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## THE CHURCHES OF MACEDONIA

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*"Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia: that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality."*

**(2 Corinthians 8:1-2)**

I would like to share about the historical example of giving when the Macedonian churches in Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea collected special financial support for the needs of the church in Jerusalem. Actually, the Apostle Paul talks about these churches to the Corinthians wishing them to become as Macedonian churches to which, as he says, God has given "grace of the riches of their liberality".

Before we look at the crucial principles in this historic event I would like to emphasize that giving is always initiated by God's grace.

Giving is not only a human act, it is not an act made by the good, rich or noble (actually, the poor are the majority who give); it involves grace because the lives of true givers are changed by God's grace.

Giving is a solution for many things, however it seems that nowadays believers like to spiritualize things rather than giving or doing something for the expansion the Kingdom of Heaven.

★ **Giving is not only a human act, it is not an act made by the good, rich or noble.**



According to statistics, only 30% of believers give their tithes and offerings. I will not even mention missions, because according to my experience, missions today is only one of many church functions to which is given if something is left over or as a formality in order that the church may have a big map with photos of their missionaries.

It is sad to see that many things are not done for the Kingdom because people are simply stingy and give crumbs but for their selfish wishes they are ready to spend in excess. I remember a pastor from a bigger church said from the pulpit that they should buy four golf carts by which people would be transferred from the parking lot to the entrance of the church. Immediately several believers came forward and gave their checks. However to meet this pastor it was necessary to request and appointment. It was not easy to reach him.

Today believers are in debt to fulfill their own wishes. For the Kingdom of God however, few will be found to sacrificially give.

★ **The churches fight for survival because the hearts of their believers are hardened.**

Unfortunately, due to lack of such dedication to God, many churches and missionaries in the world are paralyzed and unable to make necessary changes in the areas where they exist. The churches fight for survival because the hearts of their believers are hardened. If believers would say, "we will give to you" rather than the cliché, "we will pray for you" the Kingdom of God would grow much faster.

If we do not support God's work according to the principles established in the Bible, we must not be astonished when we do not see results. The level of care we have for God will be visible by how we practically care for and give for His work. If our faith does not touch our money then we are not properly converted!

I also believe that giving tithes and offerings is not only the financial solution for the church or individuals but also the solution for spiritual problems they face.

Have you ever asked yourself why many believers do not grow in grace or why they constantly face the same old temptations? Have you ever considered why we have the same understanding of things although we have been in the church for many years?

Lack of spiritual growth in many believers is a result of their problem with giving. Sooner or later each of us will face the question of money and money

management. What will we do then? We will either responsibly face it or hide behind various theological excuses. But if we accept responsibility in giving we will grow spiritually in God.

Jesus clearly said: *"He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much."* (Luke 16:10) To get around the word "least" is not wise for we will cheat ourselves.

Good money management is the basis for the Christian growth. If we become aware of the truth and come to the light about giving and yet refuse to walk in the light of the truth, we invite deadly consequences. John confirmed it when he said, *"If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth."* (1 John 1:6)

If we refuse to walk in the light, we tear down our spiritual walk in physical, mental and financial areas. This destruction often works as a self-righteous blind spot, which cannot be removed in spite of all our efforts.

For example: we often use a spiritual deed to replace our failure to obey in another area of our life. We, therefore, often have excuses and say, *"I do not give tithe but go to church three time a week."* Or *"I do not give tithe but I read the Bible and pray more that the others and serve in the church."*

These self-righteous attitudes will not help

us, we cannot bargain with God. Rather than being obedient to God and His Word we often compare ourselves with others in order to look better!

I have seen this in my own life, and believe that it is the same with many believers: when we begin to give, subsequently our thoughts, our heart and will will open up. We, in fact, become free of our self-righteous behavior.

Let us turn to the Macedonian churches and their example of offering. In 2 Corinthians chapter 8 the Apostle Paul shares how God poured out His grace to the churches of Macedonia, however he also talks about the money they gave him while he was with them:

*"Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia:"* (verse 1)

▶ **1. IF WE WANT TO GIVE IN GOD'S WAY, IT IS NECESSARY TO HAVE GOD'S GRACE**

Paul does something that, according to our human logic, we would not do: he

★ **Lack of spiritual growth in many believers is a result of their problem with giving.**



shared with other churches about the generosity of these churches.

How would another church in Zagreb feel if I said, *"I want you to know that the members at my church have given more than they can afford"*? Many would say that this is the Pharisee's way and unspiritual because we publicly shared a sensitive issue. Some would think to themselves, *"I don't care how much they have given. I give as much as I wish and as much the Lord wants me to give."*

Paul says, *"Look how generous the churches of Macedonia were."* He did not mention the amount but emphasized that they did it out of dedication to God's grace in them.

Further he says, *"that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality."* **(8:2)**

If we think more about it, this text makes no sense because it talks about great troubles and abundance of joy. He talks about their great poverty but at the same time rich giving. How is it possible to be like that? In human eyes it isn't but in

★ **Beyond abilities does not mean that you give what you do not have because you obviously cannot do it.**

God's grace it is possible to have rich joy in spite great poverty and immense troubles.

In other words, troubles need not affect our joy! The world has joy resulting from circumstances but the Christians have joy because of Jesus regardless of the circumstances. In spite great problems, troubles and deep poverty they were full of joy and willingly served God and others in need.

Do we have the same grace of God or we walk in the flesh? When in trouble Christians usually say, *"I don't want to hear anybody's problems. Why should I take on others' burdens? Who cares for me? What is with my problems? Does anybody care for me at all?"*

What Paul felt with admiration was their giving in spite of their deep poverty: *"For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing,"* **(8:3)**

It seems to me that at times we give so secretly that we lose real biblical motivation. We don't want to give our name so that it is not known how much we give and we comfort ourselves by saying, *"It is between God and me."* Many don't give their names so that it cannot be seen whether they give or not. How wise of them. But the churches of Macedonia did not conform to such behaviour! Because of the abundance of God's grace

they had received they wanted to thank Him in that manner and in turn gave even beyond their ability.

*In 2 Corinthians 8:3 we read: "For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing,"*

When God's mercy is upon people, they give because they want to. Not only do they want to give but also they give beyond their abilities. What does it mean to give beyond one's ability?

The majority can give and they give. But how many of us give beyond our abilities? Beyond abilities does not mean that you give what you do not have because you obviously cannot do it. Paul said that he didn't even think that they could give that much, because they had given beyond his human expectation.

If we today want to conform to this truth, can we say that we give according to this measure of God's grace or according to our own discretion?

I think that we would have great testimony of God's grace if we were able to say *"We have supported all our projects, we have built our church building, we didn't get money from foreign lands or the government but the Lord had given us grace to do it ourselves.* This would be a testimony that would encourage a lot of

people and they would believe in God!

This is what will happen in the awakening for which we pray – God will pour out His grace upon us and we will be able to give more; more than we even think we can. Unfortunately, many haven't reached this stage of dedication where abundance of God's grace is evident.

Actually I could say that the maturity and spirituality of a church or an individual can be seen in their giving and the accounts. When it comes to awakening and dedication we would rather give to God's Kingdom than feast ourselves with unnecessary wishes and stuff. Our standard is God's grace, not our selfish wishes.

### ► **2. MACEDONIAN CHURCHES WERE DEDICATED TO GOD**

In verse 4, the Apostle Paul says that they were *"imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints."*

Above all, they begged him to let them give! Paul may have been surprised or said, *"I know your needs ... please keep it for yourselves, you will surely need it"*. Imagine someone saying to you, *"Take our money, we will manage!"*

★ **Our standard is God's grace, not our selfish wishes.**



It was possible for them because of God's grace. They begged him and said: *"You must give us a chance to be in this grace and fellowship with other believers."* This giving was a privilege to them. But remember such giving has its own price – it was not the giving from their excess but from their needs.

This kind of giving is possible only to those who are fully dedicated to the Lord. For the half converted, non-devoted, fleshly Christians it makes no sense. They give the crumbs after they fulfill their selfish wishes or material goals.

In verse 5 it is clearly written, *"And not only as we had hoped, but they first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God."*

The foundation of their behaviour is now clear - they were dedicated to God in full and were ready to give everything to Him. Noone manipulated them or threatened them. When we are completely dedicated to Him, it is not hard to give our talents, time or money. They were so dedicated that they desired God's grace be given to the Corinthians, too. The Apostle Paul even *"urged Titus, that as he had begun, so he would also complete this grace in you as well."* (8:6).

★ **If you love the Lord  
prove it!**

Paul wanted, and this is my wish too, that this grace not only be given to some or that it remains a historical note. Through this grace we will obtain new fire and enthusiasm that this work be visible among us. I believe that even Paul was surprised and was filled with new fervor when he saw their giving.

Our church may boast of God's grace in many areas – we love the Word of God; we are diligent in faith and evangelism. But God's grace should be more evident in giving. This, too, is a work of grace. It is time we hid no more in this act of mercy and be more open and obedient.

Their giving was proof of their sincere love to God. Christians, who do not give, do not love God. *"I speak not by commandment, but I am testing the sincerity of your love by the diligence of others."* (8:8)

Many say, *"I don't have to give because free giving is not a command."* This attitude shows where their heart is. It is true that it is not a command, but it also shows their love for God.

If we love Him, we will not anonymously give \$1.00, but without shame give beyond our ability. Many give under the veil of religiosity. The reason is that they do not want to give the entire tithe but only a part of it. The rich often do that. It may seem enough to them (as well as to others), yet they do not give the tithe in

full but according to their discretion.

If you love the Lord prove it! It is not enough to tell Him that you love Him and yet not show it in public! In

**2 Corinthians 8:24** Paul clearly says: *“Therefore show to them, and before the churches, the proof of your love and of our boasting on your behalf.”*

Love and dedication to someone or something should be visible. It should not be hidden somewhere inside but visible to all. When one is diligent they will come to church, eagerly prayer, support the leadership and serve God. *“But they are so spiritual”*, we may think when considering religious ones, however they avoid prayer meetings and fellowship with the saints.

The church of today does not know how to be normal. Let us prove our love and dedication in practical and visible ways.

Jesus Christ, Himself, left us the example of giving.

*2 Corinthians 8:9: “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.”*

Jesus Himself, the Creator of everything, was rich but in Bethlehem was born and was poor. Why? That we, the spiritually poor, may have all!

Jesus Christ did not give from His spiritual surplus. He completely gave up glory and richness for us! He did not just have good intentions, He did not say: *“I shall die for them when I have money”*

How many of us can say, *“I could have been richer, have money, but I gave it up all and gave to God. Now I live on less and choose a humbler lifestyle in order to give.”*

Unfortunately, materialism occupies many believers’ lives. Instead of giving when it is necessary, they give primarily to ease their conscience because they do not give as they should give, their god is money and stuff.

Many show more interest in things than in God. If they have the same enthusiasm when giving to God as when buying cosmetics, clothes, cars, cell phones and other such toys we would expand the Kingdom of God.

*“And in this I give advice: It is to your advantage not only to be doing what you began and were desiring to do a year ago”*, says Paul.

One thing is certain, Paul did not ask money for himself. *“Do not be afraid, we are*

★ **Love and dedication to someone or something should be visible.**



*not ask for bigger salaries but because it is primarily good for you.” Said Paul.*

We should always be ready to give – it is a key element to an awakening! *“But now you also must complete the doing of it; that as there was a readiness to desire it, so there also may be a completion out of what you have. For if there is first a willing mind, it is accepted according to what one has, and not according to what he does not have.” (2 Corinthians 8:11-12)*

The heart should always be ready! God will never make you remain hungry, but He surely looks at attitude of your heart: *“For if there is first a willing mind, it is accepted according to what one has, and not according to what he does not have.”*

God does not reject us because we do not give as much as the others, but accepts our giving because it comes from a willing heart that gives more than expected and according to God’s grace.

The quantity is not important but the principle of obedience.

*“But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver. ”*  
**(2 Corinthians 9:6)**

We must be obedient to God’s word and give Him what belongs to Him, only then will His glory be revealed only and will we be able to efficiently reach our cities and our country. Although everything belongs to God, His hands are tied by our stinginess. Finally I say, He works through people!

★ **Although everything belongs to God, His hands are tied by our stinginess.**

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