

THE MACEDONIANS' EXAMPLE (PART 2)

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On Paul's third missionary journey, he began by going "over all the country of Galatia and Phrygia in order, strengthening all the disciples" (Acts 18:23). Paul then went to Ephesus, where he would spend the next three years (Acts 19:1-20:1,31). From Asia, Paul went to Macedonia (Acts 20:1-2). Throughout this time, Paul was taking up a collection to take to the poor saints in Jerusalem (Rom 15:25-31; 1 Cor 16:1-3; 2 Cor 8:1-5; 9:2,8-9). The churches of Macedonia were poor, but insisted that they be allowed to participate in this good work. These brethren are one of the best examples we have of the practice of pure and undefiled religion before God (Jas 1:27).

Opportunities to serve are a favor from God

The churches of Macedonia suffered affliction from the time of their establishment on Paul's second missionary journey (Acts 16-17; 1 Thes 1:6-7; 2:14; 3:1-8; 2 Thes 1:4-7). Now, somewhere between five to seven years later, they were still suffering affliction (2 Cor 7:4-5). They also were materially poor. Yet God showed great favor towards these poor, suffering Christians by providing them with all that they needed to give generously to help their brethren who were in need. Paul wrote, "Moreover, brethren, we do you to wit of the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia; how that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality" (2 Cor 8:1-2). The Greek word for "grace" here is *charis*, which means *favor*. God literally does us a favor when He gives us the opportunity to help people in need, especially our brethren. We should therefore cheerfully and willingly use every such favor that the Lord gives us (Gal 6:9-10; 2 Cor 9:6-8). This is exactly what the Macedonian brethren did. Paul testified that the churches of Macedonia gave "to their power" and even "beyond their power" (2 Cor 8:3). Instead of Paul having to beg them to give, the churches of Macedonia begged Paul and

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his co-workers “with much entreaty that we would receive the gift, and take upon us the fellowship of the ministering to the saints” (2 Cor 8:4). They did beyond what Paul had hoped (2 Cor 8:5).

Giving ourselves to the Lord

These Macedonian churches gave liberally in spite of their affliction and “deep poverty” (2 Cor 8:1-2), and did not have to be prodded and cajoled into doing so. They were “willing of themselves” to give (2 Cor 8:3). Paul and the others were evidently reluctant to receive such a large contribution from such poor brethren, but the Macedonian churches compelled them to accept it. Instead of having to be begged to give, they were actually begging for their contribution to be accepted (2 Cor 8:4)! They did this because they desired to have “fellowship” (literally *partnership*) in the “ministering to the saints” (2 Cor 8:4). While others were giving in response to this important need, they did not want to be left out. This excellent attitude and desire was the result of the fact that they “first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God” (2 Cor 8:5). They did not give grudgingly or out of necessity, but cheerfully, just as God desires (2 Cor 9:7). They gave properly of their material goods because they had *first given themselves* to the Lord. They understood that God *commands* Christians to give of their means to help the needy, especially needy Christians (1 Cor 16:1-3; Gal 6:10; 1 Tim 5:3-10; Jas 1:27), and they were obviously determined to obey God’s commandment. They also understood that we serve Christ by serving our brethren (Matt 20:25-28; 25:31-40; Mark 10:42-45; Luke 22:25-27; John 13:1-17; Eph 6:5-8; Php 2:1-8; Col 3:22-24). They did not want to miss out on the eternal reward they would receive for their good works (Matt 6:19-21; Col 3:23-24).