

2 Corinthians 8:3

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For to their power, I bear record, yea, and beyond their power they were willing of themselves;

Analysis

For to their power, I bear record, yea, and beyond their power they were willing of themselves—The phrase *kata dynamin* (κατὰ δύναμιν, 'according to ability') describes normative giving, but Paul immediately adds *para dynamin* (παρὰ δύναμιν, 'beyond ability'), indicating the Macedonians transcended rational capacity. The preposition *para* suggests 'alongside, beyond, contrary to'—they gave in defiance of economic logic. The phrase *authairetoi* (αὐθαίρετοι, 'of their own accord') emphasizes spontaneous volition; no one pressured them.

Paul's witness (*martyrō*, 'I bear testimony') carries legal weight—he's not exaggerating. The Macedonians gave sacrificially because gospel grace had liberated them from materialism's tyranny. This reflects Jesus's teaching about the widow's two mites (Mark 12:41-44): proportionate sacrifice matters more than absolute amount. Their voluntary enthusiasm stands in implicit contrast to the Corinthians' hesitation, which Paul tactfully addresses throughout chapters 8-9.

Historical Context

The voluntary nature of Macedonian giving countered Roman patronage systems where wealthy elites gave publicly for honor and social advancement. Christian *charis*-giving operated on entirely different principles: anonymous, sacrificial, rooted in gospel grace rather than civic pride. This radical economic ethic attracted lower-class converts while puzzling Roman observers who saw charity as a means of social control.

Related Passages

1 John 4:8 — God is love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. What does it mean practically to give 'beyond your ability' while remaining financially responsible?
2. How does voluntary, joyful giving differ from guilt-driven or tax-incentivized giving?
3. When have you experienced the freedom of giving sacrificially without external pressure?

Interlinear Text

ὅτι	κατὰ	δύναμιν	μαρτυρῶ	καὶ	ὑπὲρ	δύναμιν
For	to	their power	I bear record	yea and	beyond	their power
G3754	G2596	G1411	G3140	G2532	G5228	G1411

αὐθαίρετοι
they were willing of themselves
G830

Additional Cross-References

Exodus 35:29 (Parallel theme): The children of Israel brought a willing offering unto the LORD, every man and woman, whose heart made them willing to bring for all manner of work, which the LORD had commanded to be made by the hand of Moses.

Exodus 35:5 (Parallel theme): Take ye from among you an offering unto the LORD: whosoever is of a willing heart, let him bring it, an offering of the LORD; gold, and silver, and brass,

1 Chronicles 29:9 (Parallel theme): Then the people rejoiced, for that they offered willingly, because with perfect heart they offered willingly to the LORD: and David the king also rejoiced with great joy.

Philemon 1:14 (Parallel theme): But without thy mind would I do nothing; that thy benefit should not be as it were of necessity, but willingly.

Acts 11:29 (Parallel theme): Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judaea:

1 Corinthians 9:17 (Parallel theme): For if I do this thing willingly, I have a reward: but if against my will, a dispensation of the gospel is committed unto me.

1 Corinthians 16:2 (Parallel theme): Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come.