

**Transformed by His Wealth - Part 18 (2 Corinthians 8:10-24) Pastor Edward Cheng
December 31, 2017**

In a world that desperately needs generosity, we should be the light of Christ, demonstrating the generosity He showed us. In 2 Corinthians 8:9 we learned that we should be generous in response to Jesus' generosity, by which we have with complete certainty become rich. When we realize the extreme value of the riches we have in Christ, we will complain less and be more generous. This generosity is more than just giving to church. It's about being generous to others with your money, time, energy, and even your parking space. It's about being generous with thanksgiving, with service, with grace, with mercy, and with love. Recall in the first part of chapter 8, Paul used the Macedonians as the example of effusive generosity. Now, he continues to elaborate on the manner in which we should be generous.

In vv. 10-11 we see that the Corinthians expressed their desire to give the year before, but still haven't done it. Meanwhile, the Macedonians have given with extreme generosity. Paul doesn't command them to give, but tells the Corinthians that it's best for them to now do what they expressed their willingness to do. What you say should match what you do. If you keep making excuses and not following through, internal tension builds up. Furthermore, you may develop a reputation for being undependable and full of talk. Many years ago, a young man interviewed me for a school project. During the interview, he struck me as a very smooth talker who would say anything to achieve his goals. He stained my couch with his pen, and promised to come back and clean it up, but he never returned. Years later when I encountered him at the gym, he admitted that he used to pursue selfish gain through dishonest means, and told me that he had changed and wanted to be a pastor. I took this at face value, but I told him that I wanted to see him follow through, and that the next time we met he should be in seminary or be a pastor. If you are willing to do something, then do it. But be careful about what you say, because people will hold you to it. Don't verbally commit to something you aren't willing to do; and if you are willing, you should follow through. Your speech and actions should be in agreement with a willing heart. When the Spirit tugs at your heart, it's often not something that's easy or natural to do. But it's best for us to follow through. In Matthew 21:28-32 we see that the son who refuses to obey but then repents is better than the son who says he will obey and does nothing.

Despite the extreme generosity of the Macedonians in the midst of extreme poverty, in v. 12 Paul says he isn't asking the Corinthians to give out of what they don't have. They don't need to take out a loan to give. What matters is having a willing heart. This is what makes the gift acceptable. The concept of acceptability of gifts alludes to the Old Testament. In Leviticus 1:3-4 and 22:19-21 we see that acceptability of offerings in the Old Testament depends on the quality of the gift. Animal sacrifices had to be without defect. But now Paul tells us that acceptability doesn't have to do with quality or quantity, but rather the heart of the person giving. We see this also in the narrative of the widow's offering (Luke 21:1-4). When you give it shouldn't be obligatory, but willing.

Verses 13-15 sounds almost like communal living, which goes against the capitalistic upbringing we have. Paul talks about equality, but we saw last week that giving isn't about what we get in return. It isn't quid pro quo. When Paul uses the word equality, it has more of the idea of camaraderie. The point is that we are all in this together. It's not that what we have must be equal, but rather that we should help each other because we are all in the body of Christ. It's like how the wineries in Napa helped each other out after the fires. This was done without expectation of being helped by others when another fire comes along. Likewise, in the body of Christ we give to others because we are united with them, not because we expect them to help us later. But if they do, it will also be because of the unity in the body of Christ, not because we helped them first. It's good to give to unbelievers, but giving to brothers and sisters in Christ is a priority. In v. 15, Paul quotes from Exodus 16:18, which talks about how the Israelites weren't supposed to hoard manna because they were to trust that God would provide for them daily. Likewise, God provides for all of us, not through manna, but through each other. We are the agents of His provision for His people. Let us have a heart that is willing to give, and let us follow through with it, because we are all in this together, and God wants to use us to take care of each other.