

15. Learning to Follow the Example of Christ

In our last topic, we saw how to help our children understand the difference between godly sorrow and worldly sorrow. We saw that godly sorrow will produce true repentance in the life of a person. In contrast, the sorrow of the world will produce sorrow that the person got caught in sin but it will not result in repentance. Instead, the person will continue to live with fear, guilt and shame. Today, in our topic we want to help our children learn to follow the example of Christ who gave Himself for us.

The churches in Corinth and the surrounding area were rich churches. In contrast, the people in the churches in the region of Macedonia lived in poverty. 2 Corinthians 8:1-2 says, “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.” Paul said that he wanted the Christians in Corinth to know about the way that the grace of God had worked in the lives of the Christians in Macedonia.

Paul said that the churches of Macedonia had been greatly tested by oppression and pressure in their lives. Many wars had been fought in the area of Macedonia and the people had been left with very little. Some things had been taken by those fighting the wars and other things had been destroyed in those wars. As a result, many of the people of Macedonia lived in deep poverty. The meaning of deep poverty is described in this chapter. In verse 9, we read, “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.” Christ left the riches of heaven. He was born into poverty. Soldiers gambled for his few earthly possessions, as he died on the cross, and He was buried in a borrowed tomb. Here, we see that Christ ended His physical life with nothing of physical value. However, he provided us the riches of eternal life. Paul used the example of Christ to help the Corinthians understand the poverty of the Christians in Macedonia.

In spite of their deep poverty, Paul said that the Christians in Macedonia were filled with an abundance of joy. The word that is translated “abundance” means *excess or surplus*. Here, we see that the Christians in Macedonia had so much joy that they did not even think of their deep poverty. In fact, their attitude was like the attitude of the widow in Luke 21. Luke 21:2-4 says, “And He saw also a certain poor widow putting in two mites. So He said, ‘Truly I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all; for all these out of their abundance have put in offerings for God, but she out of her poverty put in all the livelihood that she had.’” Here, we see that this widow was thankful for the fact that she had two mites to give to the Lord. That was the attitude of the Christians in Macedonia. They were so filled with joy that they could give to the Lord that they just abounded in their generosity as they gave to the Lord.

We go on to read about the way that the Macedonian Christians gave to the Lord in 2 Corinthians 8:3-5 where we read, “For I bear witness that according to *their* ability, yes, and beyond *their* ability, *they were* freely willing, imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints. 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 word that is translated

“ability” is the word that is also translated “strength, power or ability”.

First, we see that they gave according to their ability. It is interesting that it does not say that they gave a tithe. Tithing is only mentioned two times in the New Testament and they both refer to the same statement by Christ. Matthew 23:23 says, “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier *matters* of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone.” Instead, we see that the Macedonians gave according to their ability.

Second, we see that they gave beyond their ability. Their giving was sacrificial. They gave more than what they could afford, based on their ability. It is no wonder that Philippians 4:19 says to one of the churches in Macedonia, “And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.” The Macedonians gave even beyond their ability like the widow in Luke. As a result, Paul said that they could trust the Lord to supply all of their needs.

Third, we see that they gave freely. In fact, verse four shows us how freely they gave when it says, “Imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints.” The word that is translated “imploring” means *to ask or to beg*. Here, we see that the Macedonian Christians literally begged Paul and Timothy to receive their generous gifts so that they could share in the ministry to the needy saints in Jerusalem. They were more concerned about the needs of the Christians in Jerusalem than they were about their own needs because they wanted to give to the Lord in thanks for all that the Lord had done for them.

We see that they used these three principles in their giving to the Lord because they first gave themselves to the Lord. They recognized what it meant to make Christ the Lord of their lives. They understood what Christ meant when He said in Matthew 6:24, “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.” They realized that they had given the control of their lives to the Lord and they showed by their giving that they recognized that whatever they had on the earth belonged to the Lord. They wanted to give freely even beyond their ability because they had chosen to make Christ the Lord of their lives.

One of the things that Paul had encouraged Titus to do was to encourage the Christians in Corinth to also share with the needy Christians in Jerusalem. 2 Corinthians 8:6-8 says, “So we urged Titus, that as he had begun, so he would also complete this grace in you as well. But as you abound in everything--in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all diligence, and in your love for us--*see* that you abound in this grace also. I speak not by commandment, but I am testing the sincerity of your love by the diligence of others.” Paul had written to the Corinthians about the way to give. 1 Corinthians 16:2 says, “On the first *day* of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come.” Here, we see that Titus had encouraged the Corinthians to give to help the needy in Jerusalem. Now he had asked Titus to complete this ministry by having the Corinthians finish preparing their gift for the saints in Jerusalem before Paul arrived at Corinth.

The report of Titus to Paul made it clear that the Corinthian Christians were growing in their spiritual lives. Paul wanted the Corinthians to also learn to abound in their giving to the Lord. The word that is translated “abound” is the same word that is used in verse 2. In that verse, we see that the Christians in Macedonia had abounded in their giving. They gave much more than anyone would expect since they were living in great poverty. Paul wanted to encourage the Corinthian Christians to also learn to give abundantly. The growing maturity of the Corinthian Christians did mean that they had learned to abound in many areas of their lives.

In fact, Paul said that their faith had really grown and become much stronger. Their speech, as they spoke about the Lord to others, had also really grown because they had grown greatly in their understanding and knowledge of the teachings of Christ. They had also grown in diligence. We saw in chapter seven that this spoke of the fact that they had grown in their eagerness to be obedient to the Lord. In addition, Paul and Timothy were very thankful because they heard how the Corinthian Christians had grown in their love for them. As a result, they felt very free to encourage them to abound in their ministry of giving to the Lord. In this particular case, that ministry would be to also have a share in helping the needy Christians in Jerusalem.

Paul went on to write in 2 Corinthians 8:8-9, “I speak not by commandment, but I am testing the sincerity of your love by the diligence of others. 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.” Here, Paul made it clear that he was not commanding the Corinthians to give. That would mean that they would give from duty instead of giving freely and joyfully from a heart of love. Paul was only letting them know what the Macedonians had done to give them an example for their own lives.

However, he also reminded them of the One who showed a much greater example of giving out of love as he reminded them of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. As the Creator of the universe, all things belonged to Christ. Christ chose to set aside all that He had and humbled Himself by choosing to be born into poverty. His parents even had to offer the sacrifice of the poor when they dedicated Christ in the temple in Luke 2:23-24. Then, Christ chose to accept the worst form of death as He was crucified on the cross to pay for our sins. Since He had no tomb, He was buried in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea according to Matthew 27:57-60. Christ was willing to live in poverty so that he could share with us the riches of eternal life. We are some of those who have benefited from the ministry that Christ completed through His death and resurrection. As a result, we want to show our children the importance of sharing both our physical riches and our spiritual riches with others. May the Lord richly bless you as you show your children how to follow the example of Christ by the choices you make in your own life.