

Paul was careful to remember the poor in Jerusalem for whom a collection had been organized. The Corinthians had started to take part, but for some reason had slacked off. Paul encourages them to get back on track and uses the churches in Macedonia as an example. In this passage Paul gives reasons why the Corinthians should follow that example in giving generously.

### 1. ***Give to excel in God's grace (8:6-7)***

In these verses Paul calls their giving, literally, “this grace”. Generous giving is an evidence of God’s grace working in a person’s heart. The Corinthians had shown an abundance of God’s grace in many other areas: spiritual gifts and general Christian virtues.

Note: “your love for us” (NIV, vs 7) has textual differences and is itself difficult to translate. A comparison with other translations reveals the challenge. The most probable sense is the love which the Corinthians had for others which came about by the message and example which Paul had given.

In all these other areas – faith, speech, knowledge, earnestness, and love – the Corinthians had excelled. Now Paul encourages them: excel in this grace as well, that of generous giving.

Giving can appear to be a very human activity, but selfless, generous giving is a work of God’s grace in our hearts. In a materialistic culture the believer can especially appreciate this evidence of God’s grace in the heart.

### 2. ***Give to demonstrate sincere love (8:8-9)***

What we do with our money, often shows what we consider to be important and how serious we are. (Cf. “put your money where your mouth is.”) Giving, therefore, can demonstrate the sincerity of one’s love.

Paul is careful not to command the Corinthians to give, which would test their obedience but not the sincerity of their love. The earnestness of the Macedonians, giving freely even beyond their ability, would put their own sincerity to the test.

The ultimate example of this grace of giving is the grace of Jesus Christ Himself (vs 9) which concisely summarizes the effects of the incarnation including its benefit for believers. Jesus left all the riches and glory of heaven to become a man, taking the nature of a servant (Philippians 2:5-8). Although he was Lord, he humbled himself and obeyed, ultimately dying on a cross, bearing our sins for our sake. In this way we could participate in the life of God and receive all spiritual blessings in Him. Through His poverty we could become rich.

Our generosity shows our understanding and appreciation of what Christ did for us. The parable of the unforgiving servant illustrates this. Our love for God is shown by our love for our brothers and sisters in Christ (1 John 4:20). Our generosity to brothers and sisters in need demonstrates the sincerity of our love.

### 3. ***Give to conform actions to desires (8:10-11)***

Note: “Last year you were the first ...” (NIV) is better translated “since you made a good start last year ...” (NEV).

The Corinthians had desired to participate in the collection, had actually begun, but for some reason had stopped. Paul encourages them to match their desire with action. If a generous spirit reveals the sincerity of one’s love, then giving reveals and confirms the generous spirit. As faith without works is dead (James 2:15-17), so also it does help to say, “I love you brother” but then do nothing about his physical needs. Cf. 1 John 3:17-18. Our love and our desire to help must come to action.

Paul says that putting desire to action would be “best” (NIV) or to the “advantage” of the Corinthians. The word is also translated “profitable”. “Profit” makes us think of good investments. Jesus said that the safest place to store your treasure is in heaven (Matthew 6:19-21). When we hoard our surplus, when others have need, we are not profiting ourselves.

### 4. ***Give to fulfil God's purpose in abundance (8:12-15)***

To understand the final reason, it is important to understand the condition that one gives “according to your means” (vs 11, cf. vs 12). No amount (absolute or percentage) is specified, as was in the OT. Tithing, as taught in the OT, is not taught in the NT. NT believers should give according to their means, which demands of us that we live by the Spirit and not according to law. We must discern between need and abundance, self-interest and generosity.

God has as a purpose in giving us an abundance, that we generously give to others in need (vv 13-14). At the moment the Corinthians had an abundance and the believers in Jerusalem had a need. In the future that might change. Those who had an abundance should give to help those who had true need. (This is not an equalization of property or condoning laziness. Cf 2 Thess 3:10.)

Paul supports his conclusion the provision of manna during the wilderness wanderings of Israel. It was not possible to hoard the manna, since any excess would stink and get maggots. Whether by divine provision or by sharing among themselves, everyone had exactly what was needed each day. That is the way which God provides for His people. Abundance is not to be hoarded, but used to help those in true need. See also 1 Timothy 6:17-19.

This passage looks at the issue of truly giving and not at paying those who labor or paying our bills. We give to needy brothers and sisters, not because we are under law and must give a certain amount. It is not because we earn salvation by giving alms. We give out of what we have, out of our abundance, to those who are in need in order to excel in God’s grace, to demonstrate the sincerity of our love, to put action to words & desires, and to fulfil God’s purpose in that abundance. God richly provides us everything for our enjoyment, but most of all desires that we become like Christ, to grow in His grace, by giving out of our abundance to help those who desperately need it.