



2 Corinthians - Chapter Nine

II. 2 Corinthians 8:1-9:15 - Paul's Appeal to the Repentant Church in Corinth Regarding the Collection (continues/concludes)

Summary of Chapter Nine

Paul states that his reason for sending Titus and his two companions is to ensure that the collection is completed, for if the Corinthians failed to do so it would reflect badly on them and Paul in the eyes of the Macedonians, who had faithfully completed their own collection as a result of Paul's contagious enthusiasm for the cause and its outcomes for the giver.

Paul concludes his appeal by pointing to the benefits the Corinthians will reap as a result of generous giving. He crafts his arguments in the OT and uses the agricultural analogy of the benefits of sowing abundantly in order to reap an appropriate harvest. The same applies in terms of spreading the Gospel; the more generous the giving, the greater are the rewards.

Paul identifies four beneficiaries of charitable giving: the giver (vv.8-11), the recipients (v.12), God (vv.11-12), and the church (vv.13-14). These verses may be just a sketch, but they are a sketch of nothing less than the whole picture of what it means to be God's people.

II.c 2 Corinthians 9:1-15 - The Collection for Christians at Jerusalem

Paul's final strategy now appears in vv.1-5, where he uses a little reverse psychology on the Corinthians. He began his appeal by pointing to the exemplary model of the Macedonian churches. At the end he admits that this sacrificial model is due in part to the boasting about the Achaian churches that he had done while in Macedonia. In particular, he had been bragging about the Corinthians' 'eagerness to help' and 'readiness to give since last year', which served to stir most of the Macedonian churches to action (v.2). How would it look, then, if some visitors from Macedonia should come and find the Corinthians unprepared? It would be rather embarrassing for Paul, not to mention for them (v.4).

Paul argues that the Corinthians' gift will maximise their joy, help fellow believers, and bring honour and praise to God (vv.6-15).

¹ Now it is not necessary for me to write to you about the ministry to the saints, ² for I know your eagerness, which is the subject of my boasting about you to the people of Macedonia, saying that Achaia has been ready since last year; and your zeal has stirred up most of them.

2 Corinthians 9:1-2

Now it is not necessary for me to write to you about the ministry to the saints acts as a reminder of what Paul has said before, without the need to repeat the detail, for it should be familiar to them: <<*Now concerning love of the brothers and sisters, you do not need to have anyone write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another*>> (1 Thessalonians 4:9).

The subject of my boasting about you to the people of Macedonia. Because of the political and social tensions that had always existed between Greeks and Macedonians, Paul is able to use this to his advantage. By boasting of one group to the other, he would have had the effect of motivating the one to at least match the efforts of the other.

By saying that those in Achaia were eager to contribute to the collection, i.e. the ministry of the saints, it is likely that the Macedonians would do all they could to display that same attitude. However, this would not have been as necessary in Macedonia for they had already demonstrated their determination in the face of adversity to do what was right in the sight of Christ.

Saying that Achaia has been ready since last year most likely refers to Paul's expectation that they would have continued with their promised collection and completed it. However, when Titus met up with Paul in Macedonia, he had informed him this was not the case, thus Paul urges them to resume with their promise or they will lose face with the Macedonians. Some commentators believe it means that Corinth had been ready to contribute since last year, but this makes less sense when read with Paul's other statements.

Your zeal has stirred up most of them. Paul recalls the Corinthians' initial enthusiasm and how it had stirred the Macedonian churches to action.

³ But I am sending the brothers in order that our boasting about you may not prove to have been empty in this case, so that you may be ready, as I said you would be; ⁴ otherwise, if some Macedonians come with me and find that you are not ready, we would be humiliated – to say nothing of you – in this undertaking.

2 Corinthians 9:3-4

I am sending the brothers. Paul had determined to send a party of three including Titus: <<*As for Titus, he is my partner and co-worker in your service; as for our brothers, they are messengers of the churches, the glory of Christ*>> (2 Corinthians 8:23).

May not prove to have been empty, Greek *kenoō*, belongs to the same stem as the adverb used in 6:1, which there refers to the danger of apparently receiving God's grace in a less than genuine way. Here the danger is that the Corinthians may fail to give generously as Paul had boasted they would (v.2). The implication may be that their failure to give generously would be evidence that their faith was less than genuine, but they would also be missing out on the blessing that is in store for everyone who 'sows bountifully' (v.6).

If some Macedonians come with me. It seems that, at the time of writing, final arrangements had not been made. It subsequently proved to be the case that Sopater, Aristarchus and Secundus did travel with Paul as recorded in Acts 20:4.

We would be humiliated – to say nothing of you. Paul was not thinking just of his personal reputation, although he has argued much in his letters to retain his credibility as an apostle against the counterclaims of his opponents. However, here he has the reputations of his co-workers, the Corinthians and indeed the entire Gospel in mind, and the damage that unfulfilled promises can cause.

⁵ So I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to go on ahead to you, and arrange in advance for this bountiful gift that you have promised, so that it may be ready as a voluntary gift and not as an extortion.

2 Corinthians 9:5

May be ready as a voluntary gift and not as an extortion. The word translated voluntary or willing gift can also mean blessing, for Greek *eulogia* means generous; the collection is to be a response to God's grace in their lives (vv.6-9), not something coerced by the fear of judgment.

Elsewhere, Paul indicates the intent is just as important as the gift: *<<Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the profit that accumulates to your account>>* (Philippians 4:17).

The point is well taken. If Paul had waited until he had arrived with the Macedonian representatives, then Corinth would have felt compelled to give and the arrangements would have been hastily made so as not to lose face. The preparatory visit of Titus and his companions would buy enough time for the Corinthians' gift to be ready as a voluntary one.

⁶ The point is this: the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.

2 Corinthians 9:6

Sows bountifully. Paul expands a well-known proverb: 'You reap what you sow', which is common agricultural analogy and seen in various forms, such as: *<<As I have seen, those who plough iniquity and sow trouble reap the same>>* (Job 4:8), *<<May those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy>>* (Psalm 126:5), *<<Whoever sows injustice will reap calamity, and the rod of anger will fail>>* (Proverbs 22:8), *<<They have sown wheat and have reaped thorns, they have tired themselves out but profit nothing. They shall be ashamed of their harvests because of the fierce anger of the Lord>>* (Jeremiah 12:13), *<<Look at*

the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?>> (Matthew 6:26), <<give, and it will be given to you>> (Luke 6:38a), <<The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. For here the saying holds true, "One sows and another reaps">> (John 4:36-37), and: <<Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for you reap whatever you sow>> (Galatians 6:7).

God does not command Christians to give a certain amount, but he provides opportunities to give generously. Those who sow generously will also reap bountifully in terms of bearing fruit for God's Kingdom; and in other ways as well (v.11).

⁷ Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. ⁸ And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work.

2 Corinthians 9:7-8

Each of you must give as you have made up your mind. Paul offers three distinct guidelines to the Corinthians:

1. Giving is an individual matter of the heart: *<<Tell the Israelites to take for me an offering; from all whose hearts prompt them to give you shall receive the offering for me>> (Exodus 25:2).*
2. Giving requires resolve: *<<Anyone who resolves to do the will of God will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own>> (John 7:17).*
3. Giving is to be a private and not a public decision: *<<But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you>> (Matthew 6:3-4).*

God loves a cheerful giver, that is, loves in the sense of approves of, which comes from the LXX version of: *<<Those who are generous are blessed, for they share their bread with the poor>> (Proverbs 22:9), and is similar to: <<Give liberally and be ungrudging when you do so, for on this account the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in all that you undertake>> (Deuteronomy 15:10).* God loves such joy-motivated giving to others because it expresses contentment in God's gracious giving to the believer (v.14) that makes every good work possible and results in thanksgiving and glory to God (vv.11-13).

What form does God's favour take? Is Paul thinking of spiritual benefits or material blessings? The focus in the context is clearly on material blessings. Yet Paul could well be thinking of all the benefits people receive from God. For inherent in the term grace is the idea that whatever people possess, be it physical or spiritual, they possess by reason of God's goodwill toward them, not because of personal merit.

Possession is also by reason of God's power. God is able is perhaps better rendered 'God is powerful'. It is God Almighty who provides the means to be generous: <<*Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine*>> (Ephesians 3:20). This same thought is found in proverbial form in the teaching of Jesus: <<*Freely you have received; freely give*>> (Matthew 10:8b NIV). The order here is important. It is only as one has freely received that one can, in turn, freely give.

⁹ As it is written,

'He scatters abroad, he gives to the poor;
his righteousness endures for ever.'

2 Corinthians 9:9

He scatters abroad, he gives to the poor. The good work of God's people: <<*Therefore, my beloved, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you know that in the Lord your labour is not in vain*>> (1 Corinthians 15:58), corresponds to the description of the man in Psalm 112:9 quoted here, whose righteousness is manifest in his generous provision for the poor.

Endures for ever. Such righteousness remains beyond the Day of Judgment because it originates from and is sustained by the Lord's righteousness, expressed in giving to his people, which also endures for ever: <<*Full of honour and majesty is his work, and his righteousness endures for ever*>> (Psalm 111:3).

¹⁰ He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness.

2 Corinthians 9:10

The promise that God will increase the harvest should not be understood in material terms but in terms of increasing your righteousness. Thus the quoted OT texts seed to the sower and bread for food (Isaiah 55:10d), and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness (Hosea 10:12), refer specifically to the provision of God's word for the redemption of his people. God's promise is that he will use his people and their resources as instruments of his grace for the salvation of others.

In these quotations Paul intends his readers to take a wider perspective rather than just the content of the individual verses, all of which come from the LXX.

Proverbs Chapter 22 gives a reasonably complete portrait of a wise and God-fearing person who knows how to be generous with money. The whole poem of Psalm 112 is a celebration of those who fear and trust the Lord, and in particular of their generosity and merciful behaviour towards their neighbours, particularly the poor. Once again, Paul is inviting the Corinthians to step inside the biblical portrait and discover a whole new identity, not simply to do something strange because he tells them to.

Isaiah Chapter 55 is the glorious invitation to all and sundry to come and feast on God's rich bounty, because God is making a new creation in which everything will be renewed. This new creation, achieved through the death and resurrection of the Servant of the Lord in Isaiah Chapter 53, is based on the covenant renewal celebrated in Isaiah Chapter 54, and will come about because God will sow his Word in the same way that he sends rain and snow to provide seed-corn and bread.

This picture is exactly the same as the large-scale picture Paul has been drawing throughout the letter: God's new creation (5:17), is based on God's new covenant (Chapter 3), and is accomplished through the death and resurrection of Jesus the Messiah, and now at work in the world through the preaching of the Gospel.

It was widely believed that material prosperity was the result of divine blessing. Paul, to a certain extent, reflects this belief: <<*As for those who in the present age are rich, command them not to be haughty, or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment*>> (1 Timothy 6:17). While the Stoics taught self-sufficiency, Paul taught God-sufficiency.

John Bunyan wrote, 'A man there was and they called him mad; the more he gave, the more he had'. Of course Bunyan was writing of the Christian. To the world such a principle of giving is nonsense; but to Paul it is a reality of the Christian life.

¹¹ You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity, which will produce thanksgiving to God through us;

2 Corinthians 9:11

You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity. God will provide for the Corinthians' needs so that they can continue generously meeting others' needs and providing resources to advance the Gospel. Such enrichment was noted during the opening verses of a previous letter and alludes to God's gifts to them: <<*for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind*>> (1 Corinthians 1:5).

The reader would do well to observe what Paul does not say. He does not say that wealth or surplus income is a sign of God's blessing. Nor is it giving per se that is applauded. It is, rather, a lifestyle of generosity that Paul commends. For those who give cheerfully and willingly, the promise is that God will provide all they need to continue doing good, not necessarily all they want!

¹² for the rendering of this ministry not only supplies the needs of the saints but also overflows with many thanksgivings to God. ¹³ Through the testing of this ministry you glorify God by your obedience to the confession of the gospel of Christ and by the generosity of your sharing with them and with all others, ¹⁴ while they long for you and pray for you because of the surpassing grace of God that he has given you.

2 Corinthians 9:12-14

For the rendering of this ministry. The collection is an integral part of the ministry of the Gospel and is an act of public worship: <<*They were pleased to do this, and indeed they owe it to them; for if the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings, they ought also to be of service to them in material things*>> (Romans 15:27), along with other ministries: <<*Welcome him then in the Lord with all joy, and honour such people, because he came close to death for the work of Christ, risking his life to make up for those services that you could not give me*>> (Philippians 2:29-30), <<*And in the same way he sprinkled with the blood both the tent and all the vessels used in worship*>> (Hebrews 9:21), which causes others to offer thanksgivings to God as they see the work of God's grace in the lives of the Corinthians.

With many thanksgivings to God is as much, if not more, of the reason why one should give. Certainly, such giving supplies the needs of the saints. It also glorifies God, i.e. you glorify God by your obedience to the confession of the gospel of Christ, which raises his profile in the world, and thus that of the church, which in turn brings increased blessing to so many.

While they long for you and pray for you because of the surpassing grace of God that he has given you is an insight into the benefits for the global church and the Gospel. The majority of the recipients in Judæa would be Jewish Christians and for them to receive so generous a gift from the Gentile churches would aid their understanding of the true nature of the real people of God; those who are in Christ Jesus: <<*who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours*>> (1 Corinthians 1:2b). Paul is also confident that the prayers the Judæan church offers for the Corinthian and other Gentile churches will be answered abundantly by God and will produce a far greater reward than their original offering was worth in real terms.

¹⁵ Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!

2 Corinthians 9:15

Thanks be to God. Once again, Paul ends a section of the letter with thanksgiving. The gift of the Corinthians reflects the indescribable gift God has given to believers in Christ: <<*He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else?*>> (Romans 8:32), <<*But, as it is written, 'What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him'*>> (1 Corinthians 2:9), and: <<*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*>> (2 Corinthians 8:9). However, it should always be remembered that people can never out give God!

Was Paul's appeal successful? Acts 20:2-3 would suggest so. Luke records that Paul made his announced third visit to Corinth and stayed for three months. The length of his visit suggests that he received a ready welcome and that matters were in order regarding the Corinthians' contribution to the relief fund. Paul admits as much in Romans 15:26, where he states: <<*for Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to share their resources with the poor among*>> New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised 2Corinthian9-7

the saints at Jerusalem>>. Yet Luke lists no delegates for the Achaian churches. It may be that there was insufficient time to arrange for a delegate to accompany the funds to Jerusalem; or the Corinthians could have decided to forgo representation as a way of demonstrating their belated trust in Paul's integrity and character.

Paul and the delegates arrived at Jerusalem and were received warmly (Acts 21:17). Not a word is said, however, about the collection itself. Some conclude from Luke's silence that the offering was not well received. However, arguments from silence are precarious ones at best. Moreover, the difficulty that captures Luke's attention is not the Jerusalem church's response to the collection but the trouble that unbelieving Jews from Asia caused Paul, as recorded in Acts 21:27-36. Paul had anticipated encountering problems in Jerusalem and had asked the Roman church to pray that he be rescued from unbelieving Jews in Judæa (Romans 15:31). Yet the collection was far too important to deter him, for it symbolised, as it were, the very nature of the church – a community called out from many backgrounds to be 'in Christ'.