

AF A9 BIBLE STUDY: II Corinthians 8

Scripture of Lesson: II Corinthians 8: 1-24

In this chapter Apostle Paul write about charitable gifts for poor Christians in Judea.

1. Example of charity by Macedonian churches: v. 1-12

Christians in Jerusalem and Judea were in dire circumstances financially due to a prolonged draught, colonial oppression of the Roman Empire and the Jewish ruling groups and persecution from fellow non-Christian Jews and Gentiles. The Gentile Christian churches in Greece in regions of Macedonia and Achaia sent charitable gifts to these churches as Paul wrote in his letter to the Romans.

But now I am going to Jerusalem to minister to the saints. For it pleased those from Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor among the saints who are in Jerusalem.
[Rom 15: 25-26]

Here in Chapter 8 Paul writes to the Corinthian church about the gift received from the churches in Macedonia [Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea] so as to encourage them to follow the good example of those in the Northern Greece. Based on Rom 15:26, we can see that the churches in Achaia including Corinth followed their northern brothers' example and made contributions to this charitable project for the Jewish Christian brethren in Judea.

It is notable that the Christians of Macedonia gave liberally "beyond their power (v. 8:2)" out of their willing mind because God had bestowed His grace [*charis*] to them. This word, *charis*, out of which the English word, charity, came means "grace, kindness and favor toward someone, often with a focus on a benefit given to the object." Paul indicates the origin of this grace they received to the grace of Lord Jesus, that, "*though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might be rich*" [v 8:9]. Paul seems to imply that, as they received the grace of the Lord into their hearts, they also came to have a willing mind to love other brethren as Christ loved them, so that they were prompted to give bounteously to the cause of brotherly charity.

Christians often give to charitable causes not because they are rich but because of the 'grace' of Lord Jesus in their hearts. We have been chosen to be channels of God's blessing to this world.

2. Church errand for charity: v. 13-24

In the second half of this chapter Paul expresses his desire to send Titus and two unnamed brothers who are trustworthy on the errand of delivering the collected charity money to Jerusalem. We read from the Acts 20-21 that Paul himself went on a journey to Jerusalem, which he knew would bring much affliction to him. Since this mission of delivering a sizable sum of charity money was a grave one, Paul entrusted the mission to trustworthy people so that the ministry would be free of criticisms [v. 8:20]. Titus was a blameless servant of the Lord who volunteered for the work of collecting the sums and the deliverance trip. Another brother, unnamed, is a person of praise by all. This person is thought to be Luke, the author of the gospel of Luke and the book of Acts [v. 8: 18-19]. And a third brother, also unnamed, was chosen for this errand [v. 22]. And Paul vouched for their integrity as fellow laborers, messengers of the church and persons who demonstrate the glory of Christ in them [v. 23]. Thus, Paul wanted to remove any doubt or suspicion as to the integrity of the cause and manner of this charity project.

Churches of today can learn from this example of the manner and spirit of the Christian churches' charity project in the first century, which can be summarized as follows:

- 1) There was a definite need to fill and an opportunity for the Gentile Christians to show their brotherly love and charity to the Jewish Christian brethren in another area.
- 2) The project was conceived and directed by the senior pastor, Apostle Paul.
- 3) Multiple churches took part in the project collectively.
- 4) They gave willingly even out of their own conditions of poverty.
- 5) The collection of monies was done by an entrusted junior pastor, Titus.
- 6) The handling of the collected sum was done by a party of multiple trustworthy brethren together with Titus, a junior pastor.
- 7) The collection was not spent for the personal needs of the pastors.

Discussion topics:

1. *What are your views on church collections and charitable donations?*
2. *What is your thought on sharing of God's blessings with the poor in the world?*