

2 Corinthians 8-9 – Chapter Study

INTRODUCTION

Outline -

I. Greeting • 1:1-11

II. Paul's Ministry • 1:12-7:16

III. The Collection • Chs. 8-9

As we noted last Sunday when we covered vs. 1-12, besides Paul's passion of winning the lost to faith in Christ, he had other concerns, 2 of which were the relief of the poor & unity among believers.

He saw a way to merge these 2 concerns by inviting the Gentiles churches to send relief to the poor & beleaguered Jewish believers in Jerusalem who were suffering harsh persecution.

When Paul wrote 2 Corinthians, he was wrapping up his 3rd missionary journey and would soon be headed back to Jerusalem.

A year before he'd presented the opportunity among the churches of Greece to contribute to the cause.

Now that he was about to return, he asks them to follow through on what they'd promised a year ago.

You see, Titus had just brought him a report from Corinth that they'd done nothing in following through on their commitment to contribute.

This stood in stark contrast to the churches of Macedonia, the region north of Corinth, which had not only kept their promise & made a large collection, they'd done so in a time of great difficulty.

The Macedonians were far from flush with wealth, yet they'd been incredibly generous.

The Corinthians in contrast were doing pretty well, yet they'd done nothing regarding the collection.

So Paul wrote chs. 8&9 to show how the grace of God ought to produce generosity on the life of the believer.

As we saw last Sunday in vs. 1-12, Paul lays down the basic principles of what we might call grace-giving as it had been demonstrated in the life of the Macedonians.

Their first act in giving was to give themselves.

They saw their specific contribution as a token or symbol of themselves.

This is why they'd been so generous; God's grace had freed them from the constraints of worry & greed.

A. The Patterns of Giving • 8:1-9

1. The Macedonians • 8:1-7

2. Jesus Christ • 8:8-9

B. The Purpose of Giving • 8:10-15

¹⁰ And in this I give advice:

Paul had just said that he wasn't demanding or commanding that they give.

If he did, then their gift would not have been by grace.

So while he won't command that they give – he will provide guidance on how & why they ought to be generous.

It is to your advantage not only to be doing what you began and were desiring to do a year ago; ¹¹ but now you also must complete the doing of it; that as *there was a readiness to desire it, so there also may be a completion out of what you have.* ¹² For if there is first a willing mind, *it is accepted according to what one has, and not according to what he does not have.*

When Paul had first made known the need of the poor in Jerusalem & shared his desire to take them relief from the Gentile churches, the Corinthians had responded enthusiastically.

They said, "Count us in!" But a year later, they'd done nothing by way of follow up.

The generosity of the struggling Macedonians made the failure of the Corinthians in the midst of prosperity all the more obvious.

Paul says that *intention* means nothing if there's no action taken to follow through.

¹³ For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened;

¹⁴ but by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may supply their lack, that their abundance also may supply your lack—that there may be equality.

Paul makes a simple observation on life; it goes through seasons.

Sometimes we're rolling in clover, other times we're in the desert.

Sometimes we're on the peak of the mountain, other times we're at the bottom of the valley.

He isn't asking the Corinthians to give more than they can; only to recognize that they ought to give while they're enjoying a season of prosperity because the time may come when *they will be the needy ones.*

¹⁵ As it is written, "He who gathered much had nothing left over, and he who gathered little had no lack."

This is a quote from Exodus describing those who gathered manna.

They were told to only collect that amount they could eat in a day.

Those who collected more than their daily provision found that the next day it had gone bad.

God wanted to teach His people to rely on Him for their daily bread.

They needed to learn total dependence on Him.

This is **NOT** to say God doesn't want us to exercise wisdom and live prudently.

Having savings & modestly preparing for the future is wise, as the Proverbs make clear.

Why, even in the collection of manna this lesson was made clear, for on the 6th day they were told to look ahead, realize the Sabbath was coming and collect enough on the 6th day to last through to the beginning of the next week.

Prudent planning & saving isn't wrong – it's good & wise.

The danger is in placing one's trust in your plans & savings. Abraham, the father of faith, is a great example of the balance we ought to have as we follow God.

Abraham was a very wealthy man. [1]

But he was ready to offer Isaac—the only thing he had that meant anything to him.

When God is your chief passion, He can trust you with anything He wants to send your way.

It's not wrong for us to have things, but *it is wrong* for things to *have us* because God wants us to be free.

Once again, it's an issue of the heart.

C. The Procedures of Giving • 8:16-9:5

¹⁶But thanks be to God who puts the same earnest care for you into the heart of Titus. ¹⁷For he not only accepted the exhortation, but being more diligent, he went to you of his own accord.

Titus had taken Paul's previous letter to the Corinthians – one we don't have. As we saw in some earlier studies, it was a harsh letter but it had accomplished what needed to be done in rebuking the Corinthians and led to their much needed repentance.

Titus knew the letter he carried them from Paul was hard, but he shared Paul's deep concern for the Corinthians & was willing to take the risk of carrying them a letter they might very well react with hostility toward.

Titus had also been charged with the task of asking the Corinthians how the collection for the needy in Jerusalem was coming – always an awkward subject.

It had been all the more awkward when the Corinthians replied that they'd not done anything, then Titus had to carry that report to Paul.

No one likes being the bearer of bad news.

It requires a special character & courage to do so when necessary.

¹⁸And we have sent with him the brother whose praise is in the gospel throughout all the churches, ¹⁹and not only *that*, but who was also chosen by the churches to travel with us with this gift, which is administered by us to the glory of the Lord Himself and to show your ready mind, ²⁰avoiding this: that anyone should blame us in this lavish gift which is administered by us— ²¹providing honorable things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men.

In a bit of a run on sentence Paul refers to an unnamed man who'd been sent along with the contribution of the Macedonians who would accompany Paul to Jerusalem.

Though unnamed, many commentators think it's *Luke*.

Paul sent Titus & this other guy back to Corinth with 2 Corinthians.

Paul wanted to assure the Corinthians that the contribution made to the needy would all go there; they need not worry about the funds being diverted to something else.

Remember, there'd just been a long period of distrust on the part of the Corinthians toward Paul.

They'd repented of their error in judging him but he was wise enough to know the old lies could resurface.

So he assured them that there was lots of accountability regarding the collection and how it was used.

Accountability is absolutely crucial when it comes to the handling of finances in the church.

That's why we have an annual business meeting – so that we can open our books to you and you can see what we do with what's given.

Also, we're zealous to ensure proper handling procedures when the offering is received on Sundays.

There are always multiple people of solid credibility that have the collection within view.

It's counted by a small group ASAP on Sunday, tallied & recorded and put in the safe.

There's just no chance for the offering to be misused.

I heard about a church recently where a volunteer counted the offering by himself and when the pastor suggested it was to his advantage that he ask a couple other people to assist him so that there would never be any question that could arise about matters, he got offended, quit & left the church.

When it comes to issues of morality & ethics, we ought to not only strive for personal holiness, but to be blameless.

That is, we ought not give occasion for questions to arise by living in a manner that doesn't give an opening for questions or concerns.

Paul understood this & implemented a plan to make sure no one would have room to lay a charge to his integrity regarding the collection.

22 And we have sent with them our brother whom we have often proved diligent in many things, but now much more diligent, because of the great confidence which we have in you.

Here's another unnamed assistant that was sent along with Titus and the other guy. Commentators suggest this might be Silas.

The 3-man team of Titus, Luke & Silas would be a pretty powerful group and would communicate to the Corinthians just how earnest Paul was in making sure they were fully reconciled to him.

23 If anyone inquires about Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker concerning you. Or if our brethren are inquired about, they are messengers of the churches, the glory of Christ.

Paul writes this because the Corinthians were all in to credentials.

It's one of the points of attack on his credibility his opponent had fixed on before & that had carried such weight with the Corinthians when they were at odds with Paul.

Paul had written to them and said, "You want my credentials? You want proof of my calling? **YOU** are my credentials! Your church is the proof of my calling."

Now he says, "If this issue of credentials comes up with these 3 guys; *I* verify &

validate their ministry.”

24 Therefore show to them, and before the churches the proof of your love and of our boasting on your behalf.

9:1 Now concerning the ministering to the saints, it is superfluous for me to write to you; ² for I know your willingness, about which I boast of you to the Macedonians, that Achaia [region, like Macedonia] was ready a year ago; and your zeal has stirred up the majority.

Paul was in an awkward place because just as in ch. 8 he *now* shared the awesome example of the generosity of the Macedonians, a year ago, he'd told the Macedonians of the enthusiastic response of the Corinthians to the idea of the collection for the needy believers of Jerusalem.

It was the report of the Corinthians enthusiasm that had helped spark the Macedonians generosity.

So it would be pretty lame if the Corinthians failed to follow through on their earlier promise.

³ Yet I have sent the brethren, lest our boasting of you should be in vain in this respect, that, as I said, you may be ready; ⁴ lest if some Macedonians come with me and find you unprepared, we (not to mention you!) should be ashamed of this confident boasting.

⁵ Therefore I thought it necessary to exhort the brethren to go to you ahead of time, and prepare your generous gift beforehand, which you *had* previously promised, that it may be ready as a *matter of generosity and not as a grudging obligation.*

So, you see what's happening, right?

Paul is on his way to Corinth. Some of the Macedonians may be coming with him.

So he sent Titus and the other 2 on ahead with this letter to encourage the Corinthians to keep their promise to send relief to Jerusalem.

To make sure their giving is motivated by grace and not guilt, he goes on to give the following instructions . . .

D. The Promise of Giving • 9:6-15

⁶ But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.

Paul uses a basic principle that applies to both agriculture & to spiritual things.

If you sow little, you reap as much.

If you are liberal in your sowing, there's a greater return.

Now – this seems at first blush to be an appeal to self-interest; *almost carnal*. //

Not at all!

As the servants/slaves of God, we ought to be of a mind that sees all we have & are as belonging to God.

If that is our mindset, then we can live & work with an eye to return because what's returned is God's not ours, & only becomes more resource to invest & use for His glory.

I want you to know that I pray, *not for poverty* for the people of CCO *but for prosperity*.

But a prosperity that's safe because it's seen by those who receive it as kingdom-resources to be used for the Lord's glory.

To that end, I echo what Paul says here – if you want to be bountifully blessed – bountifully give.

7 So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.

He get some absolutely crucial guidance here regarding the practical aspects of giving.

1st – We ought to give as we purpose in our hearts.

In other words, our giving ought not be impetuous & unplanned, as I shared mine was when I was a young believer.

We ought to take thought to our giving; how much, when, where, & how – then follow through.

Part of that planning should be room for hearing about a special need or opportunity & being ready to give to it.

I know believers who set aside a certain percentage of their income once a month or every payday & give that to their church.

But they also set aside funds & wait for those opportunities they know they'll hear about later.

2nd – Our giving ought to be a thing of joy; willingly & not begrudged.

The word *cheerful* is the Greek word *hilaros*. Our word “hilarious” comes from it.

But overbearing humor is not what the word meant in Greek.

It was a *synonym for joy*; for a deep-seated confidence in the goodness & love of God.

It's a rock-solid confidence in the victory of good over evil.

This joy comes for a knowledge produced by faith in God that the end of the believer is ALL GOOD!

On the Friday after Christmas, my 2 sons & I went to see the movie *Valkyrie*.

It's based on the true story of an attempt to assassinate Hitler.

The plot fails, Hitler survived and the plotters were executed.

Walking out of the theater, I asked my sons what they thought.

They said they didn't like it so much because it didn't resolve; Hitler survived.

I reminded them that it was based on actual events.

They knew but still didn't like it because it didn't turn out as they hoped; the hero of the story failed in his quest and ended up dying.

At the end of the movie, text rolls across the screen giving more information about what happened.

That wasn't the only attempt on Hitler's life; there were about a dozen assassination plots; not one of them succeeded.

And just 9 months after the events of the movie, Hitler killed himself as the Allies closed in on Berlin.

The circumstances of today may not give us much reason for joy, but we don't look to circumstances.

We look to God Who's promised us the ultimate victory.

Every time we give willingly & enthusiastically we're investing in the ultimate

victory of good over evil, God over satan.

We're saying that the spirit is greater than, superior to the flesh.

⁸ And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work.

Paul returns to grace because in the end, that's what giving is all about: Grace is giving and giving is grace as we saw Sunday.

Don't miss what Paul says here – look at it again.

God is able to make all grace abound toward you,

Of course He is – He's the source of grace & has an inexhaustible supply.

But keep the context in mind=Giving!

God doesn't want us just to *receive* grace, He wants to make us *partners* in

His grace, dispensers of it to others. That's why Paul says -

that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work.

God does not want the life of His people to be *meager* or marked by *miserliness*.

He wants us to experience abundance.

Jesus said, "I have come that they may have life, abundant life!"

Notice – He didn't say abundant "wealth" because wealth doesn't equal life or joy or satisfaction.

For many wealth *adds* to their troubles.

Jesus came to bring rich, full, meaningful *life*.

Generous grace-giving is a crucial part of that kind of abundant life.

⁹As it is written: [Psalm 112] "He has dispersed abroad, He has given to the poor; His righteousness endures forever." ¹⁰ Now may He who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food, supply and multiply the seed you have sown and increase the fruits of your righteousness, ¹¹ while you are enriched in everything for all liberality, which causes thanksgiving through us to God.

Liberality refers not to politics but to generosity.

If you're a *liberal* giver, it means you're not stingy; your heart & hand are open.

As Paul wraps up his instructions on giving, he once again appeals to the Corinthians sense that they're farther along than others.

He says that genuine spiritual maturity, as demonstrated in righteousness, is attended by generosity.

Sad to say – there are far too many church-going people who fancy themselves to be real saints who rarely if ever give.

Their Bible is all marked up & they never miss a Sunday but the Lordship of Christ ends at the edge of their wallet & checkbook.

It's said that prior to some of the Crusaders, as the warriors prepared to embark on their journey from Europe they'd all go down to a lake or river and undergo a mass baptism.

They'd march out into the water and at a word from the priest, submerge their entire bodies, all except their sword hand which they kept above the water.

They didn't want to sanctify *that* hand so that they could wield their sword

in battle without their conscience getting in the way.

We hear that story & shake our head at the tragic misunderstanding of the Lordship of Christ, yet the fact is, many people do something similar with their wallet.

They don't literally hold it above the water when they are baptized, but their commitment to Christ exempts their finances.

Paul is clear here as he quotes Psalm 112 – *real* spiritual maturity is attended by generosity.

¹² For the administration of this service not only supplies the needs of the saints, but also is abounding through many thanksgivings to God,

¹³ while, through the proof of this ministry, they glorify God for the obedience of your confession to the gospel of Christ, and for your liberal sharing with them and all men, ¹⁴ and by their prayer for you, who long for you because of the exceeding grace of God in you.

Paul gives expression to his *motive* in taking this collection from the Gentile churches.

He knows it will go a long way in proving to the Jewish believers of Jerusalem that a genuine work of God's grace had been done in them and they were indeed their brothers & sisters in Christ.

When those Jews realized that the Gospel of Christ was truly winning Gentiles to faith in God it would transform their understanding of God and result in their further growth in grace.

And the end of it all would be even more glory going to the Lord.

Then, as Paul thinks about all this – he says →

¹⁵ Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!

It all starts with God and the incredible gift He gave by sending His Son.

That was a gift too great for words to laud. Yet we will try!

[1] Thanks to Jon Courson – Commentary on the NT.