



Sermon, Sunday July 7, 2024 “The Collection for the Lord’s People”

SCRIPTURE: 2 Corinthians 8:1-15 ¹ We want you to know, brothers and sisters, about the grace of God that has been granted to the churches of Macedonia, ² for during a severe ordeal of affliction their abundant joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. ³ For, as I can testify, they voluntarily gave according to their means and even beyond their means, ⁴ begging us earnestly for the favor of partnering in this ministry to the saints, ⁵ and not as we expected. Instead, they gave themselves first to the Lord and, by the will of God, to us, ⁶ so that we might urge Titus that, as he had already made a beginning, so he should also complete this generous undertaking among you. ⁷ Now as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in utmost eagerness, and in our love for you—so we want you to excel also in this generous undertaking. ⁸ I do not say this as a command, but I am, by mentioning the eagerness of others, testing the genuineness of your love. ⁹ For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich. ¹⁰ And in this matter I am giving my opinion: it is beneficial for you who began last year not only to do something but even to desire to do something. ¹¹ Now finish doing it, so that your eagerness may be matched by completing it according to your means. ¹² For if the eagerness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what one does not have. ¹³ For I do not mean that there should be relief for others and hardship for you, but it is a question of equality between ¹⁴ your present abundance and their need, so that their abundance may also supply your need, in order that there may be equality. ¹⁵ As it is written, “The one who had much did not have too much, and the one who had little did not have too little.”

Introduction: Jerusalem Church

Today is the seventh Sunday after Pentecost. The title of today’s message is ‘The Collection for the Lord’s People.’ The story about a generous gift in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9, including today’s text, refers not to an offering in the general sense, but to a relief fund for a Jerusalem church in trouble.

There are two reasons why the Jerusalem Church, which could be considered the mother church of all churches at the time, experienced difficulties. First, because severe famines were repeated, the economic situation of the entire Jerusalem area became difficult. Second, because of persecution from Judaism, Jerusalem believers (mainly Hellenistic Jewish Christians) were scattered to various regions. This is described in detail in Chapter 8 of Acts.

Apostle Paul launches a campaign to help the struggling Jerusalem church. In response to Paul’s campaign, the churches of Philippi and Thessalonica in the Macedonia region and the Corinthian church in the Achaia region joined. However, although the fundraising campaign proceeded normally in the Macedonia region, it was sluggish in the Corinthian church. The reason fundraising at the Corinthian church was sluggish was because a movement to reject Paul was taking place in the Corinthian church at the time. At that time, many believers in the Corinthian church denied Paul’s leadership and authority.

Paul sent his disciple Titus to Corinth to solve this problem. He received word from Titus that the problem with his apostolic authority had resolved. Later, while writing a letter to the Corinthians, Paul again mentions the issue of alms for the Jerusalem church.



But why was Paul so passionate about helping the Jerusalem church? In fact, if we think only from Paul's perspective, it is rather natural for Paul to ignore the difficulties of the Jerusalem church. This is because the Jerusalem church is also responsible for the movement to reject Paul within the Corinthian church. The rejection of Paul within the Corinthian church at that time began when the people sent from the Jerusalem church to the Corinthian church criticized Paul. They said Corinthian church members that Paul had no authority as an apostle and that his teachings about the law were wrong. The members of the Corinthian church were greatly influenced by their words.

Considering this situation, it is more natural for Apostle Paul to disapprove of the Jerusalem church. However, Apostle Paul earnestly asks the members of the Corinthian church to provide donations for the Jerusalem church. At that time, the reason that Apostle Paul was able to ask the Corinthian church members for donations for the Jerusalem church regardless of his personal feelings was because of his religious view (ecclesiology).

Paul compared the church to a body in 1 Corinthians 12:12-27. According to Paul, all believers are members of one body in Christ. The core of Paul's ecclesiology is that all believers are in an organic relationship. This means that there is no high or low between individual believers within the church. Also, among individual believers within the church, it does not matter whether they are recognized by the world or not. From Paul's ecclesiology, it is natural for other churches to share the suffering of the Jerusalem church members.

Body: Paul's vision for a fair balance

As I mentioned above, Paul did not conduct a campaign of donations for the Jerusalem church for his own pastoral achievements. Apostle Paul was a mature person who is free from others' recognition and evaluation of his honor and achievements. Apostle Paul confessed in Romans 14:8 as follows: **“If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.”**

In fact, it is inconvenient to urge people to give alms to help other churches. Paul's urging for donations was burdensome for the Corinthians. Also, from Paul's personal perspective, it would be a burden if the Corinthians did not respond to the campaign. However, Paul did not back down because he knew that the church was the body of Christ. If you read today's text, we can fully understand his feelings. Verse 8 of today's text says: **‘I do not say this as a command, but I am testing the genuineness of your love against the earnestness of others.’**

In this passage, Paul says that he is not giving command to the Corinthian church. Paul is appealing to the Corinthians and persuading them. In Chapter 9 of 2 Corinthians, Paul tells the Corinthian church that the churches in Macedonia participated ‘excessively’ in raising relief funds. When Paul mentioned this, he did not mean to create competition among the churches. Paul's purpose was to confirm whether the love of the Corinthian church believers was genuine.

Paul believed that the Corinthian church's participation in raising relief funds for the Jerusalem church before the churches in Macedonia was possible because of the Corinthian church's genuine love for the Jerusalem church. Paul wanted to spread the word that the Corinthian church's love for its neighboring churches was genuine.

There may have been some people in the Corinthian church who responded to Paul's thoughts, and others who did not. Whether in the past or present, it is inevitable that people who believe in God and go to the same church may have different thoughts. Some people are more active in the essence of faith, while others look more closely at reality. So, Apostle Paul represents the heart of a person who examines reality as follows: Verses 13-14 of today's text say: **‘I do not mean that there should be relief for others and pressure on you,**



but it is a question of a fair balance between your present abundance and their need, so that their abundance may be for your need, in order that there may be a fair balance.'

Perhaps, among the Corinthian church members at that time, there were those who thought that since their own finances were not sufficient, they should save the church finances for difficult times rather than using them to help the Jerusalem church. Apostle Paul may have heard about this situation in the Corinthian church through Titus. So, Paul explains gently, like a teacher teaching young students. Paul said that your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. Paul thought that the fundamental goal of relief fund collection is to achieve **'fair balance'**.

Here we can see Apostle Paul's vision for 'fair balance'. Paul explains his vision with an example from the Old Testament. In verse 15 of today's text, Paul quotes Exodus 16:18 and says the following: **'He who gathered much did not have too much, and he who gathered little did not have too little.'**

Chapter 16 of Exodus is the 'story of manna.' The ancient Jews who lived in the wilderness after the Exodus were able to avoid starving to death for 40 years in the wilderness with God's help. They went out into the wilderness every morning and gathered a day's worth of manna according to the number of people in their family. However, some people went out in the morning and gathered a lot of manna, while others gathered a little. However, according to the Book of Exodus in the Old Testament, it is recorded that those who gathered a lot had nothing left over, and those who gathered a little did not lack anything, and each person gathered enough to eat. This passage clearly expresses Paul's vision for a fair balance.

However, many modern people may think that this expression is too idealistic. Because human nature seeks to possess more things. So, some people cannot give up their desire for possessions even though they have earned enough money to last their entire life. This is the reality of the capitalist world we live in. However, if humans reject the vision for a fair balance, I believe that the Lord will lead us to such a world according to His will.

Conclusion: Is the power of love in our lives?

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ! Now let's summarize today's message. The desire for a fair balance where there is neither excess nor deficiency is not given to us automatically. Paul said to the Corinthian church as follows, 'I am testing the genuineness of your love against the earnestness of others,' the key is whether we can love.

We must be able to truly love our lives, which the Lord has granted us as a gift. Also, we must be able to share the suffering of our neighbors around us.

We are people who have experienced God's love through the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Therefore, we must live each of our daily lives to the full, hoping for a fair balance where humans can live like human beings. For this purpose, I hope that the power of love given by the Lord will come to all of us. **Amen!**

