

# The Generosity of the Macedonian Christians: A Godly Model for Christian Giving

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**Abstract:** In recent times, concerns have been raised by section of the Church regarding the excessive demands for money by the Church. The argument is that the excessive demands are to the detriment to the personal needs of the congregants. What is more, the presence of Covid-19 has partially led to worsen economic situations, which has in a way affected the giving pattern of the Church. This situation drew the attention of this researcher to the generosity of the Macedonian Christians as found in 2 Cor. 8 & 9. Using secondary sources and the theory of gratitude this paper established that the Macedonian Christians exhibited prosocial behaviour and were energised to sustain their moral behaviour through giving in the midst of severe afflictions. They gave not only to show appreciation for the extension of the Gospel to them, but to aid in the mission work of the Church. In this regard, severe economic and social situations should not deter believers from giving to the Church.

**Key Words:** Giving, Macedonian Christians, severe afflictions, gratitude, and generosity.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The study deals with the generosity of the Macedonia Christians, which is seen as a godly model when it comes to Christian giving in the Church. It unearths lessons that the Ghanaian Church can learn from the generosity of the Macedonia Christians. It commences with the definition of concepts, statement of the problem, formation and situations, theory and ends with guiding principles.

It is significant from the onset to state the context in which certain terms or words have been used in this write-up. The researcher is aware that giving in the Christian context can be understood from various perspectives. For instance, it refers to devoting one's expertise or time for God's work, yet it would not be considered from this perspective. This is because it would be extremely difficulty quantifying one's expertise or time into monetary value. In this sense, giving, in this context, refers to contributing financially or resource wise to the Church. Additionally, the Macedonia Church is used in this context to represents the churches in Phillippi, Berea and Thessalonica established by Apostle Paul during his missionary journeys (Melick Jr. R. Richard, 1989).

### *Statement of the Problem*

Even though giving has been part of the religious practices of the Church since its inception, over the ages, a section of the laity has raised concern regarding the excessive demands for money by the Church (Turner, 1967; Beckmann,

1975 and Shaibu 2010 & 2018). It is common knowledge that humanity is in a tight financial situation especially with the advent of covid-19, which has partially worsened economic situations in the Church and world in general. The discontentment of some believers' couple with the covid-19 as well as worsen economic situation draws one's attention to the generosity exhibited by the Macedonian Christians as recorded in 2 Corinthians chapter 8 and 9. The current socioeconomic scenario in Ghana may not be identical to that of the Macedonian Church, yet poverty is a common denominator between the two nations. For instance, Philip (1962:288) describes the economic situation of the Macedonian Christians as 'rock bottom poverty'. According to World Bank (2020) report, poverty is still a challenge in Ghana. Interestingly, Bruce (1971) claims that neither persecution nor poverty could deter the Macedonian Christians from exhibiting a worthy generosity. Per the act of the Macedonian Christians, one is tempted to believe that their giving was not in any way influenced or determined by worldly or material factor(s). It is against this backdrop that this paper seeks to critically assess lessons that the Ghanaian Church can learn from the generosity of the Macedonian Christians.

### *Formation and Situations*

The Roman province of Macedonia comprised the northern part of Greece, wherein were found Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea. The churches in Macedonia were planted by Paul during his second missionary journeys in the course of his mission (Melick Jr , 1989) as a Christian evangelist. The birth of the churches in this geographical location was accompanied by much apposition toward the apostles and the Macedonian converts. Like all other churches within the Roman world, the Macedonia Church was occasionally persecuted by some Roman authorities or the representatives of some the Roman authorities and this was because of their new found faith. Additionally, the Macedonian Church, like all other churches of that era, face other challenges such as (double) taxation, widowhood, socio-economic ostracism and a severe famine that rocked the world in 47-49 C.E. (Barnett, 1999). Perhaps the worst hit was the Jerusalem Church who was impoverished because of its failure to sustain their communal living spirit (See Acts 4:32-33). Hence, these challenges, to some extent worsened the plight of the Church in general and that of the Jerusalem in

particular. It is in this context that the Macedonia Church had to give to support the Jerusalem Church (Morris, 1978).

To help curb the situation concerning the Jerusalem Church, that at the end of the Jerusalem Ecumenical Council deliberations, the inner core disciples requested Apostle Paul to raise funds to support the Jew saints (Barnett, 1999), hence the coming into being of Pauline theology of fundraising and the financial contributions of the Macedonia Church. This is not to suggest that the inner core disciples and Paul in particular were insensitive to the plight of the Macedonia Christians in that the latter continue in their afflictions while the Jerusalem Church should have relief. Instead, Paul envisions reciprocal relationships in which the gifts of the Macedonia Church will assist alleviate the material needs of the Jerusalem Church and this could be reversed in the future. This arrangement is likely to result in some form of equality (See 2 Corinthians 8:14). It is obvious that Paul may have accepted as well as admitted the difficulties that existed within the Church, yet in order to achieve a true Christian fellowship, this practice had to be put in place. One this agrees with Ogereau, (2012) that the collection was directed at refining the inequality that existed in the Roman Society and in this case, the Church in particular.

Regarding the response of the beneficiaries of the Macedonia gift, the book of Acts informs us that the Jerusalem Church evidently received the gift gladly.<sup>1</sup> This implies that the Jerusalem Church will thank God for the generosity of the Gentile Christians as well as reciprocate the kind gesture by interceding for the donors. Additionally, the gift will facilitate the unity of the Jewish and Gentile Christians (Plummer, 1966). It is worth stating that the significance of the donor to the Jerusalem Church had been dealt with by Colin Kruse.

#### *Theory of Gratitude*

Gratitude has been theorised as a moral affect with both precursors and consequences (McCullough, Kilpatrick, Emmons & Larson, 2001). Gratitude according to McCullough et al. serves as a moral barometer, motivator and reinforcer. They argue that when person experiences gratitude, such a person is motivated to carry out a prosocial behaviour and a person is energised to sustain such moral behaviours. Similarly, gratitude is a virtue that occupies a core place in Judea-Christian tradition. Gratitude, as noted by Robert and Teresa (2005), is a virtue that expresses a sentiment in response to a gift and entails an obligation. Pao (2002), for example, has stated that gratitude is a central feature in Pauline fundraising strategies. For instance, the Gentile Christians expressed their gratitude, through their contributions, for the unconditional favour regarding the extension of the gospel to them. Additionally, they were indebted to the Jewish Christians and this they fulfilled through their contributions. The kindness of God toward the

Gentile Christians served as a moral barometer in this regard. Additionally, their moral motive led to their prosocial behaviours, which subsequently led to their contributions towards relieving the suffering of the Jerusalem Saints.

The above theoretical framework guides the study. As recipients of the gospel, are the Macedonian Christians motivated to exhibit prosocial behaviours and energised to sustain their moral behaviours in the midst of their severe afflictions?

#### *The Guiding Principles*

This section deals with the guiding principles and the lessons that the Ghanaian Church can learn from the illustration of the Macedonia Church and these are grace, ability, godly model, Jesus' sacrifice, self-offering, resources, opportunity, natural and special revelation, sow cheerfully and interdependence of believers.

The act of giving is a natural instinct that should be guided by a genuine and clear fundraising vision (Tolson, 2003). Bisagno (2002) notwithstanding thinks that such a natural instinct should be presented with a logical, reasonable thought-out plan that would meet the need and inspire people to give. Although giving is a natural instinct, it is one thing that believers cannot do without the essence of grace. Apart from what Tolson and Bisagno advocate, God's grace is the most powerful driving force for giving, and the Macedonian Christians' generosity in the face of adversity (2 Cor. 8: 2) is a wonderful example. The generosity of the Macedonian Christians is to encourage today's Christians to do same. It is significant to note that without the grace, the Macedonians could not have exhibited such generosity. In fact, considering their predicaments, indicated earlier, as at the time of raising the funds, (2 Cor. 8: 2- *for in the severe test of affliction, their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of liberality on their part*) one can say that their generosity was totally beyond natural bound. Indeed, God's grace 'moved' people to always do the positively unthinkable. Their giving was truly a work of divine grace. Apostle Paul saw the generosity of the Macedonians as a true reflection of the sufficiency of God's power that empowered them to exhibit that act of charity (2 Cor. 9: 8 & Psalm 112: 9).

Although their situation was 'rock bottom' poverty (Hughes, 1962) the Macedonians decided to be a testimony to the admonishing of James 1: 2- that say Christians should count it all joy when they meet various trials. In this regard, the Macedonians did not only experience joy but had it overflowing even in the midst of afflictions. Furthermore, just as persecution did not curtail their joy, neither did their poverty deter them from exhibiting an admirable charity (Bruce 1971). It is also worth noting that in the midst of their affliction (the Macedonian Christians), God's grace made the Macedonians to have an abundant joy which abounded in their generosity. In this way, the act of the Macedonian Christians is in accord with the theory of gratitude in that God's kindness for extending the Gospel to them can be seen as the barometer

<sup>1</sup> See Acts 21:17

that motivated as well as reinforce them to exhibit their prosocial behaviours in the midst of their affliction. This is illustrated by their financial contributions toward relieving the predicament of the Jerusalem Church.

In 2 Cor. 8: 3-5 the Macedonians gave beyond their ability. This does not mean that they were reckless in their giving. The point is that they gave beyond what they predetermined to give (Church, 1960). They, exceeding their predetermined target exhibited God's grace and it is the grace that could let a Christian always go the extra mile in such situations.

In addition, the generosity of the Macedonian Church offers a godly model for financial stewardship in the Church today. Paul uses the example of the Macedonian Church to motivate the Corinthians and all believers of all ages into understanding that severe difficulties or humanly/worldly factors should not be an excuse or justification for not giving to God. In fact, in spite of their severe affliction, they gave freely and with great joy. They generously gave because they had experienced God's grace (Scott, 1998). Additionally, whatever they gave was based on their own accord. In other words, they were not coerced to give. In fact, they even pleaded to be permitted to be part of the fundraising activity (See 2 Cor. 8: 24). Their plea, according to Church implies that it was a privilege to be part of the fundraising activity.

Further, the generosity of the Gentile Christians further illustrates the greatest sacrifice of Jesus' generosity (2 Cor. 8:9). Jesus' generosity is seen by the prosperity preachers as depicting material prosperity. Notwithstanding, the act goes beyond material prosperity to refer to riches of glory. One agrees with Harris's (1978) assertion that Paul depicts the glory of heavenly existence as wealth, in comparison with the worldly which is the lowliness of earthly existence which amounts to poverty. Paul's stress was on Jesus' voluntary surrender of glory, which is contrasted with the spiritual wealth derived by others (See Eph. 1:3) through His gracious act of giving. In this sense, Jesus gave his riches of glory in heaven as well as life for humanity so that humankind might share in His riches of glory in heaven (See 2 Cor. 8: 9 & Phil. 2: 1-11) (Constable, 2021). Jesus' generosity implies that believers are to put the well-being of their neighbours ahead of their interest.

Aside, the Macedonian generosity depicts their self-offering unto the Lord and then to Paul (2 Cor. 8: 5) and their fellow Jewish Christians. In this sense, their core concern was to serve Jesus Christ, which they demonstrated through giving in an uncomfortable situation. Besides, the love they demonstrated reflects their faithful response to God's self-giving in Jesus Christ. Just as God did not count the cost in giving Jesus Christ to humanity, so were the Gentiles who did not count or rely on their situations before contributing to support the Jewish Saints. The point worth stressing is that when one gives out of love he or she in most cases does not think or consider his or her present situation or predicaments.

What is mostly considered would be the joy that one derives in contributing to relieving a brother who is in need. The Macedonian Church illustrated this when they gave liberally out of their afflictions (Kraftchick, 1993).

Again, the Gentile Christians did not only offer themselves to God just as God did through Jesus Christ, they also gave their resources to God. Their act indicates their acknowledgement of God as the owner and giver of their resources and whatever they gave in support of the Jewish Christians in actual fact was made possible by God's grace. In addition, their act reveals true Christian worship; they worship God with both their body and resources.

In addition, because of the great zeal they had in serving Jesus Christ they did not let their economic situation deter them from the fundraising activity. In this sense, one can say that the Macedonians did not see fundraising as a financial obligation, but rather as an opportunity to minister to their fellow Saints who were in the churches of Jerusalem and Judea. The distance separating the Gentile and Jewish Christians could not deter the former from ministering to the latter.

The generosity of the Macedonian Christians could be viewed from both the natural and special revelation (Melick Jr., 1989). They gave recognizing the fact that God would reciprocate their gesture. As in the case of harvest, the Gentiles would reap in proportion to their sowing (9:6; cf. Luke 6:38; Gal. 6:7-9). There is thus a correlation between the Macedonian Christians and material things, and this is a normative Christian principle. According to Paul, the Gentiles were to give according to how God has blessed them. Regarding this command, one agrees with Melick Jr. that instead of Paul warning the Gentiles (Corinthians) of the repercussions of stinginess, Paul rather threw light on the rewards associated with giving. Perhaps, Paul may have taken this stand because he knew that the Gentile Christians were aware of the repercussions of stinginess. In addition, it could also be that Paul knew that a Christ-like life is devoid of stinginess.

In their sowing, the Gentile Christians were to exhibit a Christ-like life or attitude, which is acceptable unto the Lord. In other words, their sowing would be acceptable and honouring to Christ should they sow cheerfully. On the issue of cheerfulness, Melick Jr. gives two very useful guidelines worth considering. The first is that the gift of the Gentile Christians was to be according to their respective conviction. For instance, a believer should not be influenced by a clergy before giving. The significant thing to do is for one to respond to the promptings of the Holy Spirit in the light of his/her own personal situation. The second is that one should not let any external force determine the quantum of his/her contribution; the ultimate driving force should be the Holy Spirit. In this case, the Gentile Christians did not allow the strained relationship that existed between them and the Jewish Christians (Gal. 2:11-21) or their severe affliction

serve as an obstacle in their giving. In other words, the Gentile Christians did not succumb to any external pressure. When it is under the influence of an external force, one is bound to give grudgingly or out of regret.

To avoid these motives, the giver should give out of a free predetermined commitment. The commitment would then provide the giver with the best conscience and place the giver in God's love since the latter loves a cheerful giver. In this regard, one agrees with Melick Jr. that sowing generously implies responding to the prompting of the Holy Spirit which leads the giver to give based on what God has laid on his/her heart.

Another worthy illustration from the act of the Gentile Christians is the visible expression of the interdependence of believers worldwide. The giving depicts the idea of a community of believers that form a fellowship because of the redeeming feature of the Lord. The Gentile Christians demonstrated this concept in their contribution when they saw their Jewish brethren as part of themselves hence raising funds to relief the Jewish Saints. In this regard, believers are to share their joy and burden together. For instance, as the Gentile Christians supported the Jewish Saints during the latter's time of needs, the latter is supposed to reciprocate that gesture any time the former is also in need (2 Cor. 8:14). In this sense, the researcher thinks that the lives of believers are intertwined and whatever affects one affects the entire body of Christ. Hence, the welfare of a believer should be the concern of all believers since whatever affects one affects the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12: 12-27). It therefore becomes incumbent on believers to always support each other by carrying the burden of each as was demonstrated by the Gentiles (Gal. 6: 2). For this reason, giving unites believers together and offers opportunity for taking care of both the needs of others in the Church, other sister churches and the society. It is significant to note that the level of communal solidarity that existed in the early Church did not take cognizance of ethnicity, strained relationship or any worldly influence. The significant issue worth considering, which of course the Macedonians might have done, is the close union and common faith they shared with the Jewish Christians as belonging to the same body of Jesus Christ. Implicit in this close union is a responsibility to care for those in need in the household of God. In this regard, giving creates a relational perspective.

This interdependence principle also means that material salvation is a corporate affair and the Gentile Christians demonstrated this. Just as the contributions of the Gentile Christians provided material salvation to the Jewish Saints, so are believers expected to emulate the example of the Gentile Christians (James 2: 15-17). In fact, the early Church exhibited this concept through their communal living spirit (Acts 4: 32-37). It is worth adding that the material salvation depicted in Acts 4: 32-37 was also extended to non-Christians (Chadwick, 1967). When believers see material salvation as all-inclusive, they are not only fulfilling scripture (James 2:

15-17) they are emulating the Lord's inclusive redemption of humanity (John 3:16).

In addition, the principle depicts that believers are to live as a community of the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12: 12-27) complementing the efforts of each other for the betterment of the body of Christ. In this aspect, there would be some form of mutuality in the community of Christ since a believer survives better corporately. Martin Luther King, Jr. (1968:12) who affirms that:

We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied to a single garment of destiny. What affects one directly, affects all directly. As long as there is poverty in this world, no one can be totally healthy...Strangely enough I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be. You can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be.

The researcher agrees with King's assertion. Likewise, Mbiti (1989:15) notes, "I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am". The implication of this is that an individual becomes conscious of his/her existence in the midst of the community. In other words, the total life of a believer is interwoven with that of the community of Christ (1 Cor. 12: 12-27).

Additionally, the principle further demonstrates the fact that in Jesus Christ, believers are all equal regardless of one's social, educational, political, gender and ethnic status (Gal. 3: 28). In this concern, there should not be any humanly or physical barrier separating believers. Unfortunately, the present Church has not been able to achieve this fate.

From the foregone discussion, it can be realised that the generosity of the Macedonian Christians was underpinned by the above-mentioned issues. It comes out that the Gentile Christians demonstrated a Christ-like life by 'walking their talk' in their contribution and this was made possible through the agency of divine grace. The divine enablement empowered the Gentile Christians to give cheerfully unto a worthy course without succumbing to either internal or external influences. Their contribution expresses the interdependence of believers as emerging from one family, the family of God.

It is important to stress that the generosity of the Macedonian Christians offers a godly model and precept for financial stewardship in the Church. Apostle Paul's illustration of the act of the Macedonian Christians is to motivate believers that severe difficulties or worldly factors should not be an excuse for not giving. Based on the godly model and principle, one can hence argue that Christian giving is one that is stirred and determined by godly faith, which no worldly influence(s) can impede such a faith, and whatever a believer gives, he/she acknowledges, returns a portion of his possession to the source of his/her possession in appreciation to the Source (Giver).

## II. CONCLUSION

The Macedonian Christians gave to honour the Jewish Christian and their act was a sign of gratitude for the gospel, which has been extended to them (Rom. 15: 27). In this way, the Macedonian Christians expressed their gratitude and generosity to the Jewish Christians for the unconditional favour regarding the extension of the gospel to the former. In other words, the Gentile Christians expressed their gratitude and generosity materially to the source of the Gospel. As a result, their act is oriented on gratitude and generosity.

Aside, they gave to aid the mission work of the Church (Phil. 1:1-30). For this reason, giving is about a believer exhibiting generosity in appreciation for receiving the gospel and the believer's generosity use for mission work.

Additionally, we can infer from the above that the Macedonian Christians expressed their gratitude for receiving the gospel and that today's Christians can truly express the same sentiment only if they can come to feel entitled to the type of grace that gave the Gentile Christians the kind of joy and gratification exhibited through their giving. Only then can they feel the commitment necessary to express their true gratitude for the extension of the gospel in their lives. Hence, it can be concluded that as recipients of the gospel, the Macedonian Christians were motivated to exhibit prosocial behaviours and energised to sustain their moral behaviours in the sense that neither persecution nor their severe poverty deterred them from given generously in support of the Jew Christian Saints.

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