

# A MINISTRY FOR HUNGRY SAINTS

IN THIS WORLD, WE EXPERIENCE SUFFERINGS: BUT GLORY IS COMING

# SECOND CORINTHIANS

✠ II CORINTHIANS

An overview of the Book of Second Corinthians, by Given O. Blakely

## Lesson #33

### COMMENTARY ON: 8:1-5

#### 2 CORINTHIANS 1:3-4

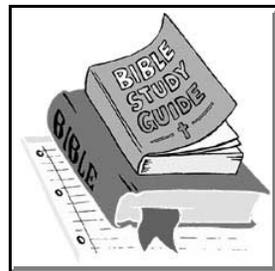
*"Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God."*

#### THE CHURCHES IN MACEDONIA

According to the commission of the early church, Paul has been gathering a collection for the poor saints in Jerusalem. The need arose because of a grievous famine that was prophesied by Agabus. In responding to this need, the churches in Macedonia were especially noted for giving beyond their ability. In this passage we find a wonderful confirmation of the enabling power of love and faith. We see what can happen when hearts are committed to the Lord, and a determination is made to labor with the Lord, even when the required means do not seem to be available. Here we are again exposed to the manner of the Kingdom.

#### 2 CORINTHIANS 5:1-2

*"For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. for in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven"*



Since May, 1993, a ministry instituted for the encouragement of believers in Christ



## The Epistle of Second Corinthians

### Lesson Number 33



**A MINISTRY INITIATED IN MAY 1993, AND DEDICATED TO BUILDING THE FAITH AND ENHANCING THE HOPE OF THOSE WHO ARE WORKING OUT THEIR OWN SALVATION WITH FEAR AND TREMBLING.**

**TRANSLATION LEGEND:** AMPLIFIED or AMP = Amplified Bible, (1965), ASV=American Standard Version (1901), BBE=Bible in Basic English (1949), DRA=Douay-Rheims (1899), ESV=English Stand Version (2001), IE = International English, ISV = International Standard Version (1967), JPS = Jewish Publication Society (1917), KJV=King James Version (1611), LIVING = Living Bible (1971), MONTGOMERY = Montgomery's New Testament (2001), MRD = Peshitta-James Murdock Translation (1852), NAB=New American Bible (2002), NASB=New American Standard Bible (1977), NAU=New American Standard Bible (1995), NIB=New International Bible, NIV=New International Version (1984), NJB=New Jerusalem Bible (1985), NKJV=New King James Version (1979), NLT=New Living Translation (1996), NRSV=New Revised Standard Version (1989), PHILLIPS = J B Phillips New Testament (1962), PNT = BISHOP'S New Testament (1595), RSV=Revised Standard Version (1952), TNK=JPS Tanakj (1985), Webster=The Webster Bible (1833), WEYMOUTH=Weymouth's New Testament (1903), WILLIAMS = William's New Testament (1937), TNK = JPS Tanakh (1985), TYNDALE=Tyndale's Bible (1526), WYCLIFFE= Wycliffe New Testament (1382), YLT=Young's Literal Translation (1862).

**LEXICON LEGEND:** FRIEBERG = Friberg Lexicon, UBS=UBS Lexicon, LOUW-NIDA=Louw-Nida Lexicon, LIDDELL SCOTT=Liddell Scott Lexicon, THAYER=Thayer's Greek Lexicon

**AN EPISTLE WRITTEN TO A CHURCH THAT WAS MOVING AWAY FROM ITS CARNALITY, YET LACKED MUCH INSIGHT. HERE IS A STRONG APPEAL TO PERFECT HOLINESS IN THE FEAR OF THE LORD.**

----- Lexicon and Bible Translation Codes with Identification -----

# THE CHURCHES IN MACEDONIA

“<sup>8:1</sup> Moreover, brethren, we do you to wit of the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia; <sup>2</sup> How that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality. <sup>3</sup> For to their power, I bear record, yea, and beyond their power they were willing of themselves; <sup>4</sup> Praying us with much entreaty that we would receive the gift, and take upon us the fellowship of the ministering to the saints. <sup>5</sup> And this they did, not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God.” (2 Cor 8:1-5)

## INTRODUCTION

There is a Divine manner made known in this book that is especially worthy of note. Take, for example, the matter of the “fornicator” with which Paul has just dealt. In this Second Epistle, he first alluded to this incident in the second chapter (2:4-11). He again deals with it in the seventh chapter (7:9-15). He once again alludes briefly to the matter in the twelfth chapter where he expressed his former fears of what he might find when he returned to Corinth. “For I fear, lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I would, and that I shall be found unto you such as ye would not: lest there be debates, envyings, wraths, strifes, backbitings, whisperings,

*swellings, tumults: and lest, when I come again, my God will humble me among you, and that I shall bewail many which have sinned already, and have not repented of the uncleanness and fornication and lasciviousness which they have committed”*(2 Cor 12:21).

Sandwiched between the first and second mentioning of that grievous transgression Paul instructed them and expounded to them the following:

- His experience in Macedonia (2:12-13).
- The triumph realized in Christ Jesus

(2:14).

- How the godly are a savor of Christ unto God (2:15-16).
- How he did not corrupt the word of God, as did others (2:17).
- He expounded the unique nature and effectiveness of the New Covenant (3:1-18).
- He elaborated on the nature of his ministry (4:1-5).
- He expounded the nature of the new creation, and its objective (4:6-18).

*The power and effectiveness of faith is seen in the response of the churches in Macedonia— by Given O. Blakely*

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- ☛ He elaborated on the resurrection of the dead, showing its centrality in the objective of salvation (5:1-5).
- ☛ He declared the incentives that compel the servants of God (5:6-16).
- ☛ He affirmed the reality of the new creature (5:17).
- ☛ He expounded reality and nature of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:18-21).
- ☛ He reasoned upon the nature and implications of salvation in Christ Jesus (6:1-13).
- ☛ Upon the basis of the Divine intention in salvation, he urges separation from the world (6:14-7:1).

While it may appear on the surface as those the above matters had very little to do with the issue of fornication and its correction, this is not at all the case. **The Kingdom of God is not a helter-skelter one – impetuous, haphazard, random, and without clear objective.** Those who are properly characterized as *“laborers together with God”* (1 Cor 3:9) are not going from place to place putting out spiritual fires, and

dealing with the various problems of the day. Since the church has been flooded with religious professionals, that may appear to be the case. However, such is a total misrepresentation. As important as the correction of moral and spiritual deficiencies are, that is not the key factor in spiritual labors. It is *“the truth”* that makes *“free”* (John 8:32) – **not truth about problem resolution, but the truth about Divine provision.** The church is properly referred to as *“the pillar and ground of the truth”* (1 Tim 3:15) – **not truth concerning correct procedure and imagined recovery routines, but the truth of “the record God has given of His Son”** (1 John 5:10-11).

Paul sprinkled his words of correction with the doctrine of grace and Divine provision because that is what makes correction possible. Correction has more to do with getting on the right road, than living in a flawless manner. Men *“do”* wrong – whether in moral areas like fornication, or doctrinal flaw like the resurrection – **because they are walking on the wrong road.** The *“highway”* that God has raised up is free from contamination, and no one becomes defiled because they are on that road. The prophet Isaiah wrote of this highway – a road that was not raised up until several centuries after he had completed his ministry. Here is what he said of the road to be traversed by those who are *“strangers and pilgrims”* in this world. *“And an highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for those: the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein. No lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast shall go up thereon, it shall not be found there; but the redeemed shall walk there”* (Isa 35:8-9).

This is a *“way”* – a means of

getting from one place to another. It is a means of travel – movement – and is not intended to be a place to camp. Notice what is said of this *“way.”*

- ☛ It is a *“highway”* – a **thoroughfare**, or road occupied by many. It has an appointed beginning and ending – *“an highway shall be there, and a way.”*
- ☛ It is a way for holy people – *“the way of holiness.”*
- ☛ There is no place for unclean people on this road, and thus they do not travel upon it – *“the unclean shall not pass over it.”*
- ☛ It is intended for *“wayfaring men,”* men who are going, or traveling, where this road is leading – *“but it shall be for those: the wayfaring men.”*
- ☛ Those who remain on this road will **not** go astray, wander, or get lost – *“the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein.”*
- ☛ No ferocious or devouring beast will be found there to hurt – *“no lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast shall go thereon, it shall not be found there.”*
- ☛ Those who have been redeemed by Christ **will** be found there, walking toward a blessed eternal destiny – *“the redeemed of the Lord shall walk there.”*

Those are the facts in the case. **They are not things as they should be, but things as they are.** This being the case, how is it that divisions, fornication, inconsideration, confusion, and the abuse of the Lord’s table took place in Corinth?

**Paul sprinkled his words of correction with the doctrine of grace and Divine provision because that is what makes correction possible. Correction has more to do with getting on the right road, than living in a flawless manner.**

Are such things found on the “highway” raised up by God? Is it possible for such departures to take place where “holy” people **are** walking? Can they be found where “unclean” are **not** walking? Can such sin surface in those who are **pressing** toward the mark? Is it remotely possible that devouring circumstances can occur where there is “*no lion*” or “*ravenous beast*?” Or, is it possible that in his grand description of the road to glory, Isaiah was really **not** speaking the truth?

How often I have heard those who

*nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God*” (1 Cor 6:9-10).

#### Paul’s Holy Strategy

I hesitate to refer to Paul’s approach as a “strategy,” else I be considered to have adopted the ways of the world. I am using the word in another sense, and not merely to describe an established routine. **Paul was writing to the Corinthians to awaken the nature they received when they were born again.**

blends with God’s “*eternal purpose*,” and assists in clarifying the whole picture. Therefore, when Paul is addressing the matter of their recovery from the toleration of fornication among them, he can also speak freely of the New Covenant, the resurrection body, his own sufferings for Jesus’ sake, and now a collection for the poor saints in Jerusalem.

To the unlearned, this may appear be rather scattered and undisciplined thinking. However, it rather displays the marvelous nature of the Kingdom of God, and of the “*truth itself*.” **All of the things Paul has mentioned have to do with God.** They all have to do with His “*great salvation*.” They all relate to the Lord Jesus Christ, and therefore to the truth of God as well. All of them have a bearing upon the eternal destiny of those receiving the instruction. None of the matters with which Paul dealt were isolated from the great realities of the Kingdom of God: “*righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit*” (Rom 14:17).

**Rather than these people being overcome by difficult circumstances, they themselves became overcomers. Their lives were moved along by a higher purpose – one that is common among all who are traversing the “way of holiness.”**

have fallen into deep sin testify how much they loved the Lord, and how they were believing in Him. It is just that they made a mistake, or were in the wrong place at the right time, or were a victim of unfortunate circumstance. **Is there anyone who would insult our intelligence, and grieve the Holy Spirit of God by saying the path to glory is attended by such things?**

This is not at all the case! Those who fall into sin **got off** the highway to do so! They stepped into the region where there **are** lions and ravenous beasts! They entered into the territory where there **are** “unclean” people, and “*wayfaring men*” could **not** be found. **The dangers and jeopardies that attend night-time walking, are not found in the day!** The perils that lurk on the broad road that leads to destruction are **not** found on the “*highway*” that has been raised up for the “*wayfaring men*.” Those are all found on another road – and it is not **one** that leads to glory. That is precisely why Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “*Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers,*

He was speaking in, what might be called, “highway talk” – the kind of speaking one would hear while sojourning on the “*way of holiness*.” He now speaks to them of what other believers have done – people who were walking on the “*highway*.” Rather than these people being overcome by difficult circumstances, they themselves became overcomers. Their lives were moved along by a higher purpose – one that is common among all who are traversing the “*way of holiness*.”

Thus, Paul does not hammer the Corinthians down to the ground with repeated words of rebuke and denunciation. There is no need for that now, for they are in the recovery mode, and are getting back on the “*highway*” that leads to life. Now they will be better able to appreciate the advancement of kindred spirits, and be emboldened to themselves provide an excellent example to others.

#### THE INTEGRATION OF TRUTH

The truth of God is fully integrated. **By that I mean that everything not only fits together, it works together.** Every facet of the truth

**This perspective also corroborates that the problems of the brethren, however serious they may be, are not at the heart of Divine dealings.** That is, the true subject-matter of preaching and teaching is not man himself, but God’s provision for him, as it is revealed in Jesus Christ and through the Gospel. Every other subject is tangential to that, and must this be viewed and addressed with Christ, the Gospel, and our eternal destiny in mind.

**In the recovery from sin, edification, or building up and strengthening in the faith, is essential.** That is precisely what Paul is doing – edifying the saints, or feeding “*the flock of God*” (1 Pet 5:2). He is pouring the strength back into them that sin had removed.

One word on the matter of edification. **This involves the understanding, and is by no means accomplished in the arena of emotional feelings or bodily sensations.** Edification occurs at the point where men consider and perceive what has been declared. As we reflect upon the words of life, strength is ministered to the “*inner man*,” thereby

facilitating, or making easier, recovery, spiritual resolve, and advancement in the faith. Apart from edification, none of

these things can be accomplished. That is why Paul is writing in this way – making the people keenly aware of eternal

verities and Divine intent. It is helpful to detect his manner of writing. It has a certain sanctifying influence about it.

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## THE COLLECTION FOR THE POOR SAINTS

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The subject Paul now addresses relates to a collection he was gathering for the poor saints in Jerusalem. This is mentioned several times in his writing to the Corinthians.

- 1 Corinthians 16:1-3: An exhortation for the Corinthians to put aside a special portion for this collection on the first day of the week, so special gatherings would not be required when Paul personally arrived in Corinth.
- 2 Corinthians 8:1-5: Paul shares the example of the churches in Macedonia who gave liberally to the collection for the Jerusalem brethren.
- 2 Corinthians 8:6-9: Paul reminds the Corinthians that he had sent Titus to gather their collection, urging them to prove the sincerity of their love, and to do so remembering how Jesus became poor that we might be made rich in Him.
- 2 Corinthians 8:10-14: An additional exhortation to get to the business of taking up the special offering so it could be taken to the saints for whom it was being gathered.
- Paul informed the Corinthians that he had made provision for the safe delivery of the funds to the brethren in Jerusalem, sending an especially approved brother to accompany Titus, who himself was well noted for his spirituality and integrity (2 Cor 8:16-24).
- 2 Corinthians 9:1-3: Paul reminds the Corinthians that he had boasted about their readiness to participate in this collection, yet they had not yet done what they had said.
- 2 Corinthians 9:5-7: Paul reasons

with the Corinthian brethren concerning this collection, telling them that those who sow sparingly will reap sparingly, and those who sow bountifully will reap bountifully.

- 2 Corinthians 9:8-13: The apostle reasons with the Corinthians concerning the blessing of God – how that He can multiply the seed they sow in their offerings for the saints in Jerusalem.
- Paul also made reference to this collection to the brethren in Rome, mentioning that the Gentiles ought to contribute to the needs of the poor

*be great dearth throughout all the world: which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar. Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judaea: which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul” (Acts 11:27-30).*

This severe famine is said to have actually occurred around 44 A.D., and lasting until 48 A.D. It appears as though the aftermath of this famine, coupled with the growing persecution of believers in Jerusalem, caused an extended period of great poverty. This Epistle was written

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saints in Jerusalem because they had been *“made partakers of their spiritual things”* (Rom 15:25-28).

- An allusion is also made to this collection in the Epistle to the Galatians, where reference is made to the conference in which the determination to help the saints was made (Gal 2:10).

As you can see, this was a matter of some significance, and it behooves us to be familiar with it. The record of the original initiation of this project is found in the book of Acts.

*“And in these days came prophets from Jerusalem unto Antioch. And there stood up one of them named Agabus, and signified by the Spirit that there should*

around 56 A.D., approximately eight years after the famine had ended. It is not difficult to believe the area was still in a state of recovery. Thus, the saints in Jerusalem had endured a very long period of hardship – at least twelve years at the time Paul is writing – four during the famine itself, and eight as a consequence of the famine.

### As A Matter of Interest

As a matter of additional interest, this was the fourth famine that occurred during the reign of Claudius. The historian Cassius mentions a severe famine in the first and second year of the reign of Claudius, felt mostly by Rome. A second famine occurred about the fourth year of his reign and continued for several years, effecting Judea. Josephus, Jewish historian, writes of this famine.

Ant. Lib. XX. Cap. 5, sect. 1 A third famine is mentioned by Eusebius which commenced around 48 A.D., effecting mostly Greece, and being very severe. The fourth is the famine referenced in our text. Historian Tacitus says it was so severe that it was esteemed a Divine judgment. PULPIT COMMENTARY

I mention these things because they confirm why the protracted need arose among the brethren in Jerusalem. The previous famines, and the one following, all depleted resources available to them, producing long-term need. Coupled with persecution, these brethren were going through extremely difficult times.

#### Paul's Concern for the Brethren

Coupled with the fact that the Gentiles owed their very salvation to the Jews – for “*salvation is of the Jews*” (John 4:22) – you at once see the tenderness of Paul in this matter. He had a heart for the people of God, and could not forget his Jewish brethren. His fellowship with Christ moved him to consider the needs of his brethren above

#### ON THE FAMINE ITSELF

In point of fact, the predicted famine, which began in the fourth year of Claudius Caesar (A.D. 44) and lasted till A.D. 48, fell upon Judea exclusively, as far as appears from Josephus ('Ant. Jud.,' lit. 15:3; 20. 2:5, 5:2), and was very severe there. Ishmael was high priest at the time; and Helena, Queen of Adiahene, fetched large supplies of corn from Egypt and of figs from Cyprus to Jerusalem, to supply the wants of the people. Eusebius ('Eccl. Hist.,' 2:8) speaks of this famine as having prevailed “over the world,” and as being recorded by authors hostile to Christianity, but mentions no names and gives no particulars ('Eccl. Hist.,' 2:8), but in the twelfth chapter of the same book he limits it to **τὴν Ἰουδαίαν**, Judaea. There were several other historical famines in the reign of Claudius, but they can hardly be included in the prophecy of Agabus. The prophet Agabus is mentioned again in Acts 21:10, and again as coming from Judaea. Renan ascribes the poverty-stricken condition of the Jerusalem Christians to their communistic institutions. PULPIT COMMENTARY

his own – a consistent trait of those walking in newness of life. Real spiritual life produces selflessness.

#### Modern Trends

Although this is not a matter to be pressed beyond the boundaries of godly reason, it ought to be noted that the only specific philanthropy mentioned in the New Covenant Scriptures was directed toward the saints (Acts 2:44-45; 4:34-37; 6:1-3; 11:29-30; 24:17; Rom 15:25-28; 1 Cor 16:1-3; 2 Cor 8:4; 9:1; Gal 2:10; Heb 6:10; John 3:17).

It is significant that in our time the thrust of, what is called “missions,” has changed to relief ministries, most of which are not directed to the saints. No one of sound mind will oppose such efforts as though they were a transgression. However, when the resources of the people of God are **focused** upon someone other than the saints, we are confronting a phenomenon for which we have no Scriptural example. In my judgment it is exceedingly difficult to justify such an approach to working for the Lord. There is no example in Scripture of such an **emphasis**. I am aware that this statement will be rather distasteful to some, but submit it for your consideration.

## NOTING THE GRACE THAT WAS BESTOWED

<sup>8:1</sup> *Moreover, brethren, we do you to wit of the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia.”*

Having expressed his confidence in the brethren in Corinth – now that they have cleared themselves of a most grievous matter (7:11) – Paul quickly moves to some unfinished Kingdom business. Although their recovery was most notable, evidencing a great working of God among them, it was actually preparatory for their involvement in “*the good and acceptable, and perfect will of God.*” **It is only after we have triumphed over sinful inclinations that we may become involved in any ministry to the brethren of Christ** (Rom 12:1-2). The heart and mind must be uncluttered if we are to serve God “*acceptably with reverence and godly fear*” (Heb 12:28).

#### MOREOVER

“*Moreover . . .*” Other versions read, “*Now,*” <sup>NASB</sup> “*And now,*” <sup>NIV</sup> “*But,*”

DARBY and “*Next.*” <sup>NJB</sup>

Here is a word that indicates the continuation of a thought that was left briefly in order to properly prepare for its acceptance. This preparation can be stated in a number of ways.

- Now that immorality has been purged from your presence, and you are a “*new lump*” (1 Cor 5:7), we can get on the Father’s business.
- Now that you have cleared yourselves from any defilement, revenging your disobedience, you are prepared to engage in the work of the Lord.
- Now that I have gained confidence in you, I can speak about matters that require your involvement.
- Now that godly sorrow has done its work, and you have repented, the

Father is again ready to use you.

**One of the requirements for serving the Lord is moral and spiritual purity.** Of old time this was made clear. “*Depart ye, depart ye, go ye out from thence, touch no unclean thing; go ye out of the midst of her: be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the LORD*” (Isa 52:11). In this very epistle it is said, “*Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you*” (2 Cor 6:17). Solemnly those who approach the Lord are told, “*I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting*” (1 Tim 2:8).

**Those who hearts, minds, and even bodies, are soiled with moral and spiritual contamination are not acceptable workers in the vineyard of the Lord.** An institutional church may allow for such people to participate in the work

of the Lord, but God will not – and of that you may be sure.

Now, having been assured that their hands are clean, Paul gets back to the matter of the Father’s business.

**WE DO YOU TO WIT**

“ . . . brethren, we do you to wit . . . ” Other versions read, “brethren, we make known to you,”<sup>NKJV</sup> “brethren, we wish to make known to you,”<sup>NASB</sup> “brothers, we want you to know,”<sup>NIV</sup> “I want to tell you,”<sup>LIVING</sup> “brothers, we are going to tell you about,”<sup>IE</sup> “we desire to let you know, brethren,”<sup>WEYMOUTH</sup> and “We want to tell you further, brethren.”<sup>AMPLIFIED</sup>

Now Paul will engage in some

Thus Paul begins to share with the Corinthians the remarkable things that occurred among some other brethren – and he does it to provoke them to be more comely in the matter of fulfilling their vows to do good. It was the working of the Lord, to be sure, yet it was accomplished in a people who had given themselves to Him.

**THE GRACE BESTOWED**

“ . . . of the grace of God bestowed . . . ” Other versions read, “the grace of God which has been given,”<sup>NASB</sup> “about the grace that God has given,”<sup>NIV</sup> “about the grace of God that has been granted,”<sup>NRSV</sup> “about the grace of God which has been shown,”<sup>RSV</sup> “what God in His kindness has done for,”<sup>NLT</sup> “what God in

perceived in the deeds of those in whom His grace is working.

The “*grace of God*” is a commentary on God, not man! It reveals the love and ability of God, not man! It is, in its essence, a trait of God. If grace is found within men, it has been acquired outside of themselves. They received it, they did not manufacture it.

Thus we read of “*the grace of God*” being “bestowed,” “given,”<sup>NASB</sup> “granted,”<sup>NRSV</sup> or “shown.”<sup>RSV</sup> Lexically, the word “bestowed” refers to “what is given by a person in superior position to one in a subordinate position.”<sup>FRIEBERG</sup> As used in this text, other meanings include, “of one’s own accord to give one something, to his advantage, to bestow, give as a gift,”<sup>THAYER</sup> and “to give, grant . . . give out, produce . . . cause.”<sup>USB</sup>

**The “grace of God” is a key consideration in sound doctrine, as well as spiritual perspective. Anything that diminishes the grace of God, or places it in a position that is subordinate to the accomplishments**

The grace of God is not sold, earned, or produced by men. What the grace of God accomplishes cannot be done any other way. Human effort alone cannot do what “*the grace of God*” enables men to do. **The truth of the matter is that there is no such thing as an effective work within God’s kingdom that is not accomplished through His grace.** His favor is upon it, and that is why it is efficacious. His love and preference are in it, and that is why it accomplishes His will. Men cannot be trained to do what the grace of God enables them to do.

holy motivation, provoking the brethren at Corinth to “*love and good works*,” one of the key results of dwelling together in unity (Heb 10:24). He will point to the godly conduct of other brethren in an effort to stir up the Corinthians to complete their commitment to assist the resourceless saints in Jerusalem.

*His grace has done*,”<sup>LIVING</sup> “*the gracious love which God has shown*,”<sup>IE</sup> “*of God’s spiritual blessing which was given*,”<sup>WILLIAMS</sup> “*about the grace of God which has been manifested*,”<sup>MONTGOMERY</sup> and “*about the grace (the favor and spiritual blessing) of God which has been evident*.”<sup>AMPLIFIED</sup>

Now we will find that “*the grace of God*” is intensely personal. It is not like a large hovering cloud that is suspended over the church. It is more like the “*tongues of fire*” that were revealed on the day of Pentecost that “*sat upon each one of them*” (Acts 2:3). In this case, particular churches in a particular region had grace bestowed upon them, so that they accomplished something that was greater than what was accomplished in Corinth. That is precisely why Paul brings this matter to their attention.

Some object to this kind of provocation, affirming that it is demeaning – that every believer should stand on their own without any comparison being made between them and others. However, this is not good thinking, and reflects the impact of a psychological emphasis, as compared with a spiritual one.

The “*grace of God*” is a key consideration in sound doctrine, as well as spiritual perspective. **Anything that diminishes the grace of God, or places it in a position that is subordinate to the accomplishments of men cannot possibly be true.** The grace of God is the driving force in salvation – throughout the entirety of God’s “*great salvation*.” Whether it is salvation in its initial working, or in its progress and eventual culmination, salvation is ever “*by grace through faith*” (Eph 2:8).

**THE CHURCHES OF MACEDONIA**

**Good reports of other brethren assist us in reevaluating our own labors.** While we are not to emulate one another in the flesh, or allow petty jealousies to rise within us, we can be provoked to throw ourselves more fully into the work of the Lord, be more consistent in our expressions, and be noted for extending ourselves for the work of the Lord. We can help one another in this regard.

**This text will show us that the grace of God can be found in the most practical matters of life in Christ Jesus** – like taking up a collection for the needs of others. The love and tender mercy of God can be evidenced in such an activity. His favor, gentleness, and preferences can be

“ . . . on the churches of Macedonia.” Other versions read, “*the Macedonian churches*,”<sup>NIV</sup> “*in the assemblies of Macedonia*,”<sup>BEBE</sup> and “*congregations of Macedonia*.”<sup>TNT</sup>

Macedonia was a region. Some of

the details of Paul's travels into Macedonia are found in Acts 16:10-17:15. This was the area into which Paul and Silas were particularly called, by means of a special vision (Acts 16:9-10).

At least three bodies of believers in that area are mentioned in Scripture, and all of them were very commendable

• **The Bereans.** *“And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming thither went into the synagogue of the Jews. These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so”* (Acts 17:11).

• **The Thessalonians.** *“So being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us . . . For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe . . . But we, brethren, being taken from you for a short time in presence, not in heart, endeavoured the more abundantly to see your face with great desire . . . Wherefore we would have come unto you, even I Paul, once and again; but Satan hindered us. For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? For ye are our glory and joy”* (1 Thess

2:8,13,17-20).

• **The Philippians.** *“But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at the last your care of me hath flourished again; wherein ye were also careful, but ye lacked opportunity . . . But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at the last your care of me hath flourished again; wherein ye were also careful, but ye lacked opportunity . . . **Notwithstanding ye have well done, that ye did communicate with my affliction.** Now ye Philippians know also, that in the*

*resorted thither. And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: **whose heart the Lord opened,** that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul”* (Acts 16:13-14).

There were also two women in Philippi who had labored with Paul in the Gospel. Paul delivered a special word them, admonishing them to be of the same mind. *“I beseech Euodias, and beseech Syntyche, that they be of the same mind in the Lord. And I entreat thee also, true yokefellow, help **those***

**There were also some women who became prominent in the churches in Macedonia. When Paul and Silas first arrived in that area, they spoke to a group of women who were gathered together for prayer.**

*beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church communicated with me as concerning giving and receiving, but ye only. For even in Thessalonica ye sent **once and again unto my necessity**”* (Phil 4:10,14-16).

There were also some women who became prominent in the churches in Macedonia. When Paul and Silas first arrived in that area, they spoke to a group of women who were gathered together for prayer. From that number, Lydia became the first convert from the region. *“And on the sabbath we went out of the city by a river side, where prayer was wont to be made; and we sat down, and spake unto the women which*

*women which labored with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and with other my fellowlabourers, whose names are in the book of life”* (Phil 4:2,3).

On one occasion, Paul spent an extensive period of time going *“over those parts,”* and giving them *“much exhortation”* (Acts 20:1-2). This appears to have been a region marked by some very strong believers, even though Paul also encountered much troubled from the enemies of the faith in that area (2 Cor 7:5). **Now, their strong faith will be declared by their works – and it will be referenced to provoke the godly to stronger efforts.** This provides us some indication concerning the way in which godly works are to be viewed.

## IN A GREAT TRIAL OF AFFLICTION

*“<sup>2a</sup> How that in a great trial of affliction . . .”*

And when did this gift of grace come to the *“churches in Macedonia?”* Perhaps it was when they were on the mountain of victory, savoring some great

conquest like Joshua leading Israel in triumph over Jericho. Perhaps it will in the lofty realm of victory, like David striking down Goliath, the champion of Israel's foes. That grace was granted in such glorious hours we cannot deny. Indeed, that is the only way to triumph.

However, there is grace for other hours, **when we are in the valley.** It is a grace that enables us to rise, as it were, from the dead – when it looks as though all is lost, and gaining the upper hand is impossible.

We will see that there is also triumph in the Sea, in the desert, and in the furnace. There is victory in the lion's den, at the bottom of the seas, and in the tomb. It is true that we do have the heavenly "treasure" of the "knowledge of the glory of God," in an earthen vessel (2 Cor 4:7). Like the alabaster box of precious ointment had to be broken so its contents could be lavished upon Christ, and its fragrance fill the room (Mk 14:3), **so the followers of Jesus are broken so their precious treasure can emit its fragrance to those around them.**

**HOW THAT "IN"**

"How that in . . ." Other versions read, "Out of,"<sup>NIV</sup> "for during,"<sup>NRSV</sup> "How

Israel was judged because of what they did when they were **IN** the wilderness (1 Cor 10:5). Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were delivered because of their faith **IN** the furnace (Dan 3:23-26). Daniel was delivered because of his faith **IN** the lion's den (Dan 6:20-22). Young David surfaced as one who was strong in the faith when he was **IN** the taunts of the giant (1 Sam 17:23-51). Peter slept **IN** the prison, while chained to two guards (Acts 12:6). Paul and Silas sang praises while they were **IN** prison (Acts 16:24-25). Stephen prayed for his persecutors **WHILE** he was being stoned (Acts 7:60).

**Our trials are all managed from**

"These believers suffered hard testing,"<sup>1E</sup> "great trouble,"<sup>WEYMOUTH</sup> "a terrible ordeal of suffering,"<sup>ISV</sup> "heavy trial of affliction,"<sup>MONTGOMERY</sup> "an ordeal of sever tribulations,"<sup>AMPLIFIED</sup> and "most difficult circumstances."<sup>PHILLIPS</sup>

We do not know the specific "affliction" these brethren were undergoing at the time. It is not necessary for the details to be known by us, **because all afflictions are similar in their effects.** They also all have to do with life in this world.

What is a "trial?" Coming from the Greek word δοκιμή (dok-i-maa), this expression means "in an active sense, a proving,"<sup>THAYER</sup> "having the quality of having stood the test,"<sup>FRIBERG</sup> "proof,"<sup>UBS</sup> "to try and learn the genuineness of something by examination and testing,"<sup>LOUW-NIDA</sup> and "a proof, test."<sup>LIDDELL-SCOTT</sup>

Whether we are speaking of gold, silver, or men, **trial is by fire – fire hot enough to do away with what is unacceptable.** Thus God said through Zechariah, "And I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried: **they shall call on my name, and I will hear them: I will say, It is my people: and they shall say, The LORD is my God**" (Zech 13:9). Peter affirms that our faith is, in fact, tested, or examined, by fire. "That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, **though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ**" (1 Pet 1:7).

A "great trial of affliction" is when an unusual measure of trouble, pressures, and painful circumstances are experienced. It is when we are, so to speak, squeezed between a rock and a hard place, without any evident way of escape, or any idea of when it will all end. **It is when the hand of God presses us sore, to get out of us what hinders and inhibits us.** It is when Satan is given leave to sift us, deliver a thorn to us, or raise up enemies against us. It is when we are thrust into the fire to see what we are made of, and whether or not our profession is true.

Among religious men, the test of validity is often administered by asking

**There is the managed beginning of the trial and the managed conclusion of all trial, regardless of its intensity or longevity. But what about DURING the trial? How does a person who is living by faith and walking in the Spirit conduct himself in the midst of great difficulty and opposition?**

that while,"<sup>BBE</sup> "they are"<sup>TNT</sup> "Though they have been going through,"<sup>LIVING</sup> "while passing through,"<sup>WEYMOUTH</sup> "In spite of,"<sup>ISV</sup> "For although in,"<sup>MONTGOMERY</sup> "In the midst of,"<sup>AMPLIFIED</sup> and "Somehow, in."<sup>PHILLIPS</sup>

Paul has already testified how he conducted **himself** in a great trial (2 Cor 1:8-12). Now, he will relate the conduct of other believers while they were undergoing great stress and testing. He will not speak of their conduct **after** the trial, but of it **during** the trial.

The real life of Christ conducts itself admirably and productively within the framework of adversity. What Paul will now declare has to do with what the saints did **while they were IN** the affliction. This is not what they did **before** the trouble. It is not what they did **following** the trouble. It is what they did **DURING** the trouble – **while** they were **IN** it, tasting of its bitter dregs. This reveals the potency of faith.

heaven, and come with ways of escape, opened by the Lord Himself (1 Cor 10:13). There is the managed beginning of the trial and the managed conclusion of all trial, regardless of its intensity or longevity. But what about **DURING** the trial? How does a person who is living by faith and walking in the Spirit conduct himself **in the midst** of great difficulty and opposition? Is it possible for a body of people who wear the name of Jesus to jointly respond to affliction in a God-glorifying manner? Our text holds the answer to that question.

**A GREAT TRIAL OF AFFLICTION**

". . . a great trial of affliction . . ."  
"Other versions read, "a great ordeal of affliction,"<sup>NASB</sup> "the most severe trial,"<sup>NIV</sup> "a severe ordeal of affliction,"<sup>NRSV</sup> "a severe test of affliction,"<sup>RSV</sup> "much proof of affliction,"<sup>ASV</sup> "they were undergoing every sort of trouble,"<sup>BBE</sup> "experience of tribulation,"<sup>DOUAY</sup> "tried with much affliction,"<sup>TNT</sup> "much trial of tribulation,"<sup>YLT</sup> "much trouble and hard times,"<sup>LIVING</sup>

a variety of questions – seeing what people believe, what church affiliation they have, and what they think of this of that. **But when God tests us, He thrusts us into the fire of testing.** How will we fare in the heat of the desert, and the furnace of affliction. **If we have real life, it will survive!** If we have unfeigned faith, it will triumph! If we have actual hope from God, it will survive. The fire will tell the story.

When people are experiencing

*which is infinitely more precious than the perishable gold which is tested and purified by fire. [This proving of your faith is intended] to redound to [your] praise and glory and honor when Jesus Christ (the Messiah, the Anointed One) is revealed”<sup>AMPLIFIED</sup> (1 Peter 1:5-7).*

This is precisely why our response IN the trial is so vital. **It reveals where we actually are, and what we really have.** No wonder Peter says through the Spirit, *“Beloved, think it not strange concerning*

Hear the words of Jesus that blow upon these feeble doctrines. *“For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; insomuch that, **if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect”**(Matt 24:24). Mark reads, *“For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform signs and miracles to deceive the elect – **if that were possible”**”<sup>NIV</sup> (Mark 13:22). Are these religious marketers suggesting such a deception is really possible – and that faith is not really the consistent and unquestionable *“victory that overcomes the world”* (1 John 5:4-5)? Is the wilderness and the giants in the land of promise too difficult for Joshua and Caleb? Is Goliath too formidable for David? Is the furnace too hot for Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego? Is the lion’s den too intimidating for Daniel? Can perilous storms, three shipwrecks, and a day and a night in the murky deep derail Paul? Will a stoning multitude turn Stephen from the Lord? These must be answered by the perpetrators of lies!**

**Why must I go through such heart-rending times as this?” I will tell you why, for there is no mystery about it. This is something on which God has shed much light. You are being tested! You say you are a Christian, that you love the Lord, and that you want to go to heaven – now God is testing the truth of your profession.**

difficulties that drain their strength and confound their minds, they may ask, “Why is this happening to me? I have done the best I can, and yet nothing is working out for me? Why must I go through such heart-rending times as this?” I will tell you why, for there is no mystery about it. This is something on which God has shed much light. **You are being tested!** You say you are a Christian, that you love the Lord, and that you want to go to heaven – **now God is testing the truth of your profession.** This is not a mere opinion. God has spoken to this subject. *“Who are being guarded (garrisoned) by God’s power through [your] faith [till you fully inherit that final] salvation that is ready to be revealed [for you] in the last time. [You should] be exceedingly glad on this account, **though now for a little while**” (“if need be,”<sup>KJV</sup> “if necessary,”<sup>NASB</sup>) **you may be distressed by trials and suffer temptations. So that [the genuineness] of your faith may be tested, [your faith]***

*the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you”* (1 Pet 4:12). Empty profession and pretension cannot hold up under *“fiery trials.”*

#### Neutralizing False Doctrine

And what shall we say to those religious merchants who spout warnings about a coming *“great tribulation”* and awesome *“Antichrist”* who will cause fearful things to happen? **Are they suggesting there is some trial – and all trials are managed by God – that faith cannot stand?** Will faith and hope go up in a blaze of smoke under the assault of a person who threatens to stamp a number or sign upon you? Is that the doctrine that these men bring? When God tells us not to consider *“fiery trials”* a strange thing, do these peddlers of human dogma chronicle a trial that is, in fact, a *“strange”* one? Have we at last found a trial through which we cannot be kept? Is there really a test the elect cannot pass?

**Let us have done with allowing our minds to roam about in the field of doubt, wondering whether or not we can survive trouble.** All such reasoning is vain speculation, and thus will bring no benefit to us. If faith is, in fact, *“the victory that overcometh the world,”* then nothing in the world can possibly be superior to it! How is it possible for there to be a trial in this world that pushes faith beyond where a person is *“kept by the power of God”* (1 Pet 1:5)?

However, we do not need to conjecture and hypothesize about such things. Paul is going to reach into the arena of human experience and extract an example of people who passed the test of trial. He is going to tell us what they **did** WHEN they were in the trial – squarely in the center of it, feeling all of its heat and influence. This will reflect the manner and effectiveness of *“newness of life.”*

## ABOUNDING JOY AND RICH LIBERALITY IN DEEP POVERTY

*“<sup>2b</sup> . . . the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality.”*

In the flesh, *“a great trial of affliction”* brings out the worse. It

*The power and effectiveness of faith is seen in the response of the churches in Macedonia– by Given O. Blakely*

suppresses wholesome activity, and drives the pegs of sorrow and despair into the heart. There are those who “*faint in the day of adversity*” because their “*strength is small*” (Prov 24:10). Even though, “*in the day of prosperity*,” we may “*be joyful*,” that does not mean we are to respond to “*the day of adversity*” with lamentation and hopelessness. Even in a day of decidedly lesser light, Solomon knew this. “*In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider*” (Eccl 7:14). That consideration, from Solomon’s perspective, has primarily to do with one’s self. However, our text brings us to an even higher level of consideration.

In this text, the Macedonian churches were brought to consider their brethren, whom they deemed to stand in even greater need than themselves. **Now, the strange combination of “joy” and “poverty” join together in a great display of liberality.**

Ordinarily “*joy*” and “*poverty*” are not bedfellows. They do not live together very well. In fact, when one comes, the other tends to leave. However, in the case of the “*churches in Macedonia*,” both “*joy*” and “*poverty*” chose to stay. Neither one of them would go. Not only did they remain, they remained in plenteous measures: “*abundance*” of joy, and “*deep*” poverty. Remember, we are speaking of something that occurred “**IN a great trial of affliction.**”

### THE ABUNDANCE OF JOY

“... the abundance of their joy . . .” Other versions read, “*their abundance of joy*,”<sup>NASB</sup> “*their overflowing joy*,”<sup>NIV</sup> “*the greater joy*,”<sup>BBE</sup> “*their joy abounded*,” “*their unfailing joy*,”<sup>NJB</sup> “*their wonderful joy*,”<sup>NLT</sup> “*abundance of their rejoicing*,”<sup>TNT</sup> “*They were so happy*,”<sup>IE</sup> “*their boundless joy*,”<sup>WEYMOUTH</sup> “*the mighty flood of their gladness*,”<sup>WILLIAMS</sup> and “*their overbrimming happiness*.”<sup>MONTGOMERY</sup>

**Joy – spiritual joy – is good in any measure.** It is like a sweet elixir to those who are “*strangers and pilgrims on the earth*” (Heb 11:13). Such people experience joy when heaven becomes clearer and earth becomes dimmer. This precious commodity is administered by the Holy Spirit (Rom 14:17; 1 Thess 1:6), and results from the clarification of eternal verities for which the weary

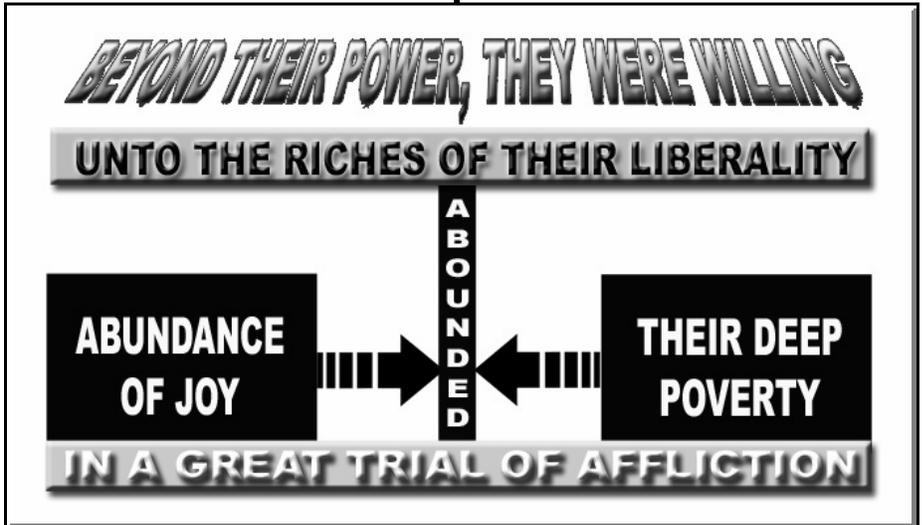
pilgrim longs.

There are numerous expressions in Scripture about copious measures of joy. Here are some of them.

• “**Great joy** so that the earth rent with the sound of them” (1 Kgs 1:40)

• “**Break forth into joy, sing together, ye waste places of Jerusalem: for the LORD hath comforted his people, he hath redeemed Jerusalem**” (Isa 52:9).

• “**When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy**” (Mat 2:10).



• “**But many of the priests and Levites and chief of the fathers, who were ancient men, that had seen the first house, when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, wept with a loud voice; and many shouted aloud for joy**” (Ezra 3:12).

• “**Thou wilt show me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore**” (Psa 16:11).

• “**Then will I go unto the altar of God, unto God my exceeding joy: yea, upon the harp will I praise thee, O God my God**” (Psa 43:4).

• “**The meek also shall increase their joy in the LORD, and the poor among men shall rejoice in the Holy One of Israel**” (Isa 29:19).

• “**And the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away**” (Isa 35:10).

• “**Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy: for, behold, your reward is great in heaven: for in the like manner did their fathers unto the prophets**” (Luke 6:23).

• “**These things have I spoken unto you, that My joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full**” (John 15:11).

• “**And now come I to thee; and these things I speak in the world, that they might have My joy fulfilled in themselves**” (John 17:13).

• “**Thou hast made known to me the ways of life: Thou shalt make me full of joy with Thy countenance**” (Acts 2:28).

• “**And the disciples were filled with joy, and with the Holy Ghost**” (Acts 13:52).

• “**Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost**” (Rom 15:13).

- “My brethren, count it **all joy** when ye fall into divers temptations” (James 1:2).
- “Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye **rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory**” (1 Pet 1:8).
- “But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with **exceeding joy**” (1 Pet 4:13).

This should suffice to confirm that “joy” is not static, or in a fixed measure.

brethren – brethren they perceived as being in greater need than themselves, who were right in the middle of “a great trial of affliction.” Instead of affliction causing destructive waves of sorrow, it caused joy to spring up like a mighty fountain. Such joy doubtless confirmed to their heart that better things were on the horizon of eternity. They could better anticipate the time when “the wicked cease from their troubling; and the weary be at rest” (Job 3:17).

For the righteous, in “affliction” there is also a confirmation that, in Christ, we have been suited for another realm – one that is blessed and eternal. **Also, “affliction” cannot of itself remove**

of bread,” she replied, “I have not a cake, but an handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse: and, behold, I am gathering two sticks, that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it, and die” (1 Kgs 17:11-12). A handful of meal, and a little oil! **There you have it – “deep poverty.”**

On another occasion, a poor widow came to the prophet Elisha. She informed him of her dilemma. “Thy servant my husband is dead; and thou knowest that thy servant did fear the LORD: and the creditor is come to take unto him my two sons to be bondmen” (2 Kgs 4:1). When Elisha asked the poor woman what she had in the house, she replied, “Thine handmaid hath not any thing in the house, save a pot of oil” (2 Kgs 4:2). **There is the same condition again – “deep poverty.”**

In both of these cases, there was Divine intervention. The first widow found the prophet’s words marvelously fulfilled in her house – during a grievous famine. “The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the LORD sendeth rain upon the earth” (1 Kgs 17:14). The second widow found that the little pot of oil in her house, when blessed by the God of heaven, filled a houseful of containers. When the oil was sold, according to the word of the prophet, her debt was paid. “Go, sell the oil, and pay thy debt, and live thou and thy children of the rest” (2 Kgs 4:7).

“Deep poverty,” indeed. **Yet the grace of God was deeper.** A liberal supply came from wells that appeared to be dry. We should expect that those in Christ will enjoy Divine intervention as well! These things have been written for our “learning” (Rom 15:4).

**ABOUNDING IN LIBERALITY**

“... abounded unto the riches of their liberality.” Other versions read, “abounded in the riches of their liberality,”<sup>NKJV</sup> “overflowed in the wealth of their liberality,”<sup>NASB</sup> “welled up in rich liberality,”<sup>NIV</sup> “have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part,”<sup>NRSV</sup> “being able to give freely to others,”<sup>BBE</sup> “the riches of their free-hearted liberality,”<sup>DARBY</sup> “overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part,”<sup>ESV</sup> “yet they

**Also, “affliction” cannot of itself remove open doors, shut heaven to us, void our prayers, or prohibit us from receiving seasons of refreshing. Afflictions have no prohibitive power in the heavenly places where we have been “raised” and “seated”**

It can increase, coming to a fuller measure, and imparting remarkable resources and benefits to the people.

This kind of joy is not irrational, or driven by raw human emotion. It is the result of knowing the Lord, seeing His hand at work, and comprehending what He has done. This is not a wave of glory that hits us, but a glorious perception into which we enter.

**Joy, true “joy,” does not depend upon circumstances.** It does not awaken when things go well, and go to sleep when they do not go well. It does not enter when there is **no** need, and leave when there **is** need. We know this is the case, because the “churches of Macedonia” had an “abundance of joy” **“IN a great trial of affliction.”** Their affliction could not force “joy” to leave. Instead, it actually increased, gaining more strength, and obtaining more dominance.

In this text, their “joy” was found in an opportunity to minister to their

open doors, shut heaven to us, void our prayers, or prohibit us from receiving seasons of refreshing. Afflictions have no prohibitive power in the heavenly places where we have been “raised” and “seated” (Eph 2:6).

**THEIR DEEP POVERTY**

“... and their deep poverty... ”

Other versions read “and their extreme poverty,”<sup>NIV</sup> “and were in their greatest need,”<sup>BBE</sup> “and their very deep poverty,”<sup>DOUAY</sup> “and their most extreme poverty,”<sup>GENEVA</sup> “and their profound poverty,”<sup>NAB</sup> “and their intense poverty,”<sup>NJB</sup> “And though they were exceeding poor,”<sup>PNT</sup> “even though they were very poor,”<sup>IE</sup> “mingled with the depths of their poverty,”<sup>WILLIAMS</sup> “their depth of poverty [together],”<sup>AMPLIFIED</sup> and “the fact of being down to their last penny themselves.”<sup>PHILLIPS</sup>

**What is “Deep Poverty?”**

“Deep poverty” is destitution – impoverishment in the extreme. Their condition was like the widow’s barrel of meal and cruse of oil. When the prophet Elijah asked her to bring him “a morsel

have given exceeding rich, and that in singleness,"<sup>PNT</sup> "the result has been an overflowing of giving to others,"<sup>LIVING</sup> "they gave very generously,"<sup>IE</sup> "has overflowed to increase their generous liberality,"<sup>WEYMOUTH</sup> "has resulted in the abundance of their liberality,"<sup>ISV</sup> "abounded to the opulence of their unselfishness,"<sup>MONTGOMERY</sup> "have overflowed in wealth of lavish generosity on their part,"<sup>AMPLIFIED</sup> and "produced a magnificent concern for other people."<sup>PHILLIPS</sup>

If a worldly solicitor confronted someone in deep poverty, he would expect nothing more than a meager offering. But this was not the case here. It appeared as though the "churches in Macedonia" were not able to assist the poor saints in Jerusalem. They had enough troubles of their own. Some might have thought Paul should not have been taking a collection from the Macedonians as well. Of course, all of that is nothing more than fleshly expressions. They have no validity in the Kingdom of God. The work

of the Lord is governed by higher ways.

But that is not what the Macedonians thought! They appeared to have leaped at the opportunity to minister to their needy brethren. **As this book will confirm, the Lord is able, and forward, to lavish His grace upon such precious souls – souls who do not assess their potential by what they are holding in their hand. God can multiply what we have!** The comprehension of this very real circumstance is very refreshing.

## BEYOND THEIR POWER

"<sup>3a</sup> For to their power, I bear record, yea, and beyond their power . . ."

When it comes to the people of God and the work of God, how much are they able to give? What are the boundaries of their ability? What are the limits of their power? Can a woman with only enough meal and oil to make two small cakes for her and her son afford to make an additional cake for a prophet of God first (1 Kgs 17:13)? Can a people who are experiencing a Divinely sent drought that is destroying the fruits of their ground afford to bring "all the tithe" into God's storehouse (Mal 3:10-11)? Can a people who are experiencing a "great trial of affliction" rise to the occasion of gathering a collection for "the poor saints in Jerusalem?" Precisely how far does the ability of such people go? And how will they be able to know how far it goes?

These are questions that cannot be answered in the schools of human wisdom. They cannot be ferreted out by philosophy or speculation. **Only a life of faith and of walking in the Spirit will discover the marvelous abilities of the people of God.** Part of living out "the newness of life" is the perceptible experience of Divine direction, provision, and enablement. The Lord will feed and direct His church through various opportunities, or open doors – **circumstances in which the individual or group of individuals can actually tap into Divine provision and competency.** This text provides us with a sterling example of these things.

### BEARING RECORD TO THEIR POWER

"For to their power, I bear record . . ." Other versions read, "For I bear witness that according to their ability,"<sup>NKJV</sup> "I testify that according to their ability,"<sup>NASB</sup> "But I give them witness, that as they were able,"<sup>BBE</sup> "For according to their power, I bear witness,"<sup>DARBY</sup> "For they gave according to their means, as I can testify,"<sup>ESV</sup> "I can testify that it was of their own accord that they

that he personally witnessed. This is not the giving of a report he received from someone else, but of something of which he has personal knowledge. This does not make the matter any more true. It does, however, bring more confidence to the hearer to hear the report of an eyewitness. Knowing this, God Himself employed first-hand witnesses to testify to the truth of the Gospel. Luke says of the Apostles, "Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a

**Thus Paul provides a written record of something of note that occurred in another place, and among another people. He does so because what God does among His people can be a source of encouragement and instruction to other members of His household.**

made their gift,"<sup>NJB</sup> "For I can testify that they gave not only what they could give,"<sup>NLT</sup> "They gave not only what they could afford,"<sup>LIVING</sup> "I tell you the truth, they gave as much as they could,"<sup>IE</sup> "For I can testify that to the utmost of their power,"<sup>WEYMOUTH</sup> "I can testify that by their own free will they have given to the utmost of their ability,"<sup>ISV</sup> and "I can guarantee that they were willing to give to the limit of their means."<sup>PHILLIPS</sup>

### The Power of An Eyewitness

Paul will now relate something

declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us, even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word" (Luke 1:2). Peter also testifies, "For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty" (2 Pet 1:16).

Thus Paul provides a written record of something of note that occurred in another place, and among another

people. He does so because what God does among His people can be a source of encouragement and instruction to other members of His household.

**To Their Power**

The “churches of Macedonia” had more ability than appearance could confirm. It would take more than their own assessment to attest to this ability. There is also the working of the Lord that can reduce the ordinary need, so that the means that are available becomes larger. The woman who was healed of her issue of blood, suddenly had an increase of her means, which she had been giving to the “physicians”(Mark 5:26).

Our ability is also viewed differently when we perceive our possessions as coming from the Lord. Take, for example, that certain widow that Jesus viewed while standing by the Temple treasury, beholding “*how the people cast money into the treasury*”(Mk 12:41). What kind of ability did she have? How much was she able to give to the work of the Lord? It is written that she “*threw in two mites, which make a farthing*” – each coin worth

approximately an eighth of a cent, according to our currency (Mk 12:42). Is that what she could afford? Was it according to her “*ability*” or “*power*”? If you were to look at it from the viewpoint of a financial planner, the woman was foolish in giving so much, for Jesus said, “*she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living*”(Mark 12:44). Another version reads, “*out of her poverty, put in all she owned, all she had to live on.*”<sup>NASB</sup> She gave “*according to her ability,*” even though there is not an economist in the world who would have applauded her action!

As with that poor widow, the resources available to “*the churches in Macedonia,*” were probably everything that they had. Thus “*to their power,*” or “*according to their ability,*” means to **the utmost extent of their ability.** They gave to the fullest extent possible, without regard for their own personal welfare – just like the widow in the temple, and the widow of Zarephath who included the prophet of God in what was, according to appearance, her very last meal (1 Kgs 17:12-15). **Only faith can obtain such a view of personal resources!** What is more,

as we will see, this is a very real view, not merely a philosophical one.

**BEYOND THEIR POWER**

“*... yea, and beyond their power . . .*” Other versions read, “*yes, and beyond their ability,*”<sup>NKJV</sup> “*and beyond their ability,*”<sup>NASB</sup> “*and even beyond their ability,*”<sup>NIV</sup> “*and even beyond their means,*”<sup>NRSV</sup> “*and even more than they were able,*”<sup>BBE</sup> “*but well beyond their resources,*”<sup>NJB</sup> “*but far more,*”<sup>NLT</sup> “*above their power,*”<sup>YLT</sup> “*even more than they should,*”<sup>IE</sup> and “*yes and beyond their means.*”<sup>PHILLIPS</sup>

From yet another perspective, what the Macedonian brethren gave did **not** at all match their ability. Paul will now show that there was **another measurement** by which their gift could be assessed. I do not doubt that what they gave was quantitatively substantial, for it is referred to as “*the riches of their liberality,*” which apparently provided some **actual assistance** to the brethren in Jerusalem. Now we will see what kind of mind-set enabled these people to be so generous during such difficult times. We will also see how God responded to this.

**THEY WERE WILLING OF THEMSELVES**

“<sup>3b</sup> . . . they were willing of themselves.”

Spiritual perspective plays a key role in doing to the work of the Lord, or rising to the challenge of the need of someone else.

**THEY WERE WILLING OF THEMSELVES**

“*... they were willing of themselves.*” Other versions read, “*they*

*were free willing,*”<sup>NKJV</sup> “*they voluntarily gave of their own accord,*”<sup>NRSV</sup> “*They gave from the impulse of their hearts,*”<sup>BBE</sup> “*they gave of their own accord,*”<sup>NAS</sup> “*they did it because they wanted to, not because of nagging on my part*”<sup>LIVING</sup> “*because they really wanted to,*”<sup>IE</sup> “*and [they did it] voluntarily,*”<sup>AMPLIFIED</sup> and “*without the slightest urging from me or anyone else.*”<sup>PHILLIPS</sup>

It is possible to live at such a

distance from the Lord that strong exhortation is always necessary. In order to become involved in the works of the Lord – works to which we have been “*ordained*” (Eph 2:10) – some must always be awakened, or stirred up. It takes decidedly more for such people to be provoked “*unto love and to good works*” (Heb 10:24). **The Macedonians, however, were not such a people.**

Their response was spontaneous, dictated by their hearts and not their minds. They were already in tune with the heavenly frequency, and thus could be directed with God’s “*eye,*” needing neither bit nor bridle (Psa 32:8-9). **Paul did not have to plead with these people to do what was right,** as God did with wayward Israel (Jer 3:14; 27:13; Ezek 18:31; 33:11). There is a spiritual condition in which more pleading and reasoning is required to move the people

**Their response was spontaneous, dictated by their hearts and not their minds. They were already in tune with the heavenly frequency, and thus could be directed with God’s “eye,” needing neither bit nor bridle**

to do what is right. It is not an enviable position in which to be found, but many do, in fact, occupy such a place.

Others, like *“the churches in Macedonia”* are already *“prepared unto every good work”* (2 Tim 2:21). They have separated themselves from the debilitating influences of the world, and are regularly ingesting the Word of the Lord, which makes one *“thoroughly furnished unto all good works”* (2 Tim 3:16-17). If it is true that we are God’s *“workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works,”* then it is surely possible for us to so live that we can *“walk in them”* (Eph 2:10). The *“churches in Macedonia”* were walking in the light, and thus could instantly respond to a need that was actually one of those *“good works”* in which they were intended to walk.

As with other areas of the

**In fact, Paul is now beginning to deal with an unsatisfactory response from the Corinthians in the very matter in which “the churches of Macedonia” excelled. He is seeking to provoke them to “do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith”**

kingdom, this is a frame of mind that cannot be developed and matured by means of law. We can announce the manner of the kingdom to people, show how God has ordained that we should walk in the good works He has appointed, and confirm that God is able to do more in us than we are capable of imagining (Eph 3:20). However, until faith takes hold of those words, a satisfactory response will not be possible. Spiritual mindedness is vital in the Kingdom.

In fact, Paul is now beginning to deal with an unsatisfactory response from the Corinthians in the very matter in which *“the churches of Macedonia”* excelled. He is seeking to provoke them to *“do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith”* (Gal 6:10). That, Paul is affirming, is something he **did not have to do** among the *“churches in Macedonia.”* His manner of reasoning is most refreshing, and instructive as well.

## MUCH ENTREATY

*“<sup>4a</sup> Praying us with much entreaty that we would receive the gift...”*

Faith and love are both aggressive. Once possessed – and the grace of God is *“exceeding abundant”* with them (1 Tim 1:14) – **they produce an initiative that can never be experienced under the administration of Law.** An “ought-to-do” posture cannot produce the kind of response to which Paul now refers. I will also say that within the religious circles with which I have been familiar, this attitude is exceedingly rare. That condition testifies to a fundamental deficiency that cannot be denied.

### PRAYING WITH MUCH ENTREATY

*“Praying us with much entreaty. . .”* Other versions read, *“Imploping us with much urgency,”*<sup>NKJV</sup> *“begging us with much entreaty,”*<sup>NASB</sup> *“they urgently pleaded with us,”*<sup>NIV</sup> *“begging us earnestly,”*<sup>NRSV</sup> *“Beseeching us with much entreaty,”*<sup>ASV</sup> *“Seriously requesting us,”*<sup>BBE</sup> *“and they had kept imploring us most insistently,”*<sup>NJB</sup> *“They begged us again and again,”*<sup>IE</sup> and *“begging us most insistently.”*<sup>AMPLIFIED</sup>

The word *“praying”* not only implies the expression of a very strong desire, it also carries the idea of repetition. **They begged, implored, pleaded, and entreated over and over, again and again.**

Note the kind of people to which we are now being introduced. The Macedonians who were in the midst of *“great affliction,”* and did not apparently possess a lot of means, were forward to instantly and generously respond to the need of the poor saints, **without being asked.** They required no admonition or strong reasoning to move them to participation. This is the product of genuine faith and love. It is not a super-trait, but an ordinary one in *“the Kingdom of Christ and of God”* (Eph 5:5). This is the response of *“the new man”* (Eph 4:24), *“newness of life”* (Rom 6:4), and the *“new creation”* (2 Cor 5:17). Such a frame of mind is not the result of discipline and training, but of *“faith unfeigned”* (1 Tim 1:5) and *“unfeigned love of the brethren”* (1 Pet 1:22). The absence of this kind of response indicates the prominence of *“the flesh”* (Rom 8:5),

*“the carnal mind”* (Rom 8:7), the *“old man”* (Eph 4:22), and *“another law”* (Rom 7:23). There is no other way to account for the failure of any professing *“Christian”* to respond to the known needs of their brethren.

It appears that the offering of these churches was so significant that, in view of the circumstances, Paul and company were reluctant to take it. It may have looked as though this would put those brethren at a severe disadvantage. If such a thought did occur to the gatherers of this offering, the Macedonians would not allow it to go further. Instead they kept on pleading with them to take what they had given.

### RECEIVE THE GIFT

*“of taking part,”*<sup>NRSV</sup> *“in regard of this grace,”*<sup>ASV</sup> *“to give effect to the grace,”*<sup>BBE</sup> *“that we would receive their benefit,”*<sup>TNT</sup> *“receive the favor,”*<sup>YLT</sup> *“to take the money,”*<sup>LIVING</sup> and *“to accept their gifts.”*<sup>PHILLIPS</sup>

What a contrast of experiences! Paul pleads with the Corinthians to

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complete their commitment to give to the suffering brethren in Jerusalem (1 Cor 16:2; 2 Cor 8:6,11; 9:5). **The churches in Macedonia plead with him to receive the offering they gave while in great affliction** – an offering that exceeded their ability.

The brethren in Macedonia

considered the opportunity to assist the saints in Jerusalem a great blessing. **They were “zealous of good works”**(which is the kind of people God is producing in Christ, Tit 2:14), and would not let this opportunity pass by them. Thus, God was working in them “both to will and to do of His own goodpleasure” (Phil 2:13), bringing them to participate in His will.

I cannot help but note the unusual contrast of this circumstance with the religious environment of our time. Today, there are frequent pleadings for people to give. Here we have brethren pleading for their gift to be received! You may judge for yourself which response is more in keeping with the nature and effectiveness of salvation.

## THE FELLOWSHIP OF MINISTERING

“<sup>4b</sup> . . . and take upon us the fellowship of the ministering to the saints.”

offering, presented by the brethren in Macedonia. It is referred to as “the fellowship.” The Greek word used here is

*Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning*” (James 1:17).

Among men, “fellowship” often refers to a group who adopt the same views, or have the same occupation of interests. In the church world, it is a body of people who have embraced the same theological views. For some, the word “fellowship” means an unfocused and general time of enjoying one another’s company. In Christ, however, the meaning of “fellowship” is vastly expanded and brought into conformity with the nature and intent of the church that Jesus is building (Matt 16:18).

**The accent in “fellowship” is not the people, but what the people do. There is an exchange among them of the grace that has been given to them.**

If we are speaking of the spiritual nature of this fellowship, that sharing involves edification, exhortation, and comfort. It includes building one another up and provoking one another to love and good works. There is a sort of pooling of the insights, joy, peace, and comfort. This kind of activity is described in Paul’s word concerning the Corinthian assembly. “How is it then, brethren? when ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying” (1 Cor 14:26). Peter spoke of the same activity when he wrote, “As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God



Paul now shares with us the reasoning of the Macedonian churches. Their’s was not a merely emotional plea, but a rational one, based on a perception of truth and the knowledge of God.

### TAKING UPON US THE FELLOWSHIP

“ . . . and take upon us the fellowship . . .” Other versions read, “and the fellowship,” NKJV “participation,” NASB “sharing,” NIV “taking part,” NRSV “communication,” DOUAY “taking part,” ESV “partakers,” TNT “participating in,” WILLIAMS “the fellowship of contributing,” AMPLIFIED and “share the honors,” PHILLIPS

The subject here is “the gift,” or

κοινωνία (koy-nohn-ee-ahn). This is the term frequently used to denote college campus ministries: “Koinonia.” The meaning of term is, “fellowship, association, community, communion, joint participation . . . the share which one has in anything . . . intimacy . . . a benefaction jointly contributed, a collection, a contribution, as exhibiting an embodiment and proof of fellowship,” THAYER “a relationship characterized by sharing in common fellowship, participation,” FRIBERG “a close mutual relationship, participation, sharing in, partnership, contribution, gift,” UBS and “an association involving close mutual relations and involvement.” LOUW-NIDA

**“Fellowship” postulates a body of interdependent members who share with one another.** All of their resources come from a common origin. As it is written, “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the

*giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen*" (1 Pet 4:10-11).

If we are speaking of the practical matters relating to life in this world, "fellowship" involves sharing our goods with one another, thereby bearing one another's burdens. This was a response found in the early church. "And all that believed were together, **and had all things common**; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need" (Acts 2:45). And again it is written, "And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: **neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common**" (Acts 4:32).

Where there is no sharing, in the Scriptural sense of the word, there is no fellowship. **Jesus is not building a church constituted of members who primarily seek their own interests.** Where such a frame of mind is found, serious deficiencies exist that must be addressed and corrected.

In this text, the "sharing" is of earthly resources. The criticality of correctly using such resources is underscored by John. "Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him. Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoso hath **this world's good**, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth" (1 John 3:15-

18). The Macedonians saw their brethren's need, and did not shut up their "bowels of compassion" from them. Instead, they responded with a liberality that exceeded what they were able to do.

It ought to be noted that "bowels of compassion" are an integral part of the "new creation." They are resident in the "new man," and are ready to function to the glory of God. When they are "shut up," a quenching of the Spirit has taken

perhaps even a select few within that certain assembly. Some dare to spread out a little more, considering their "brethren" to be those who are part of same type of denomination they have chosen. Such people are rarely interested in the affairs and condition of Christ's people in remote areas, or places with which they are not familiar. Perhaps they would give a token offering to their need, should the opportunity present itself, or a commitment to a specific work taken on

**Where there is no sharing, in the Scriptural sense of the word, there is no fellowship. Jesus is not building a church constituted of members who primarily seek their own interests. Where such a frame of mind is found, serious deficiencies exist that must be addressed and corrected.**

place. In such a case, "the flesh" assumes the ascendancy, for it is not possible to "quench" and "grieve" the Spirit, yet remain "acceptable" and "spiritual."

#### MINISTERING TO THE SAINTS

" . . . of the ministering to the saints." Other versions read, "the support of the saints,"<sup>NASB</sup> "this service to the saints,"<sup>NIV</sup> "the relief of the saints,"<sup>RSV</sup> "servants to the needs of the saints,"<sup>BBE</sup> "ministry that is done toward the saints,"<sup>DOUAY</sup> "service to the holy ones,"<sup>NAB</sup> "the gift for the Christ's in Jerusalem,"<sup>NLT</sup> "helping the holy people,"<sup>IE</sup> and "supporting their brothers in Christ."<sup>PHILLIPS</sup>

For some, "brethren" refers to those within their own assembly – or

by the leaders of their assembly. Some people have learned to live within this kind of environment. It was not so with the churches in Macedonia.

Revealing the nature of spiritual life, Paul elaborates on the response of the Macedonians, and the conditions that produced it. It will be obvious that any other response would have been wholly inappropriate. It will also be apparent that when we present our bodies as a "living sacrifice" to God, it will directly impact upon how we respond to open doors. **Genuine service toward the saints is always preceded by giving our due attention to our relationship with the Lord Himself.** Kingdom labors flow from that involvement, being thus referred to as working with God (2 Cor 3:9).

### THEY FIRST GAVE THEMSELVES

"<sup>5a</sup> **And this they did, not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us . . .**"

Ponder how much Paul is saying about the collection gathered by the

Macedonian churches, and the manner in which he is addressing the subject. **He does not accent the need of the poor saints in Jerusalem, but the liberality of the afflicted saints in Macedonia!** It is certainly not that Paul had no care for

his brethren in Jerusalem. He was, after all, gathering the collections for them. **However, when moving the Corinthians to complete their promise in this regard, he does not tell them that the saints in Jerusalem are suffering, but that the**

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saints in Macedonia are giving! How is it that he proceeds in such a manner. Would it not be better to go into some depth about the poverty in Jerusalem, and how it had effected the brethren and their families? Perhaps some snapshots of some of the more grievously affected people and areas would serve to stimulate the Corinthians.

There is something to be seen

As I have already said, some object to this kind of comparison, imagining that it is too inconsiderate and humiliating. This text confirms that is a very flawed way of thinking.

**NOT AS WE HOPED**

*“And this they did, not as we hoped. . .”* Other versions read, *“And this, not as we had expected.”*<sup>NASB</sup> *“and this, not merely as we expected.”*<sup>NRSV</sup>

**The Macedonians did not give a sort of token offering, as though they were depending upon others to take up the slack. Rather, it appears that they gave as though everything depended upon them, doing so heartily and willingly.**

here – a kind of principle that lies beneath the surface of kingdom life. Let no person doubt that the bowels of compassion can be awakened by the sight or knowledge of need. It was so with Jesus, and it will be so with those who walk in the light as He is in the light.

However, there is a powerfully constraining influence in the DOING of good – in the actual awareness of God working within a people. Thus Jesus said people would glorify God when they saw the “good works” His children (Matt 5:16). Paul told the Corinthians that their initial “zeal” about this offering had “provoked very many” (2 Cor 9:2). Peter said when our enemies “behold” our “good works,” they may very well “glorify God in the day of visitation” (1 Pet 2:12).

Rather than only commanding the Corinthians to get to the business of gathering up this offering, Paul spoke in this manner: *“I speak not by commandment, but by occasion of the forwardness of others, and to prove the sincerity of your love”* (2 Cor 8:8). Another version reads, *“I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others.”*<sup>NIV</sup> That is a most remarkable statement, and indicates the power of the “newness of life,” to which he appeals.

*“And going even further than our hope,”*<sup>BBE</sup> *“And this they did, not as we looked for,”*<sup>GENEVA</sup> *“it was not something we expected of them,”*<sup>NJB</sup> *“Best of all, they went beyond our highest hope,”*<sup>NLT</sup> *“Nor [was this gift of theirs merely the contribution] that we expected,”*<sup>AMPLIFIED</sup> and *“Nor was their gift, as I must confess I had expected, a mere cash payment.”*<sup>PHILLIPS</sup>

And what was it that Paul “expected,” or “hoped for?” He did expect something – even though the brethren in Macedonia were experiencing “a great trial of affliction.” He doubtless expected the degree of willingness that ordinarily accompanies faith. The amount that they gave, and the manner in which it was given exceeded the expectations of Paul – and those expectations were no doubt very high for ordinary men to comprehend. Here was a man who himself had counted “all things but loss” for the excellency of Christ Jesus (Phil 3:8). **You would not expect a man like that to anticipate meager offerings from the saints of God.**

The Macedonians did not give a sort of token offering, as though they were depending upon others to take up the slack. Rather, it appears that they gave as though everything depended upon them, doing so heartily and willingly. When Paul considered their

offering, he saw them in it. **Their hearts and their commitment were reflected in what they gave.** That is the case with all gifts of this kind. Meager givers have meager hearts, whatever they may have to say for themselves.

**THEY FIRST GAVE THEMSELVES**

*“. . . but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us . . .”* Other versions read, *“but they first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us”*<sup>NKJV</sup> *“but it began by their offering themselves to the Lord and us,”*<sup>NJB</sup> *“for their first action was to dedicate themselves to the Lord, and [after] unto us,”*<sup>PNT</sup> *“the first thing they did was to give themselves to the Lord. Then they gave themselves to us,”*<sup>IE</sup> *“but first they gave themselves to the Lord and to us [as His agents],”*<sup>AMPLIFIED</sup> and *“Instead they made a complete dedication of themselves first to the Lord and then to us.”*<sup>PHILLIPS</sup>

**First to the Lord**

Men are fond of saying, “first things first.” Here is an example of what takes the priority in human responsibilities. **“First,” our relationship to the Lord must be settled – settled in our own hearts and minds.** Unfortunately, we are living in a time and culture when this requirement has been greatly obscured, to say the very least. “The flesh” is altogether too prominent in contemporary Christianity. It has risen to conspicuousness in every religious area. It is seen in preaching preferences, approaches to resolving moral deficiencies, outward appearance, educational thrusts, and doctrinal emphases. **Men are being taught, in the name of Christ, to live for themselves – at least that is the clear implication that is coming across to the people.** This very thing is what has given rise to moral failures that have become common within the churches. People are living to please themselves. It is what they personally desire that is driving their lives, not what the Lord wills.

Now, Paul further accounts for the liberality of the Macedonian brethren by citing their commitment to the Lord Himself. Hannah gave her son Samuel to the Lord, lending him to God “for as long as he lived” (1 Sam 1:28). In the same spirit, the Macedonian churches, **before**

they did anything else, “gave themselves to the Lord.” Hezekiah admonished the people, “Now be ye not stiffnecked, as your fathers were, but **yield yourselves unto the LORD**” (2 Chron 30:8). **The Macedonian brethren did precisely that!** All believers are admonished, “Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but **yield yourselves unto God**, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God” (Rom 6:13). **That is what the churches of reference did.** Again, those in Christ are told, “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye **present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God**, which is your reasonable service” (Rom 12:1). **The Macedonian brethren fulfilled that word.**

It may appear as though the churches in Macedonia excelled above the kingdom standard, extending themselves further than is actually required. However, I do not believe this is an accurate assessment of the situation. Solemnly we are reminded that Jesus “died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, **but unto Him which died for them, and rose again**” (2 Cor 5:15). **There is not a shred of revelation that suggests a person can remain in good standing with the living God, and withhold their persons from Him, choosing to live for themselves.** We should remove from ourselves any teaching, or idea, that leads us to any other conclusion. If Jesus “died for all” in order that they might live for Him, it is clear that anyone living for self is on totally unsafe ground.

Here, the idea is that the people gave themselves wholly to the Lord, without holding anything back. They viewed all that they possessed as coming from the Lord, and belonging to Him. They knew that they themselves had been “bought with a price,” and therefore

were not their “own.” **Therefore, at any and all cost, they were determined to glorify God in the bodies and in their spirits, which belonged to God.** As it is written, “What? know ye not that your

these necessary things” (Acts 15:28). Even in old time, when Israel was at its best, they believed the Lord **and His servant as well.** As it is written, “And Israel saw that great work which the

**One of the marvelous benefits of the New Covenant is the harmony that is accomplished between the Lord and those who are reconciled to Him. His laws have been written in the hearts and put into their minds, so that there is no longer a fundamental conflict with the Lord**

body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s” (1 Cor 6:19-20).

#### And Unto Us

Because the brethren in Macedonia had “first” given “their own selves to the Lord,” they had no compunctions about making themselves available to God’s servants – those He Himself had sent.

One of the marvelous benefits of the New Covenant is the harmony that is accomplished between the Lord and those who are reconciled to Him. His laws have been written in the hearts and put into their minds, so that there is no longer a fundamental conflict with the Lord (Heb 8:10; 10:16).

A confirmation of this is seen in response of the early church to Divine direction. When moved by the Spirit to provide elemental instructions to new Gentile believers, a letter was sent to them. In it the brethren wrote, “For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, **and to us**, to lay upon you no greater burden than

LORD did upon the Egyptians: and the people feared the LORD, and believed the LORD, and His servant Moses” (Ex 14:31).

One of the incontrovertible traits of those who are in fellowship with Christ (1 Cor 1:9) is their favorable response to the message and work of those sent by the Lord. Rebellion, anarchy, and rejection are always signs of unbelief. This is why Jesus said, “He that receiveth you receiveth Me, and he that receiveth Me receiveth Him that sent Me. He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet’s reward; and he that receiveth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man’s reward. And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward” (Mat 10:40-42).

In a day marked by a stress on religious organizationalism and appealing careers, godly responses like those in our text appear to be waning at a rapid rate. To say the least, this is a very unhealthy sign. Not much real work of God will take place in such an environ.

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## BY THE WILL OF GOD

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“<sup>6b</sup> . . . by the will of God.” Other versions read, “in keeping with God’s will,”<sup>NIV</sup> “through the will of God,”<sup>ASV</sup>

“after the purpose of God,”<sup>BBE</sup> “at the prompting of the will of God,”<sup>NIB</sup> “for whatever directions God might give

them,”<sup>NLT</sup> “For whatever directions God might give them through us,”<sup>LIVING</sup> “whatever way the Lord wanted,”<sup>IE</sup> “in

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*The power and effectiveness of faith is seen in the response of the churches in Macedonia— by Given O. Blakely*

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*obedience to God's will,*<sup>WEYMOUTH</sup> and *"to be directed by the will of God."*<sup>AMPLIFIED</sup>

The idea here is that **as** the "churches in Macedonia" gave themselves completely to the Lord, **they became available for His direction.** Their submission made them "directable." The Amplified Bible captures this sense of the text: *"having put themselves at our disposal to be directed by the will of God."* **There is a circumference within which people are made suitable for Divine use.**

This is the significance of the mandate to present our bodies as a living sacrifice to God. That presentation is in order that we might come to **know** the will of the Lord. *"I APPEAL to you therefore, brethren, and beg of you in view of [all] the mercies of God, to make a decisive dedication of your bodies [presenting all your members and faculties] as a living sacrifice, holy (devoted, consecrated) and well pleasing to God, which is your reasonable (rational, intelligent) service and*

*spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world (this age), [fashioned after and adapted to its external, superficial customs], but be transformed (changed) by the [entire] renewal of your mind [by its new ideals and its new attitude], so that you may prove [for yourselves] what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God, even the thing which is good and acceptable and perfect [in His sight for you]"*<sup>AMPLIFIED</sup> (Rom 12:1-2).

The will of God IS "good" – essentially and fundamentally honorable, to be esteemed, and upright in every way. It IS "acceptable" – that is, well pleasing and satisfying, primarily to the Lord, and secondarily to us as we are able to perceive it. The will of God IS "perfect" – that is, it is not lacking anything for its fulfillment. It will be fully realized because it was conceived in righteousness, and is carried out in strict accord with the nature of God, which is in every way right.

**The "will of God," as used in this text, refers to His ordinations and appointments for men.** It involves the

"good works" that He has "before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph 2:10).

There are at least two ways men are brought to realize actual involvement in the will of God. First, they must present themselves wholly to the Lord – an offering that is deliberate, willing, and without reservation. Secondly, the knowledge of that will, or how men are to become involved in it, must be made known to them. The second requirement depends on the reality of the first one. In fact, the second necessarily follows the first. **No person who fully yields himself to God will come short of knowing the will of the Lord.**

Thus Paul accounts for the remarkable liberality of the churches in Macedonia. They yielded themselves first to God, thereby putting themselves, so to speak, within the circumference of Divine employment. They were "prepared unto every good work," and when the opportunity arose, they zealously entered into the work.

## CONCLUSION

There are certain priorities in the body of Christ. **As you might well expect, a total and uncomplicated commitment to the Lord is at the top.** There really is no valid work for or with the Lord apart from this, even though appearance may suggest this is not the case. Without that full devotion, the individual, or congregation, is not even in the pool of people through whom God will work. They are not, so to speak, in the Divine marketplace where laborers for the vineyard are obtained (Matt 20:1-7).

The second priority that is made known in this account is the love of the brethren, and a readiness to uphold them in any and every way required. **These are the most important people in all of the world.** They are God's "flock" (1 Pet 5:2), His "heritage" (1 Pet 5:3), the "temple of God" (1 Cor 3:16), and "the household of God" (Eph 2:19). Additionally, they are "the body of Christ" (Eph 4:12), the "bride" of Christ (John 3:29; Rev 21:9),

and the "house" over which Jesus is presiding, and for which He is caring (Heb 3:6). These are Christ's "lambs" and "sheep," and they are to be fed (John 21:15-17).

There is an approach to the work of the Lord that nearly dominates all religious activity, that places great stress upon academic matters and success in the flesh, with little or no emphasis upon the heart. While great care must be taken not to leave the impression that faith sanctifies ignorance, and commitment has no need for learning, the stress must be properly placed.

In citing the superior and God-glorifying response of the Macedonian churches, Paul has placed the emphasis in keeping with his perception of the kingdom of God – a revealed perception.

• They had an "abundance of joy" during "a great trial of affliction."

- Their profound joy joined with their "deep poverty," ensuring that it would not be an undue hindrance.
- They had a mind to do everything they do, to the full extent of their ability.
- Enabled by God, they went far beyond their ability, exceeding not only the expectations of a godly man, but defying all rules of human logic.
- They earnestly entreated Paul to receive their offering, even though it appeared on the surface to be putting themselves at a severe disadvantage.
- All of this was possible because they had first given themselves to the Lord – fully and without reservation.
- Because they were in the heart of God's will, and living unto the Lord,

they immediately gave themselves to the cause Paul presented to them.

There are significant causes that are operative in the work of the Lord. **None of them, however, have their**

**genesis with men.** None of them flow out from the natural man – the part that is traceable back to Adam. Every legitimate and effective spiritual cause has its origin in the Lord. That is why He is called “*the Alpha,*” “*the Beginning,*” “*the*

*First,*” and “*the Author*” (Rev 1:8,11,17; Heb 12:2). All “*powers*” – personalities of influence – were “*made by Him, and for Him*” (Col 1:16). It is imperative that these things be kept in mind when assessing effective responses in men.

Our next Hungry Saints Meeting will be held on Friday, 8/5/2005. In this session, we continue our current series of lessons on the Epistle of Second Corinthians. The thirty-fourth lesson will cover verses six through nine of the eighth chapter: **“FINISH THE WORK.”** When the people of God make a commitment, it is taken seriously in heaven, and ought to be on earth as well. In this text, Paul reasons with the Corinthians concerning the completion of their commitment to gather a collection for the poor saints in Jerusalem. Our meeting will begin at 7:00 P.M. You are invited to bring your family and friends for fellowship around the Word of God. Refreshments are served afterward, with a time of extended fellowship for everyone.

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