



Lesson Two - One Family

2 Corinthians 8:1-15 & 9:1-5

Churches Working Together as One Family

Brief Introduction and Review of the Introduction Video:

The Apostle Paul has a strong connection to all the churches involved in the offering that is the focus of 2 Corinthians 8 and 9. This connection means Paul is also aware of the struggles facing each of the churches.

- *What do we know about the church at Corinth? (1 – Affluent church in a port city that is also known as a financial center. 2 – They are an immature church struggling with false teachers that oppose the Apostle Paul. 3 – The church is made up of both Jewish and Gentile believers.)*
- *What do we know about the Macedonian churches? (1 – The three churches are in Berea, Thessalonica, and Phillippi. 2 – All are poor churches, struggling with persecution. 3 – All three churches are made up of both Jewish and Gentile believers.)*
- *What do we know about the Jerusalem church? (1 – Struggling with persecution from Jews that did not believe Jesus to be the promised Messiah. 2 – Jerusalem and the surrounding area had been struggling with a prolonged famine. 3 – The vast majority of those making up the Jerusalem church were Jewish believers.)*
- *Which church do you believe to be the healthiest? Why?*
- *What was the “abundance” of each church? (vv.13-14)*

The story of Carlos and Shelby is one that fits in many communities in South Carolina. We are a fast-growing state with predictions of our population growing by more than one million over the next ten years. Carlos and his family are new to South Carolina and new to their faith. His question is a good one. How does the “Baptist System” work? An important question for us to ask is how does Paul’s teaching in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 appear in Baptist work?

ONE FAMILY: 2 CORINTHIANS 8:1-15

A Generous Example – 2 Corinthians 8:1-5

Hearing about the giving and service of others can be both exciting and challenging. Paul wanted to create enthusiasm in the Corinthian church by celebrating the giving efforts of the Macedonian churches. These churches gladly accepted the challenge to give toward the relief efforts to benefit the Jerusalem church. The churches in Macedonia did not let the difficulty of their own circumstances prevent them from experiencing the joy of helping others. They gave generously. Paul is offering for the first time in the New Testament the lesson that sacrificial giving can be joyful. This is Paul’s paradox of sacrifice and joy. Important for us to remember is for some, their poverty was a direct result of their newfound relationship in Christ. Their new-found faith resulted in non-believers refusing to conduct business with them. Yet, despite their financial hardship, their giving

reflected their satisfaction with God himself, and not just their possessions. Through their example, we learn that one of the marks of a healthy believer—and a healthy church—is walking closely with the Lord in a generous spirit. When this happens, people and churches give unselfishly despite difficult circumstances.

- *Can you think of a time when you discovered someone giving sacrificially? How did this affect you?*

They gave beyond what was expected, and their giving was considered a service, privilege, and honor. It says they even begged Paul for the opportunity to give. It is very unusual to hear someone asking to give with such “energy.” They gave knowing their gifts connected them with God’s increasing work beyond where they lived.

- *How can poverty and joy exist at the same time? (Paul’s Paradox.)*
- *Why would they beg Paul to share in this ministry to the Saints?*

Paul was using the example of the Macedonian church to illustrate an important lesson to the Corinthian church. The natural order of giving starts with devotion to Christ. He is the centerpiece for all giving, as we will see later in this passage. Our giving flows out of our relationship with Jesus and is a clear indicator of his will for our lives. Giving our lives to Christ is the start of a natural progression to begin serving others. There are times we serve with our time and talents. There are other times when we serve with our treasures.

Earlier in 2 Corinthians, (2 Cor. 11:8-9) Paul reminds these young believers that it was because of the faithful giving of other Macedonian churches that resources were available for him to travel and minister in Corinth. The giving he is now requesting is part of an effort much larger than this single church. This New Testament teaching highlights local churches pooling their resources for benevolence ministries, church planting, church strengthening, and mission work. These passages emphasize the beginnings of the funding mechanism being used today across South Carolina, the U.S., North America, and across the globe.

The Charge to Finish – 2 Corinthians 8:6-8

This collection of funds was a long-term project Titus was given responsibility to oversee. The Corinthian church had committed to the effort but enthusiasm to continue was waning. While all the possible reasons for the church stopping to collect the offering are not offered in Scripture, we do know there were challenges to Paul’s authority, leadership, apostleship, and Gospel-centered teaching. A lot of distractions can present themselves in 12 months. The result of all the disruption is their loss of desire to continue.

This provides an opportunity for your group to consider an important question. What stops your churches from committing to financial efforts supporting ministry outside the direct view of, or impact to, the local congregation? *(Possible answers are: 1 – Our consumer culture focused on getting versus giving. 2 – Selfish concern for their own needs. 3 – The distraction of local concerns overtaking any notice of national or international needs. 4 – Time causing focus to wane. 5 – The disruption caused by internal church issues. 6 – No understanding of how the church is part of something much larger than themselves.)*

Generous giving does not originate from outward demand, but from inward love for God and others. It was the Holy Spirit's work, not Paul's, that needed to move the church in Corinth to give sacrificially. Paul wanted it to serve as a spiritual assessment on display, by which the churches would be challenged and encouraged. It could only happen from a transformed heart.

The Gospel Model – 2 Corinthians 8:9

Why should they follow this giving plan? Paul makes it very clear in verse 9. He is asking them to follow Christ's example. Just as those in the first century Corinthian church were asked to follow the example of Christ, we are also asked to follow this same example. Christ is the ultimate manifestation of generosity. He set aside all privilege (riches) in heaven taking on "poverty" for us. Ultimately, when Jesus was on the cross, he was being treated as if he had lived our lives so those believing in him would be treated as if they had lived his. That's how he makes us rich!

- *How does Christ taking on "poverty" make YOU rich?*

TAKING CHRIST'S RICHES AROUND THE GLOBE – THE BAPTIST ECO-SYSTEM

How the Baptist System Works:

Just as the churches in Macedonia, Jerusalem, and Corinth were facing challenges, their support of each other encouraged unity and relief in meeting needs. Today, we accomplish the same thing in our "One Family" ecosystem known as the "Cooperative Program." The Cooperative Program, also known as "CP," is the funding mechanism connecting all South Carolina and Southern Baptist churches, helping each to expand their influence far beyond their local community. CP is the funding tool allowing our churches to advance the Great Commission together.

Unlike other denominations, the local church is the starting point of our global efforts. Each church determines, either by percentage of giving, or by a designated amount in the yearly budget, how much will be given to the Cooperative Program. Also determined by each church is the percentage or amount to be given each year to the local Association. The local Association is composed of churches in your geographic area. *(There are 42 Baptist Associations in South Carolina.)*

What this means is a percentage of every dollar given by every church member is allocated by your church to support local, state, national, and international efforts. What is accomplished through this cooperative effort is truly amazing. Here is a summary of what was accomplished in 2023 through Cooperative Program giving. *(Information comes from the 2023 Annual Church Profile. This is a profile completed by SBC churches each year. The Give+Go website will be updated with 2024 numbers when they become available.)*

- We have 46,906 SBC churches and 12,982,090 million church members. (2023 ACP)
- In 2023, the SBC saw 226,919 people baptized across the globe (2023 ACP)
- We have over 3,600+ overseas missionaries trying to reach 3,180 unreached people groups through the efforts of the International Mission Board.
- We have 2,961 domestic missionaries doing Gospel work in North America, planting 608 new churches through the efforts of the North American Mission Board.

- There are more than 24,000 seminary students being trained in six Southern Baptist Seminaries.

How The Cooperative Program is Structured:

- \$188,000,000+ given by Southern Baptist Churches for international and national causes:
 - 73.20% Missions:
 - International Mission Board (50.41%)
 - North American Mission Board (22.79%)
 - 22.16% Theological Education Ministries:
 - Six Southern Baptist Seminaries (21.92%)
 - Gateway Seminary – California
 - Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary – Missouri
 - New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary – Louisiana
 - Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary – North Carolina
 - Southern Baptist Theological Seminary – Kentucky
 - Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary – Texas
 - Libraries and Archives (.24%)
 - 2.99% Executive Committee and SBC Operating Budget
 - 1.65% Christian Ethics and Religious Liberty Ministries (ERLC)

(This information can be found at <https://www.sbc.net/about/what-we-do/fast-facts/>)

South Carolina Investment in Cooperative Program Ministries:

- Total projected giving of SC Baptist churches including Cooperative Program, investments, special offerings, designated gifts, and fees is \$47,300,000.
- How South Carolina CP funds are allocated:
 - Serving Communities = 10%
 - Sharing Hope (Evangelism Efforts) = 21%
 - Strengthening Churches = 11%
 - Sending Missionaries = 40%
 - Starting Churches = 18%
- South Carolina Baptist Entities:
 - Baptist Courier
 - Baptist Foundation of South Carolina
 - Baptist Universities
 - Anderson University
 - Charleston Southern University
 - North Greenville University
 - Connie Maxwell Children's Ministries
 - South Carolina Baptist Ministry of Aging
 - South Carolina Woman's Missionary Union

The Cooperative Program is the financial engine that fuels all the successes listed above. The average SBC church gives 4.59% of their undesignated offerings to the Cooperative Program.

Imagine what could be accomplished if this percentage were increased to 7.5% or even 10%. Increasing CP giving by just 1% per year is a worthy goal for every church.

Remember Anna and Dylan from the Lesson One introduction? The CP giving of your church is what pays for Anna's training and will keep her on the mission field. The CP giving of your church is what will educate Dylan, preparing him to serve churches throughout South Carolina and the Southern Baptist Convention.

With the impact of CP in mind, let's return to what Paul has to say to the church in Corinth, and to us, about generous giving.

ONE FAMILY, IN ACTION – 2 CORINTHIANS 8:10-15 & 9:1-5

Practical Advice: 2 Corinthians 8:10-15

With the benefit of those Paul is writing to in mind, he offers practical words of advice. Finish what was started! There was an "eager" desire to begin the collection. Paul understands that just as there was an earnest desire to begin the task, there will be a genuine satisfaction of completing the effort. He is also clear in having the church focus on what they do have. Being concerned about what they do not have brings no eagerness or satisfaction.

God's ultimate goal is for his people to have exactly what they need and understand that God ultimately provides for his people. The Old Testament story of God providing food for his people as they wandered in the wilderness (Exodus 16) reminds them of God's equal provision for his people.

Practical Advice Becomes Personal Advice: 2 Corinthians 9:1-4

Verses 1-4 in chapter nine continue Paul's theme of practical advice. These verses also take on a personal tone as Paul once again reminds them of their initial eagerness, while also reminding them the Macedonian churches know they are joining them in this giving effort. Not being prepared would bring a great deal of embarrassment to both Paul and the church.

- *What are the consequences of the Corinthian church not being prepared to pass on their offering? (1 – Embarrassment for Paul and the church. 2 – This could bring Paul's authority and teaching into question. 3 – Bitterness of the Macedonian churches toward the church at Corinth. 4 – Division between the Jewish and Gentile congregations. 5 – Loss of future impact for the Corinthian church. 6 – What should be a gift appearing to be taken through coercion. 7 – Loss of God's blessing on the Corinthian church.).*

Gifts vs. Extortion – 2 Corinthians 9:5

Paul offers a protection for all involved by sending an advance party to ensure the offering is ready. He also offers an interesting choice of words in verse 5. It is clear from the verses we have focused on in chapter eight that Paul wants the eagerness to give, originally experienced by the Corinthian church, to continue through to its conclusion. Completing the collection in this way would make the presentation of their efforts a true gift. Any other attitude toward the collection has the potential for negative results. The Christian Standard Bible uses the word "extortion" to illustrate the

difference. The first is an offering given with joy. The second is taking money by force or threats. Paul's desire for the first century church and the church of today is to experience the joy of giving.

Conclusion: Today's study makes the connection between your church and all other South Carolina and Southern Baptist churches. We are "One Family" working together to advance the Great Commission together. We all play a part and should understand our part to be a blessing and a source of joy to the individual and the church.

- *Does your church see participation in the Cooperative Program to be a joy, a requirement, or a vague act by those in leadership?*