides the Gentiles with spiritual blessings (Nickle 1966:121; Bruce 1971:223). The fact that Paul goes on to cite an Old Testament example of material equality makes the former reading the likely one (v. [15](#), *as it is written: "He that gathered much did not have too much, and he that gathered little did not have too little"*). But rather than forecasting a reversal of economic conditions, Paul may be merely pointing to the kind of interdependency that should exist at all times among churches.

Third, there must be a genuine need. But what constitutes a genuine need? Some today think of themselves as needy if they lack private means of transportation or the funds for a college education; or perhaps their earnings fall below the governmental criteria for the poverty level. Paul, on the other hand, defines need as a lack or shortage of life's necessities ([1 Tim 6:8](#)). In the first century this amounted to a want of food, clothing or shelter ([2 Cor 11:27](#)). Paul himself voluntarily went without such necessities. But in the church such needs are not to go unmet—and not just within the local church. There are relatively few Christians in the Western world who lack such essentials, but in the church worldwide the need is staggering.

In the final analysis, the key to giving lies in the attitude of the heart. In [8:12](#) and [9:7](#) Paul employs four adjectives that characterize the attitude that God finds *acceptable*. It must, in the first place, be a willing gift: if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable ([8:12](#)). It is not the amount that counts with God. If a readiness to give is present, then the gift is gladly received, whether it be large or small.

Some years ago a woman was preparing a box to be sent to some missionaries in India. A child gave her a penny. The woman used this penny to purchase a tract for the box. Eventually the tract reached a Burmese chief and was used to lead him to Christ. The chief told the story of his conversion to his friends, many of whom believed. Eventually a church was established and over fifteen hundred people were converted to Christianity. The lesson is plain: no gift willingly given is too small for God to use.

The gift must also not be offered "reluctantly" (literally, "with pain"; [9:7](#)). Nor should it be done "under compulsion"—that is, as though there were no other alternative ([9:7](#)). Arm-twisting is a common practice today. Pledge drives too often work this way. Instead of soliciting willing contributions, fundraisers bring to bear external pressure of one kind or another (such as making pledges public and applauding large donations), and people feel forced to give so as not to lose face. This is what Paul was hoping to avoid by sending Titus far enough in advance to allow for the contribution to be willing, not forced.

Finally, the offering that God finds acceptable is one that has been cheerfully given ([9:7](#); *hilaros* = our English term "hilarious"). The cheerful giver is one who is happy to give and gives gladly. The sentiment is an Old Testament one. The last part of the verse is a free quotation of the Greek translation of [Proverbs 22:8](#) (LXX): "God blesses a cheerful and generous person."

The aim of these guidelines is not an exchange of financial burdens. *Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed*, Paul says (8:13). *Thlipsis** (“hard pressed”) is used of pressure of one kind or another, while *anesis* (“relieved”) denotes a relief or relaxation of such pressure. Paul does seek the Judeans’ relief from the pressure of being in dire economic straits, but not to the extent that someone else is financially strapped in the process. The objective is, rather, *that there might be equality* (v. 13*).

But what is meant by *equality*? Is Paul putting forward a kind of biblical socialism, a leveling of rich and poor? Some have mistakenly understood him to be advocating just this. Equality of provision so that there is neither surplus nor deficiency is often taken as the aim (for example, M. J. Harris 1976:370; Barrett 1973:227; Bratcher 1983:89). Yet what Paul suggests as appropriate is equity of basic needs being met, not equality of supply. *Isotēs* (“equality”), found only here and in [Colossians 4:1](#) in the New Testament, denotes what is “equitable” and “fair.” So it is equity and not equality that is at issue here. The TEV’s “It is only fair that you should help those who are in need” captures the idea.

Paul is not saying that possession of a surplus of material goods is wrong for a Christian. It is actually those who do possess a surplus who are in a position to meet existing economic needs. This is clear from verse 14*, where Paul envisions the Jerusalem church’s surplus providing for the Corinthians’ lack at a future point. On the other hand, for some Christians to be living in luxury while other Christians go without food, shelter or clothing smacks of gross inequity.

To illustrate the need for equity Paul turns to the account of God’s miraculous provision of manna in the wilderness (v. 15). *As it is written: “He who gathered much did not have too much, and he who gathered little did not have too little.”* The quote is taken almost verbatim from [Exodus 16:18](#). Moses had instructed the people that they were to go out each morning and gather enough manna for the day’s need (v. 16). The Israelites did as they were told: some gathered much, and others gathered little (v. 17). But when it came time to measure by the omer (about two quarts or liters), the person who gathered much did not have too much, and the one who gathered little did not have too little (v. 18).

* **8:13** The Greek verb *thliboµ* and noun *thlipsis* are terms that turn up frequently in this letter (verb three times, noun nine times). The basic idea is pressure imposed by external circumstances.

* **8:13–14** A difficulty in punctuating verses [13–14](#) exists. All’ *ex isoteµtos* at the end of verse 13 could be taken with what precedes: *Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality* (NIV, LB). Or it can begin a new thought: “But as a matter of equality your abundance at the present time should supply their want” (RSV, NRSV, KJV, TEV, JB). It can even stand on its own: “It is a matter of share and share alike” (Phillips, NEB, REB). While *alla* can introduce a new thought, the *ou ... alla* (not ... but) construction is a very familiar one in Paul. For this reason the first option seems preferable.

* **8:14** In view of the chronic poverty Palestine faced, Furnish (1984:420) and Héring (1967:61) think that Paul is merely putting forward a theoretical possibility or a formal statement of principle with no special thought for future implications.

Belleville, Linda L. *2 Corinthians*. Vol. 8. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996. Print. The IVP New Testament Commentary Series.

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At first glance the Exodus narrative could be read to say that each Israelite ended up with the same amount regardless of how much or little was gathered. But in fact what the text says is that God made certain that no one had more or less than their fair share (“each one gathered as much as he needed,” v. [18](#)). Although the Israelites gathered varying amounts of manna, what they ended up with was the amount that met their individual needs. The key phrase in [Exodus 16:18](#) is “as much as he needed.” It is an equity of needs met rather than an equality of supply that the narrative illustrates. Even though some gathered more and some less, the needs of all were fairly met. In the wilderness it was God who ensured such equity. Today it is the responsibility of each believer.

A. Strong Advice ([8:10–15](#))

SUPPORTING IDEA: *Although Paul did not command the Corinthians to contribute to Jerusalem, he strongly advised it. He wanted to see God’s blessing come upon the Corinthians, and he knew that a generous contribution to Jerusalem would bring such blessings.*

[8:10](#). Paul used great wisdom as he dealt with this subject. He began with a strong commendation. The Corinthian Christians **were the first**, or among the first, to begin preparations to give and expressed **the desire to do so**. At first the Corinthians were very eager to contribute to the Jerusalem church. This reaction demonstrated their commitment and desire to aid the believers who were suffering in Jerusalem.

[8:11](#). The sequence of events behind this passage needs to be understood. After first informing the Corinthians of the need for contributions, Paul told them he would travel from Ephesus to Macedonia and then return to Corinth. After a delay, Paul visited Corinth briefly and sent a harsh letter to them through Titus. Later Titus met Paul in Macedonia with reports on the conditions at Corinth. At first the Corinthians were eager to contribute to the needs of Jerusalem believers, but troubles in the church had extinguished their eagerness. At this point Paul encouraged them to complete their commitment. Their **willingness to do it** needed to be **matched by their completion of it**.

As important as it was for the Corinthians to be willing to give at first, it was not enough. Recognizing the need to contribute and responding with commitments is easy. The true test is actually handing over the money. So Paul encouraged the Corinthians to fulfill their commitments.

Even so, Paul had no particular amount in mind. He left it up to the Corinthians to give **according to their means**. Many interpreters assume that these words reject the Old Testament practice of tithing ([Deut. 12:6](#); [Mal. 3:8–10](#)), but this passage is not about money given to support the church. Rather, it is about charity for the poor above and beyond support for the church.

[8:12](#). Paul justified proportional giving by appealing to a general principle: a **gift is acceptable** so long as it is **according to what one has**. Of course, Paul also accepted sacrificial giving; he praised the Macedonians for giving beyond their means. Yet, he felt free only to persuade the Corinthians to give as their means allowed. He fixed no particular amount, leaving this to their consciences.

8:13. Paul's goal justified the principle of giving according to means. He did not desire that the Corinthians be **hard pressed** while the church in Jerusalem was **relieved**. His goal was **that there might be equality**.

Care must be taken not to read too much into these words. The New Testament never indicates that all economic inequalities within the church should be eliminated. Instead, the goal of giving in the New Testament church was to insure that the basic needs of the poor were met. Even the early practice of holding everything in common ([Acts 2:44-45](#)) was designed to insure that basic needs were met in troubled times. Wealthy Christians are warned against the dangers of riches and told to be generous, but not to seek economic equality. Just as Moses instructed Israel to care for the poor ([Lev. 19:9-10](#); [Deut. 24:12-15](#)), so the church is to care for its poor through generous contributions.

8:14-15. At least two reasons undergirded Paul's advice. First, he knew that economic situations change. **At the present time** the Corinthians were in a position to help others, but the day might come when the situation was reversed, and they would have to rely on the generosity of the church in Jerusalem.

Second, Paul appealed to a theological principle based on God's action in Israel's deliverance from Egyptian slavery. The apostle referred the Corinthians to the Septuagint translation of [Exodus 16:18](#) which indicated that no one in Israel had **too much** or **too little**. During Israel's wilderness wanderings, God miraculously supplied each Israelite family according to their needs. Even though some **gathered much**, it did not result in an overabundance. Although others **gathered little**, it did not result in serious deprivation. This miraculous provision indicated God's desire to meet the needs of all his people.

It would have been easy for the Corinthians to think otherwise. They could have reasoned that if God had not wanted the church in Jerusalem to suffer, then he would have not permitted it. But Paul resisted this fatalistic outlook. God desired that the needs of all his people be met. Even so, God was not accomplishing his desire through miraculous distribution as in the Exodus. Rather, he called on the church to care for his people.