

THE COLLECTION FOR THE SAINTS: 2 CORINTHIANS 8-9

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Christian stewardship occupies a major place in contemporary Christian thought. Through the various media, including the pulpit, many Christian spokespersons call for Christians to give of material resources for the advancement of their ministries. Often 2 Corinthians 8-9 forms the biblical basis for giving.

The Scriptures speak often of material possessions. They warn about misuse of what God has provided, about the acquiring of things as a life goal, and about the necessity of using material things to produce spiritual blessings and eternal rewards. The foundation for this occurs in the OT, and Jesus himself taught that we should "lay up treasures in heaven" (Matt 6:20). The irony of this teaching is that laying up treasures in heaven involves a wise spending of the treasures of earth. This passage speaks indirectly to that issue.

At a deeper level, however, Paul speaks here of Christian brotherhood. While ostensibly the relief offering occupies the prominent place, the passage concerns the well-being of Christian brothers and sisters. It speaks to a Christian's world and life view, the reality of a spiritual tie that transcends physical dimensions, and the fulfilling of OT prophetic expectations. The literature on this section of Scripture is extensive,¹ and at least one major commentary concerns these two chapters alone.²

¹ See for example the bibliographic entries in H. D. Betz, *2 Corinthians 8 and 9; A Commentary on Two Administrative Letters of the Apostle Paul* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985) xix-xxv and 146-53, and R. Martin, *2 Corinthians* (WBC 10; Waco, TX: Word, 1986) 248, 286-87. These two commentaries are the most significant recent works on the subject.

² H. D. Betz, *2 Corinthians*.

I. *The Occasion*

These two chapters focus on the grace of giving. Written while Paul was on his third missionary journey, they reflect one of his major concerns: a collection for the saints at Jerusalem which Paul hoped to deliver at the Passover celebration. This special offering helped provide for the financial needs of Christians from another ethnic and national background. The monies were neither the tithe nor the gifts given for the functions of the church. This was a truly benevolent offering.

The early church took seriously the social and economic conditions of fellow believers. Many different Scriptures urge care for those who have endured difficulties. These include widows and orphans (Jas 1:27), natural disasters (famines, Acts 11:27-30), and persecution. The most likely immediate concern was for the financial loss suffered in Jerusalem because of a famine which came in the mid-40s of the first century. It left many, including Christians, in dire straits.

Before turning to the content of these chapters, two introductory comments demand attention. The first relates to the purpose of the collection for the saints. Obviously Paul considered it a significant part of his ministry, devoting a seemingly inordinate amount of time and energy to help those in need. Many have suggested reasons for the offering, most of which expand the significant work of D. Georgi, *Die Geschichte der Kollekte des Paulus für Jerusalem*.³ R. Martin reduces these to four: (1) Paul was remembering the poor as he promised the "pillar apostles" of Jerusalem; (2) he was conveying genuine concern by the Gentile congregations; (3) he was seeking to unite the two diverse elements in the early Christian community; and (4) he was cooperating in the eschatological fulfillment of Israel's conversion.⁴ No doubt each of these deserves legitimate discussion. Beyond it all, however, the words of E. Best serve as a good reminder. They are based upon the character of the apostle himself. "Paul probably initially accepted the obligation to raise the money because he saw the need in Jerusalem and was inspired by the love of Jesus to respond. Other reasons might have come to his mind as time went by."⁵

³ D. Georgi, *Die Geschichte der Kollekte des Paulus für Jerusalem* (TF 38; Hamburg-Bergstedt: H. Reich, 1965). Other works which detail and expand these arguments are: K. F. Nickle, *The Collection: A Study in Paul's Strategy* (SBT 48; London: SCM, 1966); B. Holmberg, *Paul and Power: The Structure of Authority in the Primitive Church as Reflected in the Pauline Epistles* (ConB. New Testament Series 11; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979); and R. Martin, *The Worship of God: Some Theological, Pastoral and Practical Reflections* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982).

⁴ Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 251.

⁵ E. Best, *Second Corinthians in Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (ed. James Luther Mays; Atlanta: John Knox, 1987) 76.

The second introductory comment relates to the unity of the two chapters. Many interpreters assume Paul wrote the two chapters at different times and, perhaps, to different churches (see n. 7 below). Others have argued for their unity. Recently C. Talbert supported the unity of the section based on a perceptive literary and thematic analysis.⁶ The objections are not insuperable. Concerning the relationship of chaps. 8 and 9, C. K. Barrett concludes that "the transition is not as sharp as is sometimes supposed. . . . It is therefore best to treat it as a continuation of chapter viii, and as belonging to the same letter as chapters i-viii."⁷

II. *Theological Foundations*

Typically, Paul's Christian ethic emerges from theological conviction calling for a life lived reflectively and purposely. There are many suggested theological underpinnings. Some interpreters see ecclesiastical concerns in the forefront of the passage while others see a broader theological foundation. Talbert sees a threefold theological significance: "(a) it would be a realization of Christian charity (Gal 2:10; 2 Cor 8:14; 9:12; Rom 15:25); (b) it would be an expression of Christian unity (2 Cor 9:13-14; Rom 15:27); and (c) it would be an anticipation of Christian eschatology (Romans 9-11 . . .)."⁸ The ecclesiastical argument assumes that the collection is from churches to church. For them the project demonstrates a strong ecclesiastical tie. The passage, however, neither asserts nor assumes that. Here at least two primary theological pillars support Paul's program of giving.

A. *Soteriological Concerns*

Perhaps the most impressive theological underpinning is soteriological, emphasizing the outworkings of salvation. The distinctive

⁶ See C. H. Talbert, *Reading Corinthians* (New York: Crossroad, 1987) 181-82.

⁷ C. K. Barrett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (ed. Henry Chadwick; New York: Harper & Row, 1973) 232. The unity of the chapters has often been discussed since 1776, when J. S. Semler wrote a thesis suggesting that 2 Corinthians is a composite document consisting of several fragments. The arguments against the unity of these chapters are as follows: (1) the introduction of chap. 9 is typically used by Paul to start a new section of thought; (2) the discussion in chap. 9 is redundant; (3) there is an apparent contradiction between 8:10 and 9:3-5; (4) the content is addressed to two different groups (Corinth and Achaia); and (5) differing occasions are pictured between 8:20 and 9:3-5 (Talbert, 181-82). Each of these has been answered by various means. (See the representative list of scholars who hold to unity in P. E. Hughes, *Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians* [NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962] xxi-xxii.). The best history of the interpretation of these chapters from a liberal perspective is H. D. Betz, *2 Corinthians*, which also is the best presentation of the issues. It takes a literary approach to these chapters. Even R. Martin has been swayed to this position, stating that the two chapters may not be from the same letter (*2 Corinthians*, 249).

⁸ Talbert, *Reading Corinthians*, 184.

employment of the term "grace," the example of Christ, and the Pauline concept of Christian community support this interpretation.

1. *The Employment of "Grace."* Semantically, the word grace (χάρις) predominates in these chapters. Its frequency has led some to argue for the unity of the two chapters based upon the rather consistent use of the term.⁹ Indeed, the chapters open with the concept of grace (8:1) and close in the same manner (9:14-15), forming an inclusio. The term occurs at least ten times,¹⁰ and the root occurs in compound words twice more (translated "thanksgiving").¹¹

The most common use of the term "grace" speaks of the act of giving as a "grace" (8:4, 6, 7, 19). The employment of the term "grace" so frequently and naturally reflects Paul's theology. First, by using the term "grace" for the act of giving, Paul changed expressions from the Jewish concept which no doubt formulated his thinking as a rabbi. The Jews customarily referred to benevolence as an act of righteousness.¹² Jesus also spoke in these terms in the Sermon on the Mount when he addressed almsgiving as an act of "righteousness" (δικαιοσύνη, Matt 6:1ff.). His terminology reflected a situation of law and a preoccupation with legal requirements. Paul, however, used the term righteousness in this connection only once. In 9:10 he speaks of the gift as coming from the Corinthians' righteousness, but he generally refers to giving as an act of grace. By this expression, Paul emphasizes both the situation of the giver and the motivation for the gift. Those who have received God's grace engage in benevolent activities as the fruit of the state of grace. Paul carefully avoids any "works ethic," choosing rather a terminology and concept to root these activities in his characteristic theme, God's grace.¹³ E. Best correctly states, "If giving loses its origin and purpose in God and his grace, both it and our faith will shrivel and die."¹⁴

As a second factor, the concept of grace applies to a specific action related to the experience of grace. Consistently Paul refers to

⁹ Ibid., 181.

¹⁰ 8:1, 4, 6, 7, 9, 16, 19; 9:8, 14, 15.

¹¹ 9:11, 12.

¹² C. K. Barrett says "It is true that in late Hebrew הַקְדָּשָׁה (cf. the Aramaic הַקְדָּשָׁה) came to mean almsgiving" (*Second Corinthians*, 238).

¹³ Some prefer to think that Paul really speaks of grace on the human level here (Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 254), although Martin recognizes the logical underpinnings that the church acted in response to divine grace. But the term is too prominent here and the passage too theological for the mere human interpretation. E. Best, among others, provides a list of theological terms which he says "gives the whole discussion a theological orientation" (E. Best, *Second Corinthians* [Atlanta: John Knox, 1987] 88). These include grace (χάρις), ministry (διακονία), glory (δόξα), fellowship (κοινωνία), and service (χειτουργία).

¹⁴ Best, *Second Corinthians*, 87.

giving as "this grace." Ultimately Paul considers all human responses to God outworkings of grace. This is especially true of the gifts which work for the betterment of the Christian community.¹⁵ Although a spiritual gift of giving occurs in the lists of spiritual gifts, here individual gifts come as the result of God's grace ("Let each person give as he has determined," 9:7). Rather than an act for attaining righteousness, this giving evidences the grace of God in the lives of the Corinthians. In this regard Barrett's comment regarding the Macedonians applies. He notes that Paul may mean "the grace of God himself" or "that God has given grace to the Macedonians," and that Paul may not distinguish between these two.¹⁶ The term "grace," therefore correctly designates the action in its full theological definition.

Paul also uses grace to refer to the grace of God which initiates a good deed. Here, again, he expresses his understanding that everything good originates from the grace of God and glorifies his grace (see Eph 1:3-14, for example). The passage begins with the grace of God working in the Macedonians (8:1), continues with the grace of God in Titus (8:16), and ends with an expression of God's grace (9:14). Clearly, the grace of God motivates Christians to give. Paul commends them for their participation (*κοινωνία*) in the gift, because it means that God is at work in them.

2. *The Example of Christ.* The grace of God is demonstrated in Jesus. His action of self-denial is a particular expression of the grace of giving (8:8). When Christians give of their time/lives/resources (for financial resources represent them all), they are fulfilling the same action of Jesus in kind, though not in degree. That is, he gave of himself for them, and they are giving of themselves for others.¹⁷

The example of Christ, which undergirds this passage, occurs in 8:8-9.¹⁸ The illustration calls to mind the basic Christological truth. Three elements support Paul's argument, and each has particular relevance to the matter at hand. First, Jesus was rich (8:9). The term applies to possession of resources sufficient to accomplish a proposed task. Here it must refer to spiritual riches, since there is no evidence that Jesus had material possessions on earth.¹⁹ On the other hand, it is

¹⁵ For example, Romans 12:6 speaks of various gifts (*χαρίσματα*) which come from the grace (*χάρις*) of God.

¹⁶ Barrett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 218.

¹⁷ Strangely, E. Best says, "What, then, the Macedonians have done in sending money to Jerusalem can be put on the same plane as what Jesus did in living and dying for us" (Best, *Second Corinthians*, 78). He overstates the case.

¹⁸ In actuality, this is the second example for the Corinthians. The Macedonians provided the "near" example (both geographically and temporally near), but Jesus provided the ultimate example for them.

¹⁹ Indeed, his own comments reveal as much as well as the remarks of the gospel writers.

unlikely that purely spiritual blessings are in mind, since the Scripture teaches that Jesus entered a state of poverty. Paul may be speaking of the "spiritual-environmental" riches of the preincarnate state which Jesus left in the journey to earth for redemption.²⁰ Jesus' *kenosis* lies behind Paul's thought here. The example does not suggest divesting oneself of spiritual riches which sustain us through difficult times, but speaks of the willingness to change the conditions of life for the sake of others.

The second focus in the illustration is Jesus' poverty. He became poor. Jesus left the environment of heaven to assume the limitations (thus poverty) imposed by both his humanity and his earthiness. Paul stresses here the state of poverty by an ingressive aorist.

Third, the purpose of his change of condition was soteriological, i.e., that we might become rich. Jesus' riches and poverty were not primarily spiritual; neither are the Christian's. Paul has in mind the eschatological reality of the full spiritual life, including heaven, when he speaks of riches. Jesus left what he had to take us there with him.

The relevance of this illustration challenged the Corinthians. They were not to think of their environments or material possessions as of primary concern. Just as Jesus left his, so we are to realize that this world and its goods must not enslave us. Although the cross is unmentioned, it lies in the background. The point is that to accomplish what Jesus wanted, material (environmental) blessings of earth must serve God's kingdom. Now the Corinthians had opportunity to imitate Jesus' action by giving of their materials to accomplish a spiritual result.²¹

3. *The Concept of the Christian Community.* Finally, the concept of Christian community permeates the soteriological foundations. Christians form one brotherhood because of the saving grace of Christ. The offering demonstrates this unity. Naturally Christians shared with those in need, but this was more significant because it was a tangible expression and validation of the Pauline mission to the Gentiles. Repeatedly Paul expressed his distinctive theological insights in symbolic forms. His consistent emphasis on the principle of justification by faith alone led him to have Timothy circumcised but not Titus (Gal 2:3).²² This well-known incident crystallized Paul's theology

²⁰ This is amply illustrated in Phil 2:5-8 which must underlie Paul's thought.

²¹ This interpretation recognizes that, while Paul does not stress Jesus' loss of spiritual blessings, obviously he considers the environmental blessings of the kingdom as significant. Ultimately the environmental cannot be distinguished from the spiritual, for we will enjoy both. Many commentators recognize the close connection between the spiritual and material dimensions of life here.

²² He did this no doubt to demonstrate that no one should despise or reject national heritage. On the other hand, Christianity meant that no one had to accept

and exemplified it for the Christian community. In similar fashion the relief offering symbolized the real unity of the churches and their theology. The gospel of grace meant that the gospel could go to non-Jews without the cultural practices inherent in its original (Jewish) roots. When it spread beyond Jewish culture, would it be anti-Jewish or apathetic to the Jewish system which had birthed it? There was a clear soteriological tie between the peoples which took account of the deeper basis of unity. Later Paul expressed the soteriological tie with a reference to the removing of the barriers between the two groups, allowing a new man to emerge (Eph 2:1-11). Thus in the offering, the Christian community expressed itself as unified beyond racial and cultural boundaries. Paul carefully avoids the term "church" in this passage, preferring words like "saints." He emphasizes the Christian community but not in ecclesiastical terms.

B. *Eschatological Concerns*

A second theological foundation relates to the eschatological framework within which Paul operated. Clearly, his understanding of the historical outworkings of God's redemptive plans formed the basis for much of his appeal. Specifically, Paul saw a historical development in God's workings. Some interpreters link the offering to Rom 15:27 and the Christian obligation for those who profit spiritually to share their physical/material blessings with their spiritual benefactors.²³ Others prefer to make the situation hypothetical, indicating that if the Jerusalem saints have the resources in the future they will, of course, be able to help Gentiles.²⁴ The latter approach, however, fails to deal with the text at two crucial points: (1) the text says "their abundance" (τὸ ἐκείνων περισσεύμα) with no hypothetical element inserted (it is a given for Paul), and (2) the purpose clause moves to the point of equality (a true equality measures spiritual with spiritual and physical with physical). Both interpretations overlook the most obvious parallel earlier in Romans (11:12 specifically, and the argument of 9-11 generally). In the past, God worked through Israel to accomplish his purposes. With the rejection of Christ, however, national Israel lost her Christological blessings (Romans 9-11). Nevertheless, Paul expected a time in the future when God would again bless Israel. In Rom 11:11ff., Paul makes two points relating to Gentile

another national heritage either. Timothy was technically a Jew, having a Jewish mother, and identified, therefore, with that culture. Titus was Gentile and was not to reject that upbringing by circumcision.

²³ F. F. Bruce, for example, suggests this as the best possible interpretation. See F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians* (New Century Bible; ed. R. E. Clements and M. Black; London: Oliphants, 1971) 223.

²⁴ Barrett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 226, for example.

and Jewish relations which have significance here. First, the fall of Israel was not primarily punitive, but it provided for the salvation of the Gentiles.²⁵ Second, God will restore Israel in the future. That, too, will have significance for the Gentiles (Rom 11:12) in bringing them even greater riches.²⁶

This eschatological framework finds expression in 2 Cor 8:14. The key to Pauline thought here is the terms for time which he employs. The "now time" (νῦν καιρῶ) contrasts with another time, a typical Jewish and Pauline way of contrasting the present age with a future age. Therefore, Paul urges involvement in the relief offering because of its eschatological significance.²⁷

The eschatological dimension takes us deeper into Paul's understanding. Here there are clearly two realms of blessing and responsibility: spiritual and physical. The spiritual situation of Israel past brought spiritual blessings to the Gentiles. The spiritual blessings anticipated in connection with Israel's future will bring spiritual blessings to the Gentiles. The Gentiles, therefore, are to respond in providing physical blessings for the Jews who are in need. In this eschatological framework two ideas develop. First, there is a close unity between the spiritual and physical realms, and Paul moves easily between them. The blessings of the present time involve primarily the spiritual aspects of redemption. The future blessings, however, include the entrance into the environmental (physical) blessings associated with the Second Coming of Christ. The physical and spiritual unite in Paul's thought, since ultimately, at the return of Christ, both appear together for the enjoyment of Jews and Gentiles in Christ.

Second, the various churches acting consistently with the example of Christ must conduct themselves in light of the economy that characterizes the kingdom environment. Like Jesus, the Gentile Christians must give of their earthly environmental blessings, motivated in part by the expectation that they will be recipients of the future spiritual/environmental blessings of Israel. In a way, therefore, the work of Christ continues on earth through the work of the church. Christian people must pray and work for "thy kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven."

²⁵ Thus Paul stresses the redemptive aspects of God's relationship with the various peoples. He looks to the positive side of a theologically difficult situation.

²⁶ The phrase Paul actually uses is "life from the dead," referring to a resurrection which will occur at that time.

²⁷ It is worth noting that his argument to this point in Romans has included the significant phrase "the now time" (τῷ νῦν καιρῶ, Rom 11:5) as a time when Israel is a "remnant according to grace." "The now time" is the same expression of 2 Cor 8:14 which states Israel's poverty. The expression and argument in Rom 11:5 must be contrasted with 11:12, their "fullness."

The eschatological significance of the offering, therefore, goes beyond the immediately visible. Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, "remembered the poor" as the Jerusalem apostles requested (Gal 2:10). This was especially important to his ministry to the Gentiles since it symbolized the unity of the churches and his support of the Jewish Christian community. Paul realized full well that the future would be a time of unity of all persons in Christ and the complete satisfaction of every need. It was necessary, therefore, for all Christians to share in anticipation of that great day.

One final aspect of the collection requires attention. Paul realized the OT predictions about the future relationships between Israel and the Gentiles. Many of them anticipated a time when the Gentiles would bring gifts to Jerusalem. Passages like Isa 60:5ff. explain that in the last days Israel will enjoy the wealth of the world.²⁸ Since Paul expected this fulfillment in the future, perhaps he saw the offering prophetically as well. It was another step in the fulfillment realized through Christ. Even more, when Gentiles gave to Jews, the gospel message reached maturity. Christian unity was effected. Paul could then go on with his anticipated mission to the West (Rom 15:24-26).²⁹ Now, however, he must delay his trip to Rome (and the western mission) until he delivered the offering (Rom 15:28-29). The eschatological foundations of the collection were solid, and Paul's growing understanding of salvation history no doubt inspired him in his efforts.³⁰

III. *Motivations for Giving*

Having seen two of the major theological foundations for giving, the motivations may be considered. The discussion is suggestive rather than comprehensive.

A. *The Example of Others*

The first motivation found in this section is the example of others. Paul includes two examples: the churches of Macedonia and the example of Christ.

²⁸ Note especially verses like 60:5 which says: "The wealth on the seas will be brought to you, to you the riches of the nations will come" (NIV).

²⁹ On this see J. Munck, *Paul and the Salvation of Mankind* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1959) 176, 193.

³⁰ There is a growing discussion about the authority of Paul as reflected in the collection. The suggestion that this represented a "roll call" of those who accepted Paul's apostolic authority seems beyond the text. Paul does not handle the Corinthians in an excessively high-handed manner. The delegation of the task to Titus and the "gentle" manner with which he writes here suggest that he really has the Jerusalem Christians and their need in mind.

The Macedonian Christians eagerly participated in the offering for the saints. The Macedonian churches, Philippi, Berea, and Thessalonica, were founded by Paul on the second missionary journey. They occupied the same peninsula as Corinth in what is now Greece and were the nearest Christian neighbors to the north. Since little is known about Berea and Thessalonica, Philippi must represent the situation there. The church had a troubled history, It was founded amid difficulties which Paul here identifies as tests.³¹ Their situation makes the gifts all the more impressive,

Two seemingly contrary characteristics make them significant. First, they were poor. The term Paul uses to describe their poverty may well be translated "dirt poor."³² The reasons for their poverty are not clear, although their political history no doubt contributed.³³ The church contained some wealthy and influential persons at its founding, such as Lydia and, possibly, the influential Romans,³⁴ Their poverty, however, did not diminish their extreme joy, nor did it affect the size of their gift. Paul identifies the gift as the "riches of single-mindedness" (πλοῦτος τῆς ἀπλότητος v 2). The expression suggests that their gift was (1) generous, and, (2) purposeful. As to the latter, they gave "single-mindedly." The term often is translated "liberally, generously,"³⁵ but perhaps it is better translated in this context as "focused." They simply gave to meet the needs of others.³⁶ That single-minded

³¹ The histories of these churches are found primarily in Acts 16:11-17:15 and in the epistles of Thessalonians and Philippians. Space forbids recounting what may be read there.

³² The Greek is actually *κατὰ βῆθους*, a term well translated by Hughes as "rock bottom," 228. The origins of that translation are uncertain, since others have picked up the term.

³³ See H. D. Betz' brief discussion in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9,49-53. He accepts the position that the Macedonians lived in a relatively poor condition. That is challenged by Barrett who contends that "Macedonia seems on the whole to have been a prosperous province, with flourishing agriculture and mining and lumbering industries." Barrett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 219.

³⁴ Lydia is described as a "seller of purple." The reason for identifying her by vocation is not clear. Purple dye was quite expensive since it came from the head of a fish in the Black Sea and was relatively rare. Purple cloth was expensive and became a symbol of wealth. No doubt her clientele was of the upper class, and perhaps her own resources were substantial. The Roman connections are assumed because of Phil 4:22, which sends greetings from the household of Caesar. The expression would have particular significant in a Roman colony such as Philippi.

³⁵ W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich, "ἀπλότης," BAG (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1957) 85. Although these meanings are sometimes disputed (see the second of their entries), there are obviously these overtones at times.

³⁶ The same term is found in the gospels when Jesus advocated giving "liberally." The point was that the gift was to be a true gift, that is, with "no strings attached." There were to be no ulterior motives, and no personal benefits or rewards were to be sought.

focus produced a generous gift. Although the size of the gift is unknown, four elements in the text suggest it was substantial. First, Paul calls it "riches" (πλοῦτος), a rare term to use in such a context. Second, it is described as "to their ability and beyond" (8:3-4), indicating the sacrificial nature of the gift. Their giving began with ability and moved to their inability ("beyond themselves"). Third, they begged Paul to allow them to give (8:4). This statement reflects both their insistence on giving and their situation. Perhaps Paul thought the gift was more than they could really give, but they begged for the privilege of giving. Here again Paul uses the word "grace" to describe the gift. If Paul were troubled by the size of the gift, he accepted it because it came from the grace of God. Fourth, Paul took great care in the administration of the gift. With justification, some see a major transfer of funds because of the size of the envoy selected to accompany the gift to Jerusalem.³⁷

Each of these factors suggests that generosity is not dependent on the possession of significant resources, but is a matter of the purposes of the heart. Paul says as much in his commendation of the Macedonians (8:5). They "gave themselves first to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God." Their giving was twofold: to the Lord and to us. Although many suggest a temporal argument here (that they gave themselves first *in time* to the Lord), the logical expression is more likely. The financial gift represented a higher giving than was expressed. The real issue was their relationship to the Lord and the personal implications it brought. The material gift was "natural" because they had already cared for the greater matter of presenting *themselves* to the Lord.³⁸ That prior commitment led them to commit themselves to Paul and the concerns he brought to their attention. Thus the gift was truly Christian. It was an outworking of their relationship with Christ; it was a participation in the lives of other Christians, and it was sacrificial. The Macedonians were indeed exemplary in their giving.³⁹

³⁷ This, of course, is not a necessary conclusion and may not be warranted. It would be perfectly natural for each church to be represented in light of the theological significance of the gift (see above discussion). Further, it is doubtful that the size of the Christian communities of this area as well as their general socio-economic situation would allow for a gift of unusual proportions. On the other hand, it is likely that the envoy would carry cash and that many dangers awaited travelers with such resources.

³⁸ Paul's concern at this point parallels his well-known commands in Rom 12:1-2. H. D. Betz says the expression "first" means "before I asked them." or "before they made their contribution" (2 *Corinthians*, 48).

³⁹ Many times the competitive element is emphasized here. Some suggest that Paul stirs the Corinthian church to action by appealing to a competitive spirit. If this occurs, it is certainly in mild form. It seems, rather, that Paul presents two examples of giving to provide models. These are the incarnational principles which Paul saw in

B. The Continued Development of Christian Graces

A second motivation is the completion of the work of Christ in them. Here Paul builds on the desire of all mature Christians to grow in grace. In 8:7-9 Paul lists six virtues in two triads. The first triad includes faith (πίστις), utterance (λόγος), and knowledge (γνώσις). Even a cursory reading of the Corinthian correspondence reveals the importance of utterance and knowledge. First Corinthians 1:5 states that they were present in the church. These two became the subjects of contention in the church as well as the vehicles by which Paul answers the problems of divisiveness.⁴⁰ The Corinthian correspondence, however, does not reveal a church particularly known for its faith, yet Paul commends the church for these qualities which were obviously prominent. The second triad commends the church for qualities which are more directly related to the offering. First, they possess great zeal (σπουδή). The term frequents these chapters. Generally it stands for a zeal to do properly what is correct. If that meaning obtains here, Paul commends them for the desire and ability to implement the plans for the offering.⁴¹ Second, they are commended for their love (ἀγάπη). Third, they are to cultivate the gift (grace) of giving. The argument is simple, yet demands responsible action. Since the church was spiritually rich and prided itself in the manifestations of spiritual gifts, they should bring that spiritual heritage to bear on the material and financial needs of other Christians. If they would devote themselves to the offering, it would provide an occasion for them to develop another Christian grace in their lives individually and corporately. If the argument of 1 Corinthians 12-14 applies here as well, the offering takes on more significance. In 1 Corinthians the evidence of the reality of these other gifts is the exercise of love. So here, the proof of their claim to these spiritual qualities depended upon the exercise of love shown in the offering. The motivation is

Jesus first and employed in his own discipleship. He sometimes urged others to follow him. The two models complement each other. The example of Jesus was now somewhat removed from the Corinthians, and none of them had seen him in the flesh. The Macedonians, however, were near and well known. Their example could not be set aside.

⁴⁰ This becomes a major problem in the first epistle in the group spirit which manifests itself. There is a continual discussion of the theme of Christian knowledge with the responsibilities and the freedoms it brings. Indeed, that was a source of misunderstanding and distinctive in the various groups. The question of utterance also ties the books together, whether utterance of the "wisdom" of the church (σοφία) or of the matter of tongues utterance. In the second epistle these issues revolve more around the ministry of Paul. Even here wisdom and utterance are foundational to the arguments.

⁴¹ The term in its various forms occurs frequently in an administrative sense. That usage predominates here, cf. 2 Cor 8:7, 8, 16, 17, 22.

twofold: (1) the development of the complete person so every area of life falls under the lordship of Christ and the process of sanctification; and (2) the complete exercise of their spirituality calls for a tangible act of love.

C. The Completion of a Promise Made

The third motivating factor is the completion of a commitment made to the offering. This first appears in 1 Cor 16:1-4, where Paul opens his remarks in a way typical of the first Corinthian correspondence. The phrase "now concerning" indicates that he was responding to questions from the church. Thus there was a prior knowledge of the offering. Perhaps it was Titus who informed them of the offering and secured their initial participation (2 Cor 8:6).⁴² Following that, Paul wrote specific instructions in 1 Cor 16:1-4. They included (1) laying aside an offering on the first day of the week, (2) giving as God had prospered them, and (3) selecting some trusted persons to carry the offering to Jerusalem.⁴³ The same instructions had been given to the churches of Galatia (1 Cor 16:1) at the beginning of Paul's third missionary journey. Obviously the project constituted a major concern during this time of Paul's life.

The church at Corinth was the first of the churches to give, but a year had passed since Titus went to Corinth for Paul. Now Paul felt the need to address them again regarding the offering. Probably, they had given immediately upon hearing of the need (2 Cor 8:10) and left Titus with the promise of more to come. Such zealous and spontaneous giving may easily subside into forgotten promises.

Paul's approach contains several elements. He first showed genuine concern for their well-being in this undertaking (8:10). He stated what all should remember: it is in our best interests to keep our promises. He also called them to realize that the desire to perform will not replace the actual performance, and he continued by reminding them of the pressing need. They must complete the task. Second, he sought for Christian equality. The equality was in the supply of needs and sacrifice. Each person measured his giving in light of what

⁴² This must be the meaning of Titus' having made an "earlier beginning" (NIV) rather than thinking of it as earlier than Paul. We also know that Paul had sent Titus to Corinth and was somewhat concerned about his delay. That prompted Paul to leave a successful ministry in Troas and look for Titus (2 Cor 2:13), who had been sent as an envoy to solve a problem between the Corinthians and Paul (2 Cor 7:6).

⁴³ Paul's plans for the offering changed after the 1 Corinthian correspondence. According to Rom 15:25-27, Paul determined that the offering was of such significance that he should postpone his trip to Rome in order to accompany the group to Jerusalem with the offering from the Gentiles.

he had, not what he did not have (8:12). Again, the goal was not that others prosper at someone's expense, but that there would be equal sacrifice and equal supply of needs (8:13). The OT supports these ideas. Paul quotes the LXX of Exod 16:18 (8:15) to remind the people that when God supplied in the wilderness, he did it in a way that all would receive adequately and equitably. The situation applied to the Corinthians. If God were supervising the distribution of resources, as he was in the desert when he supernaturally supplied their needs, there would be adequate supply for all and equitable distribution. The Corinthians had the responsibility of acting God-like in their stewardship of resources.

D. *The Principle of the Harvest*

The final major motivation is the principle of the harvest. The principle occurs in both natural and special revelation, coming from a knowledge of agriculture and Scripture. Paul states it: "Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously" (9:6, NIV). Statements like this had become proverbial by the first century, occurring in both biblical and extra-biblical contexts. Perhaps Paul crystallizes such proverbs as Prov 11:24-25 and 22:9, which extol generosity in sharing with others.⁴⁴ The form of the proverb, however, resembles that of Cicero who said, "As you sow, so shall you reap."⁴⁵ Here Paul applies it to one's relationship to material things and makes it a normative Christian principle; Interestingly, the phrase translated "generously" is literally "upon blessings" (ἐπ' εὐλογίας), stressing the principle of proportionate giving. The Corinthians were to give according to how God blessed.

Paul provides a commentary on the last two portions of the proverb, "He that soweth bountifully shall reap bountifully" (9:6). Rather than warn of the repercussions of stinginess, which Paul assumes are self-evident, he urges them positively toward the rewards of giving. The commentary provided expands "soweth bountifully" and "reapeth bountifully."

⁴⁴ Prov 11:24-25 says:

One man gives freely, yet gains even more;
another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty.
A generous man will prosper;
he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed.

Prov 22:9 says:

A generous man will himself be blessed,
for he shares his food with the poor.

⁴⁵ Cicero *De Oratore* 2.65.261. Paul's precise statement seems to be his own rather than a copy of some other formulation.

Regarding the matter of sowing bountifully, God loves a cheerful giver. Two guidelines explain cheerfulness. First, the gift must be according to conviction (“every man according as he purposeth in his heart”). Rather than external motivation or standards, perhaps imposed by the collector of the gifts, each one is to respond to the promptings of the Holy Spirit in light of his own personal situation. A special joy and satisfaction comes from following through on what God has placed in the mind and heart. Since it is always easier to purpose than to do, and the distance between the commitment and the follow-through constitutes the amount of frustration one will experience, Paul urges them to comply with the Holy Spirit and joyfully follow God's promptings. Second, the gift is not to be given grudgingly. The parallel words “not out of regret” and “not out of necessity” suggest that one should not succumb to the external pressures imposed on him. “Regret” means literally “out of sorrow” (λύπης). Perhaps Paul has in mind the sorrow that comes from mishandling material possessions and learning this important principle of stewardship after many difficulties. The term “necessity” (ἐξ ἀνάγκης) speaks to the possibility of being pushed (by God) into a situation of giving.⁴⁶ To avoid these wrong motives for giving, the giver should give out of a free enactment of a predetermined commitment. Not only does this provide the best situation for the conscience, the burden of this section, but it places one in an environment of God's special love since God loves a cheerful giver.⁴⁷ Thus, sowing generously means responding consistently to the promptings of the Lord to give according to what God has laid on the heart.

The second portion of the commentary addresses the matter of reaping generously (9:9-11). Those who sow will receive. This passage has given rise to the idea of “seed faith,” i.e., that God will provide more to those who give.⁴⁸ The context, however, speaks against this idea. First, Paul states that God can make all grace abound. Again he prefers to use the term “grace” for this type of giving (typical of this

⁴⁶ The use of the term in 1 Cor 9:16 parallels this one in a helpful way. There Paul explains he is under compulsion to preach the gospel. There is such strong internal witness to that calling that there was no real alternative.

⁴⁷ Since God obviously loves a stingy giver or even a non-giver, this statement must mean that God's blessings are somehow uniquely poured out on a giver. When giving freely and out of love, we are more like God than when engaging in any other activity.

⁴⁸ Some who teach “seed faith” suggest that God expects a gift out of faith and that he will provide for the giver in greater measure. There will thus be a greater harvest for their own use. As will be demonstrated, this passage counters that argument both contextually (with the argument of this passage) and conceptually (that God is required to give to those who give to him).

context), and thus the grace God will supply must refer to some gift received in return. As the Corinthians are to be the vehicle of God's grace to the Jews, so God is able to work so his grace comes to them through some appropriate vehicle in their time of need. Note that Paul does not guarantee a great influx of financial provision, but reminds them that God can remember them. Since God placed the Jewish situation on Paul's heart, resulting in a generous gift for them, so God can place anyone on another's heart with the same result.

Second, Paul indicates that this grace accomplishes "good work." Two statements crystallize this teaching. In v 9:8 the goal of God's provision is that they "might abound to every good work" (note the $\epsilon\upsilon\alpha$ clause which introduces this aspect of the text). This statement is further explained by 9:10, where Paul states that God may "increase the fruits of your righteousness." Some have interpreted these statements to mean that God will provide financial blessing because of the righteousness (or good work). Taken in this sense, the gift becomes a means of securing greater financial blessings.

The problems with this interpretation are: (1) this represents a non-Pauline use of the term "righteousness," and (2) this makes giving a way of receiving rather than the single-minded giving that Paul has advocated earlier. Christian giving is never to be a means of receiving material things. Rather, Paul states that God is able to enlarge the gift given so that the giver may be able to engage in greater benevolence ("every good work," v 8), and that the gifts given will produce fruit. The latter phrase, found in verse 10, teaches that the real benefits of giving are the spiritual blessings that accrue because of the righteous state of the giver (i.e., that he is saved), and because he has invested in the work of God as a result of that state of grace.

The ultimate goal is "thanksgiving to God," expressed here in vv.11 and 12.⁴⁹ Far from being a promise that one who gives will always receive more financially, this suggests that the giver will receive, in that (1) he will understand the workings of God better and be in a better position to trust his own needs to God who *can* supply grace to those in need *even as he did through the giver to another's needs*, and (2) the results of a gift prompted by the Spirit and given for the work

⁴⁹ This is best understood as a corporate idea. Verse 12 is taken as the thanks from Jewish Christians who receive the gift (C. K. Barrett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 240), from both Jewish Christians and Corinthians (Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, 228), or even many beyond these two groups (Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 294). The general broad perspective fits best with Paul's thought. Therefore the thanksgiving comes from many sources, encouraged by this gift. Obviously in this context the Corinthians and Jewish Christians are in the forefront of thought, but the idea should not even be limited to them.

of God will be that God is glorified in new ways by broader circles of people.

The motivation from the principle of the harvest, therefore, is that God will do more with a gift given (sown) than the obvious. The act of giving cheerfully will place the giver in a special environment of God's love, and the gift will ultimately bring praise to God. There is no guarantee that God is bound to increase the resources of the giver, nor is there here a promise that God "must" meet the needs of one who gives. The matter is a matter of God's grace, not of law.⁵⁰

IV. Administrative Responsibilities

Sensitive to the charges of abuse in this area, Paul clearly sets forth responsibilities in the physical matters. The responsibilities are two-dimensional, encompassing both the giver and the collector of funds.

The primary focus of these chapters is on the giver and his responsibility before God. A summary statement will suffice to review to this point. The giver is (1) to be sensitive to the promptings of God in his life; (2) to recognize that giving is an expression of the grace of God and brings with it a responsibility of stewardship; (3) to determine for himself what amount is appropriate; (4) to follow through on his commitments, giving cheerfully; (5) to give single-mindedly, with a focus simply on being faithful to God's prompting to give; and (6) to give expecting that God will use the gift beyond what can be imagined to bring praise to himself. Clearly, Paul conceived of stewardship as essential in the lives of believers and as a unique evidence that the grace of God was operative in their lives.

Paul also defined responsibilities for the collectors of the monies, sometimes by command and sometimes by example. Although the offering was of extreme importance to Paul as a vindication and completion of his own ministry, he recognized the higher importance of his calling to spread the gospel to the world. His primary task was the ministry of the Word, and not even the offering could deter him. He chose to utilize Titus as the intermediary. Perhaps he learned from

⁵⁰ One should, of course, guard against going to extremes. The one extreme has addressed because it is most pressing in our society (that of wrong expectations supported by misunderstanding of Scripture). The other extreme is that one should not expect God to meet his own needs since that is not directly promised here. Such is not the case. The general principle is that God will supply to those who give (cf. Phil 4:19). The supply, however, is what is necessary to do the will of God in our lives. Giving to God should never be perceived as a way of investment, binding God to bless us financially. That is not giving in the character of this chapter.

the early church that while "waiting on tables" is important, there is a higher calling of "giving oneself to teaching" (Acts 6). Paul understood himself as clearly in the line of the apostles both by spreading the gospel and by his involvement in the Gentile mission, which was a ministry and insight distinctive to Paul (Eph 3:1-10). Whether or not this was his motivation, Paul chose not to engage in the "hands-on" aspect of the offering. Originally, he did not even intend to accompany it to Jerusalem, but later realized the significance of this gift and changed his mind.

The procedures for the collection are, therefore, instructive. Paul entrusted the work to qualified brethren. He addressed their character and their concern in 8:16-9:5.

A. The Character of the Men

The most prominent of the men selected was Titus, Paul's trusted companion. Significantly, he is the only one named in this passage, a fact which suggests that Paul wanted Titus to be prominent because of his relationship to both Paul and the Corinthians. Having been sent to Corinth as Paul's envoy, he had made the initial arrangements for the offering. Obviously he also bore the primary responsibility for it. Three statements reveal Titus' suitability for the task he undertook. First, he enthusiastically cooperated with the promptings of God in this service (8:16). Again, Paul thanked God for so moving in Titus' life. His "natural" concern for them and the collection qualified him for this important position. Perhaps Titus bore this burden from the beginning, since he heard the apostles urge Paul to "remember the poor" (Gal 2:1-10). Second, Titus was responsive. He "accepted the exhortation" from Paul. Third, he was anxious to go. Paul indicates that he was desirous of going to the church to see them again, a fact which evidences the special relationship God had given to Titus and Corinth (8:17). Paul's primary representative, therefore, had an enthusiastic commitment to the project, knew the theological significance of the offering, and enjoyed the trust and respect of the church at Corinth.

Another Christian brother accompanied Titus. Unnamed by Paul, this man also had the respect of the Gentile Christian community. His reputation in the work of the gospel was legendary (8:18). The churches chose him for this task (8:19).⁵¹ Paul seemed anxious to have this man because he wanted to do things properly in the sight of the Lord and in the sight of men (8:21). The concern for propriety before the Lord suggests that Paul lived with the realization that God watches each

⁵¹ The term "chosen" may actually indicate a vote. It literally means a "hand vote" (χειροτονηθείς).

person and activity. In actuality, Paul did not need a delegation to guard his character, as 1 Thessalonians 1-2 reveals. Nevertheless, the group would produce an added accountability which would be commendable to the Lord as well as satisfy human expectations. Paul had settled financial matters at the outset of the ministry, preferring not to be supported by others. Nevertheless, this procedure would ease the minds of those who gave, as well as provide an objective protection for the administration of funds.

A third brother, also unknown, accompanied the two (8:22). Characterized by a proven earnestness which now was at its height,⁵² and no doubt equally well known to the churches, this brother would lend his credibility to the offering. If Acts 20:4 speaks of the same delegation, it was significantly larger than these three. It included local representatives consisting of Asians, Europeans (Macedonians), and Romans. The offering encompassed many nationalities and was delivered by a composite group.⁵³

B. *The Concern of These Men*

The size of the group and its manner of selection further stress the importance of the offering to Paul. Nothing was to interfere with their expression of love, and the three men were to guarantee it. The group had another function, however, that of properly overseeing the matters so there would be no reproach brought to the name of the Lord or to Paul and his ministry. If there would be opposition to Paul, it would be on spiritual/theological grounds, not on financial.

The group functioned also in other ways. First, it was to assist in the collection of the offering. Paul scheduled an arrival at Jerusalem at Passover. The feast was not only the appropriate time for all Jewish men to appear at Jerusalem, but was also the time of the celebration of redemption, sacred to the Jews because of Egyptian bondage, and sacred to Christians because it pictured the redemption accomplished in Christ. The gifts from the Gentiles received at the feast of redemption were, in a sense, the final fruit of redemption. Therefore the timing was of great significance. The group of three was to guarantee that the collection would be ready on schedule.

They were also to make sure that the gift was not of "covetousness" (9:5). The term is difficult to interpret here. In 1 Thess 2:5 Paul uses the term in defending himself against the charge of "extortion or

⁵² The terms are *πολὺ σπουδαιότερον*, the superlative degree indicating an intensive desire for involvement in this.

⁵³ Perhaps two reasons for this appear: (1) to communicate personally the good will of the churches they represented, and (2) to protect the local "Christian investment" from their churches.

avarice." Perhaps, therefore, Paul wanted them to know that the gift did not come from his own covetousness, but it is difficult to see how their prior arrival would solve that problem. First, Paul could still have used the gift for his own ends even after the arrival of the group; and second, the term contrasts with "thanksgiving" (εὐλογία). The covetousness to avoid, therefore, must be an attitude on their part. Perhaps it is best to understand it as Martin does. He suggests that the gift was not to be from the "'love of money' which in turn leads to a niggardly gift."⁵⁴ The arrival of these three prior to Paul would help the Corinthians to offer a genuine thank offering to God. They could fulfill their promises, give as God had prompted, and no ulterior motives would either produce the gift or control its amount.

There are, therefore, several concerns relative to the matter of the collecting of the offering. First, Paul must be the motivator for the giving since God laid it on his heart. Second, others who share the vision and the burden must be involved in the actual handling of the monies.⁵⁵ Third, the group who deals with the money should represent trusted men from Paul and the churches. This provides accountability before the Lord and men. Fourth, the involvement of the group encouraged the churches to give more generously by reducing the likelihood of misconduct. The early arrival of the group gently reminded them of past pledges. Significantly, Paul deals in great detail in this chapter with responsibilities for both the giver of funds and the collectors.

Conclusion

In these two chapters Paul presents his most comprehensive instruction for giving to needy Christians. His theological motivations included the common salvation and an awareness of the historical outworkings of God's redemptive program. He selflessly motivated the Corinthian church to follow the example of the Macedonian Christians, to remain true to their prior commitments, and to cooperate with the work of God in their lives. They were to remember the example of Christ who gave himself for them. Finally, his administrative procedures revealed his concern that all things be done above reproach. Paul's concerns help the contemporary church. In a day of increasing demand for financial support of ambitious ministries, there is danger that the end will justify the means of fund raising. Sometimes both Christians and non-Christians take offense at high-pressure

⁵⁴ Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 286.

⁵⁵ Significantly, the term for money does not occur in these chapters.

tactics and the continuous emphasis on finances. A study of this passage however, reveals that Paul would have none of these. As important as this offering was--and as necessary for the Corinthian Christians as an expression of their spiritual lives--Paul remembered his priorities. In a masterful way he promoted the cause while disassociating himself from the process of collection and the destination of the funds. Above all, he saw this as a necessary outworking of salvation. It would unite Christians of many ethnic and national backgrounds in a tangible fellowship and, ultimately, contribute to the praise of the glory of God's grace.

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