

2 Corinthians 8:1-15

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[0 : 00] And if you will turn to 2 Corinthians chapter 8, 2 Corinthians chapter 8, which is on page 967. And so you will also see that there is a deficit.

And it's the first time I think that that's happened. I can't really work out the figures, but I know there were quite a number of thousand pounds down. And well, you can look at it.

2 Corinthians needs to be transparent about their money. And if you didn't get one of those, they're on the table at the back. So I'm going to give you my three points of application for this year.

My three points of application are number one, that you will know, something of what the Lord Jesus Christ has done for you. That you will marvel at the grace and the kindness of God.

And that you will rejoice in what Christ has done. That you would know that. My third point of application is this, that you will go home and you will consider your regular giving.

[1 : 16] So you will see on your seat, if you look at your seat, there is a white sheet, which talks about tithes and lot of things. And it's right, isn't it? First, I gave in a responsible, planned way.

So we think, this is how much I can give. And I'm going to set it up in my bank account that gives every week direct debit. It's the best way to give it. We can get 25% of every pound back if you do it in a tax-deceptible way.

The great thing about direct debit is that it goes out every month. The worst thing about direct debit is that it goes out every month. And you probably don't know which day it goes out, I don't know.

I don't know. And it may be that some dog will go that you set up the direct debit, you can't even remember how much you give it. Because it's like that, isn't it? And you set it up, and you give regularly, and two years can pass, three years can pass, four years can pass.

And it's been a long time since you've actually sat down and carefully thought, how much am I regularly giving? So that's the second application. I'd love you to go home and do that. The third application is, because you know the grace and the kindness of God, that I'd like you to think about putting money in the bag every week as it goes around.

[2 : 27] And I hope you'll find out why I think that. In addition to regular giving. I think that's just weird. I give through the bank. Why is this guy just desperate for my money? That isn't the case in the law.

But I think it would do you good to be thinking as families, as individuals, that each time the bag goes past, that you give. I should also say, there are lots of changes, isn't it?

We don't have an offering. We really, really don't have an offering. Because it's really often when you're outsiders. Number one, that's not the aim of worship. So the aim of worship is not to be friendly to the outsiders. If you're an outsider here today, you are gloriously welcome.

But actually, the aim of what they're doing is we have met together and approached God and encouraged one another. And also, I think we're going to see that money is so important. And money is part of worship.

And so it's a natural thing. And as Christians, we must now be ashamed of money. Jesus talks about money all the time. Do you remember Luke's crossword? You can't look for a chapter without him talking about money. And so the very invisible box at the back, which nobody ever talks about, because you think we're after your money.

[3 : 32] Actually, this is the truth. Jesus is after your money. Because that's very nice. So we're thinking about worship. And we're thinking about the practices of worship. And again, let me remind you, when we come to worship, it's not just what we do, but it's what God does to us.

They are formative acts as we gather to sing and pray and preach. They change the way we view the world. They change the way we perceive the good life.

They change our identities. So we've looked at a call to worship and singing and praying in our confession of sin. But this morning we come to the part of the offering. And it may seem routine. It may just seem that we do it to pay the bills of the church. But the offering is actually a response to God's grace. That's how I want you to think about it. It is a response of faith which asks you to put your money where your mouth is. All within me falls at your feet. Put your money where your mouth is. But because it involves money, it just doesn't seem very spiritual, does it?

[4 : 40] One writer says this. It is that oddly awkward moment when people scramble for purses on the floor or wallets in their back pocket. Envelopes and coins are pressed into the hands of children who are eager to put them into the bag as it passes by, giving what is not theirs.

But in that act, this is brilliant, we do something subversive. That in response to God's abundant grace, we demonstrate with something quite mundane, something quite common in the nitty gritty reality of money, that our ultimate allegiance is not to any king.

It is not to any government in this world. Our ultimate allegiance is to the Lord Jesus Christ. And that as you put money in the bag, as you give, you are saying this world is not our ultimate home. We are citizens of another country. We belong to another kingdom. We belong to a world that is unseen. And that this money is not a payment for services given, is it?

It is not a payment for what we owe. It is an expression of gratitude and devotion for everything that this king has done for us. And so as we share in this act of worship, it acts as a down payment of our lives.

[5 : 53] It's a down payment to demonstrate our commitment to him during the week, in response to what we have received, we give. It is the part of the service where we put our money where our mouth is.

And that takes us back to that very famous verse, isn't it? Matthew 6.21, where Jesus says, Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. That is every week as the offering bag comes around, we are challenged with the question, where is your treasure? What is it that you love most in life? And we can say all the right things in response to that question.

And we can sing the most incredible songs of response. And yet it is actually our bank statement that gives a truer picture. As to whether your treasure is in heaven or not.

Your money, my money, always follows what I love. We spend our money on what is most important to us. Money is not just a kind of behavioural pattern problem.

[7 : 04] It is a heart problem. And that is the battle where our deepest desires and treasures and the values and the motivations of our heart are. So as we look at 2 Corinthians 8, what does Paul want us to see?

Paul does want the Corinthians to give more. Where does he go? He goes to their heart. He wants them to give with a big smile.

When I was a little boy, we went to Kenya. And we went to all sorts of different churches while we were there. It was great fun. Some churches still, I remember vividly.

One of them was a very staunch Presbyterian church. And it had obviously been planted by Scottish Presbyterians. They had metical sounds.

They all sang very rigidly. And it was a very serious service, all these Africans. But from one point. And that was when the offering was. And at that point, it all kicked off.

[8 : 04] They danced and they smiled. And they jinked down the aisle. And they smiled. And then the next son. That's how Paul wants you to give.

He wants you to give with a big, big African smile. So where does he go? He goes to their heart. And first of all, he wants to say that excellent giving flows from right living.

Excellent giving. That's what he gives them an example of. So, Paul says, look at these guys who are excellent in giving. Look at 2 Corinthians chapter 8. We want you to know, brothers, about the church of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia.

For in severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means of their own accord, begging us earnestly for the favour of taking part in the relief of the saints.

And this not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord, and then by the will of God to us. Now the context here is this. Paul has set up a fund, a mercy fund, for the church in Jerusalem.

[9 : 11] The church in Jerusalem has always struggled with extreme poverty, right from the beginning of its existence. At the end of the first letter of Corinthians, Paul has said, take up an offering for the church in Jerusalem.

And later in this chapter, you can read on and see that the Corinthian church responded really well initially. But actually, they're giving a slow. Twelve months later, they've not actually given what they said they would.

And so Paul is spending two whole chapters in his letter to encourage and motivate them to give the money that they have pledged. And here at the beginning of chapter 8, he's drawing their attention to this stunning example of the churches in Macedonia.

And as you read these verses, it really is stunning. Here are churches that are going through their own difficulties, severe difficulties, in terms of their own poverty. And yet Paul says, out of an overflowing joy, they gave richly and generously.

But it's more than that, isn't it? Do you know, don't you love this phrase? They didn't give as much as they were able to. Which is what churches always say, isn't it? Please do give as much as you're able to.

[10 : 20] Paul says, no, no, no. They gave beyond their ability to give, didn't they? I didn't know. We're going to tick in the offering in the next one. Please do give beyond your ability to give.

They begged with Paul to give to the churches of the Jerusalem. And Paul says, here's your example. And Paul says to them, you Corinthians, you say that you excel in so many things, in faith, speech, knowledge, wisdom, and earnestness, love.

Well, match your excellency. And those things, by giving. Now, you know, when Christians get into the discussions of giving, it goes along these lines.

How much did we give? Well, the Old Testament minimum standard was a tiny, 10%. And we start to calculate in our minds, think about it for you, 10% of my salary, that's a lot of money, isn't it? Now, was it gross, or was it net? And then you come to the New Testament, and you can't find anything on tithing at all. Jesus mentions it in Matthew 23, he kind of chastises the religious leaders for being willing to tithe pretty much everything, but actually show no mercy to people.

[11 : 28] And Paul spends two chapters in 2 Corinthians, and he doesn't mention tithing once. Now, before you sigh it, a huge sigh of relief, Paul's intention is not to lower our giving at all, but to increase it.

And he seems to be moving beyond the concept of tithe, to the guideline of sacrifice. He provides the example of Christians who gave beyond their ability.

We say, what does that actually mean? Well, it means they made sacrifices in their daily living. How much did they spend on clothes, and travel, and food, or luxuries.

Here is the gospel principle behind being excellent in giving. It's that if our giving doesn't cut tangibly into our lifestyle, it's not excelling in giving.

If we can't say, there are things that I used to do, and there are things that I can't do, because we're giving money away, because I'm giving our money away.

[12 : 36] It's something I'd love to do, but actually I want to give in this way at the moment. Patricia Heaton, she's the actress in Everyone Loves Raymond. We love, Everybody Loves Raymond.

It's pretty, it's 20 minutes long. It's about length, but I can concentrate watching something. It's quite funny. Anyway, Everybody Loves Raymond, if you've not seen it. She goes to a Presbyterian church in the US.

She was putting in Patricia Heaton six million dollars a year, and listen to what she said. She said, I struggle to keep it simple. Obedience, sacrifice, and modesty are not real popular buzzwords in Hollywood.

An issue I have at the moment is do I have too much money, or am I being a good steward of it? In fact, I was talking to a friend about tithing, just giving your 10%, as opposed to giving it until it actually hurts, costing you something.

And I began to think that is what tithing was all about anyway. She's right. Here is what excellent giving is all about. It is giving beyond your ability, such that it actually costs you something.

[13 : 39] So the New Testament does not lower the bar in terms of giving. It raises the bar. And that is a huge, that is a huge challenge, isn't it?

And it's something that all of us struggle with. And even though Paul starts his appeal to the Corinthians with this example of Macedonian Christians, it is not to guilt them into giving more. That's not what he's doing.

Churches are notorious, aren't they, for laying guilt trips on people to give more. That is not the gospel way. So Paul says, here is an excellent example of giving. And look what Paul writes next. He says, but I am not commanding you, verse 8. I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing with the earnestness of others.

Excellent giving comes from gospel love. thing. It's not a command. It's not an order. It's more of a heart type. God doesn't actually need your money.

[14 : 41] It's not when the bag comes around every week. God's saying the coffers are a little low and I really need you to kind of keep the kingdom building thing going. No, this is the God who owns a cattle on a thousand hills, isn't it?

God owns the whole world. This earth belongs to God. We sang in our opening hymn. All the resources are his.

The universe belongs to him. And so why does God want you to give so generously, so graciously, so sacrificially? Let me tell you why. It's for your benefit.

It's for our benefit. Not for his. It is to keep our hearts in the right place. Seeking the right treasure. Great Bloomberg says this. Materialism may well be the biggest competitor with the God of Jesus Christ for the allegiance of the human heart in the world today.

[15 : 39] That is so helpful. Let me read it to you again. Materialism may well be the biggest competitor with the God of Jesus Christ for the allegiance of the human heart today. The biggest threat in this country is not Islam.

The biggest threat in this country is not atheism. The biggest threat in this country is that our hearts are consumed by materialism. It's not a battle of the mind.

It's a battle of the heart played out ultimately in what do we love. Because where your treasure is, that's where your heart will be. And we have been seduced, haven't we, into thinking that money and materialism materialism, they are the secret to a good life.

They are the secret to finding life as it was meant to be. And money blinds us, I think, in two ways. Money blinds us, first of all, by tricking us into believing that it provides safety and security.

That money will provide you with safety and security. That money is the safety net. That as long as, as long as I've got money, even if I lose my job, I'll be alright. If I lose my job, it doesn't actually matter because I run loads of savings and investments as I feel secure.

[16 : 50] That is not to say that savings and investments and having some wise kind of help, that is not a good thing. It is a good thing. But when wealth becomes a security blanket, it actually makes us afraid of giving to the levels that the Bible encourages.

it's not that we're stingy. It's that we're fearful. We think that money will make us safe. But to give 10% or more, or close to 10%, it will make us feel vulnerable.

And actually, I'm not willing to do that. I'm not willing to make myself vulnerable. And that is actually true whether you have, whether you have loads of money or whether you don't anyway.

Money blinds us, spiritually, and it tricks us into thinking that money is what we need to be safe and secure. Secondly, money blinds us spiritually because it's addictive.

It's addictive. When you start to make a little bit more money than you did before, it allows you to do things that you didn't do before. Those things used to be luxury because you've done without them before.

[18 : 01] But now you've got those things and you get used to those things. And surprise, surprise, the luxuries become necessities. So now you can't do without them and you end up feeling that you need more and more just to feel normal.

And along with that, money allows you to live in better places, to go on better holidays. And you think, well, once I'm there, I'll be happy and I'll be complete. The problem is, isn't it, we all know really that when you get into those kind of socioeconomic brackets, there are always people who are better off than you.

So you've got to keep making more to keep up. And money is so deceptive that as you're making more, you have this constant fear, this constant feeling that you are still financially too strapped to

give away to gospel work.

And the reality is a lie because you do have enough. you and I are always better off than we think.

And the reason we don't think we are is because we've become addicts.

We think we need just a little bit more to survive and our hearts have been deceived so that we love the wrong thing. And Jesus says, doesn't he, be on your guard. Be on your guard against that kind of thinking.

[19 : 17] He says, be on your guard against greed, Luke 12. Constantly ply yourself with questions. Always question your spending. So ask yourself by buying this thing, what am I really saying about what I really love in this life?

Do I really need this? Do I need more than this? If I didn't buy this thing that I really don't need, who could I give this money to? And I suspect if this morning you're not willing even to ask those questions, it's probably a red flag that your ultimate love is misplaced in this life.

So you follow me so far? If I was to examine my giving, I think I would have to say I don't examine it. And I see that that might be because I'd be deceived by money to love the wrong things in life.

So how do I make this shift from loving the wrong things to loving the right things? Excellent giving by loving the right things which flows from a transformed heart.

We will love the right things by having a gospel transformed heart. Excellent giving flows from right loving which comes by having a gospel transformed heart. And I want you to see two things as we finish on this.

[20 : 40] How am I going to get a gospel transformed heart? Number one, I've got to have a new vision of the future. And number two, I've got to grasp of extremes in the past. First of all, a new view of the future.

I've known to love Luke chapter 16. Everybody loves Luke 15 with the parable of the prodigal son. But Luke 16 is the parable of a shrewd manager. I think for 36 years I never understood it.

It's the parable of a man. It's the parable of a shrewd manager. But Jesus' main point in Luke chapter 16 is to encourage his followers to be shrewd in how they invest their money.

And you read Jesus make that point and you think to yourself, what would be a shrewd investment in Jesus' mind? And he tells us, let me read it to you. And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal dwellings.

Let me read it to you in another version because it's so countercultural. use your worldly resources to benefit others and make friends then so when your worldly possessions are gone they will welcome you into an eternal home.

[21 : 56] Everyone, everyone here wants to invest shrewdly to put our money in a place where the return will be a good one. And Jesus says, I've got an offer for you. Jesus says, I have an investment for you that will give you an eternal return.

He says, I tell you, invest your money in making friends because one day the money will be gone. You cannot take it with you but with all those friends there will be one almighty welcome for you in heaven.

It's the most amazing thing. Let me picture it for you. You arrive in heaven on the first day and there are people hanging off the lampposts saying, there she is and somebody is, somebody says, there she is.

Somebody says, who? Who is it? There's that lady. What lady? There's that lady that bought that Bible for me and met with me to read it. Somebody's hanging on the other side of the lamppost and says, there he is.

There's who? There's the guy from IPC that gave sacrificially to the church that the church could be planted in York and that was my church when I was a student there and I became a Christian through that church.

[23 : 07] Imagine those kind of welcomes. You know what it's like when you get to the church meeting and those of you were there and it's church budget time and you're given the sheet of paper?

I don't know about you, I'm not very good with figures. Church budgets and those sheets and this sheet there, it doesn't really rock my book. It's numbers on a page. It doesn't seem that inspiring, does it?

You get pie charts, we're all very excited about pie charts coming to the ATM. But the numbers on a church budget translate to a lot of welcomes in heaven. From people whose lives are transformed

in ways that you don't even know.

People will say in heaven, I'm so glad that you faithfully gave to your church because you might not know it but it was through that children's ministry in that church that I came to the Lord Jesus Christ. Or they might say I want to thank you for the way that through your church you gave me financial assistance in my time of need. You have no idea that what you were giving changed the whole direction of our family or in the name of Jesus.

[24 : 15] Or let's say do you remember that building process in 2014, 2015 and you gave to that and then in 2048 my daughter came to the kids club and she dragged me along to church and it changed my life and it transformed my family.

They said you gave to the church and you didn't know it but I came as a baby to Little Stars and my mother brought me to Little Stars on a Monday and then I came to the kids club and it was through that my eternity was changed.

And they will say thank you for having you invested your money. And those people will wait at the gates of heaven and they will give you an almighty welcome and do you know what?

You won't even know most of them. And there are welcomes already in store for us, aren't there? Because of the generous giving that you've given already through your life and Jesus says you won't keep doing it.

Don't you want more of those welcomes on that day? Not just from the Lord Jesus Christ who will say well done good and faithful servant but there will be cheerleaders all around him. People will just say I just want to say thanks I just want to say thanks for what you did.

[25 : 32] What did I do? I gave. Generous giving comes from a right view of the future. Secondly we will love the right things by grasping and exchanging the past. Do you remember the Scooter jokes?

Do you remember the Scooter jokes? There is somebody in the congregation that's got a Scooter isn't there? I've just realised that. Can I have permission of Charles Scooter? What do you call a Scooter with two exhausts?

A wheelbarrow. Why do Scooters have reheated windows to keep your hands warm when you're pushing it? The man goes into the garage and he says can I have a petrol cap for my Scooter? The mechanic says sounds like a fair exchange. For you and I to become excellent givers there needs to be an exchange.

There needs to be an exchange for my love of money for the love of Jesus. There's got to be an exchange. And Jesus says that exchange happens when you grasp what Jesus underwent for us.

[26 : 37] Look what he writes in verses 7 to 9. Verses 7 to 9. But as you excel in everything in faith, knowledge, your earnestness and our love for you also see that you excel in this act of grace also.

I say this not as a command but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love may also be genuine. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that though he was rich yet for your sake he became poor so that by his poverty you might become rich.

What is Paul talking about? He's talking about the Trinity. He's talking about what was Jesus like before he came to earth? What did Jesus enjoy? Jesus enjoyed with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, the Blessed Trinity.

He enjoyed all things. And the universe belongs to him. You don't get much ritual on that. And when he came to this earth he lived in poverty. He lived literally in poverty.

He had no fixed address. He had nowhere to call his own home. But you see his economic poverty is just a picture of what was going to happen to him at the cross. Because on the cross he is plunged into spiritual poverty.

[27 : 40] Jesus lost all his power and all his glory. He lost that fatherly relationship with God for the first time in all eternity.

Heaven echoes for those words my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? He lost his ultimate treasure. He liquidated everything he had for you and me. The spiritually poor.

And why did he do that? He did it to pay the debt that you and I should pay for our greed. And he did that to pay the debt that you and I should pay for our love of money and material things.

And he did that so you and I could inherit eternal life. But only by paying the penalty himself could he ever enter the kingdom. It was an act of sheer radical grace on his part.

And Paul points to that exchange. But if money was your ultimate good thing, and you'll know this morning if it's your ultimate good thing by how much it consumes your thinking and your planning.

[28 : 41] And you'll know it's your good thing by how much your happiness is built on your latest purchase. You'll know it's your ultimate good thing by how hard it is to give away money sacrificially.

And if that is your situation, it's because you've forgotten or you've not experienced the radical grace of God. We haven't seen that the grace that God has shown to you, you can show that grace to others.

You lack the inner wealth that Jesus was willing to give up everything for you. He was willing to pay anything it would take for you. So that Paul is saying, if you know how much you are treasured by Jesus this morning, then do you know what that does to your view of money?

Knowing that you are treasured by the God of this universe, your money it becomes, it becomes money. And it's not a bad thing. It's not a bad thing at all, but it's just money.

It stops money being your source of security. It stops money being your source of beauty, your means of significance. It just becomes money. And when it's just money, well, you feel liberated to give away. Liberated to give to the church.

[29 : 56] Liberated to give to the poor. And you love blessing others through your generosity, instead of building your identity for what you have. Though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor so that by his poverty you might become rich.

You cannot love God and money at the same time. love. And if Jesus isn't your ultimate love, Paul says you've got to go to the exchange.

What difference does it make to know what Paul is teaching? Well, it makes all the difference in the world, doesn't it? Let me finish with a stupid story. A man and a wife with a garden gnome.

It was a four-foot garden gnome. Actually, the gnome had her. She loved that gnome. She went out into the garden, she cleaned it daily, she set up a garden around the gnome.

It was the centre of attention on the front lawn. Her husband, however, detested the gnome. It was ugly as far as he was concerned. It was the source of his friends' constant jokes. It was a pain when he had to cut the grass and move the gnome and move the garden furniture.

[31 : 12] It was a pain. He hated that gnome. One weekend when his wife was off town, he drove two hours to a large lake. He rented a boat and he dumped the gnome in the middle of the lake.

And he uttered a joyful goodbye to the gnome. When his wife returned after the weekend, and noticed the gnome was no longer in the garden, she was overwhelmed with grief. Her husband looked at her and said, Dear, I know how much that gnome meant to you, and I'm going to put an ad in the local paper, and I'm going to give an award of \$500 to anyone who finds the gnome.

Well, the gnome didn't show up. So he said to his wife, he said, Honey, you mean more to me than anything on this earth, and if this gnome is precious to you, it's precious to me.

I'll tell you what I'll do. We'll put another ad and raise the ante. We'll raise the reward to \$10,000. So a friend of the husband says, You've got to be crazy. There's not a gnome in this world that is worth \$10,000.

And the husband says, When you know what I know, you can afford to be generous. Brothers and sisters, boys and girls, when you know what we know, when you know what the future holds, that there will be people in heaven that will wait at the gates and will welcome you in and say, Thank you, thank you, thank you.

[32 : 39] And when we know that that exchange was made for you and I in the past, that Jesus Christ, the Lord of heaven and earth, who was rich beyond all splendour, became poor for your sake, you and I can afford to be radically, radically generous.

Let's pray.