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A1401 – January 5, 2014 – 2 Corinthians 9:1-7
God Loves A Cheerful Giver

If you open your Bible to 2 Corinthians 8, we'll continue our study of NT giving and come to a few of the more famous verses on giving known well by many students of the NT. To get up to speed, last time we worked with 2 Cor 8:16-24. In this section Paul writes a letter of commendation for the three delegates who were chosen to travel to Corinth and take up the collection prior to Paul's possible coming with some Macedonian believers. In v 16 Titus was the first delegate, he wanted to go to Corinth for this purpose of his own accord and yet Paul gives the credit to God for this desire because He was the One who placed this desire in Titus' heart. In verse 18 we find the second delegate, an unnamed but famous brother because of his widespread proclamation of the gospel. In verse 19 he was not chosen by Paul but by the churches. The administration of the gift to Jerusalem was for the two-fold purpose of the glory of the Lord Himself and to show their willingness to serve. Verse 20 describes the manner of the delivery as one taking precautions so as not to result in a discrediting of their ministry. Verse 21 explains that they realized the importance of honorable dealings with money that were proper in the sight of the Lord and also in the sight of men. In verse 22 the third delegate is mentioned. He too is unnamed but we are told that he was tested many times and found to be approved. In verse 23 the three delegates had a distinct relationship to Paul; Titus was a co-worker but the other two men were merely brethren and messengers of the churches. This distinction was designed by Paul so that he could remain above reproach with his opponents who often accused him of only being in the ministry for the money. Since two of the men were not closely associated with Paul this would distance Paul from any accusations. Finally in verse 24 he exhorts the Corinthians to give liberally in order to demonstrate to the other churches their love for the brethren and also to confirm Paul's boastings about them.

Chapter 9 continues where chapter 8 leaves off, the chapter break is unfortunate as the thought continues...Here Paul begins to write that it was really unnecessary for him to write these things since he is confident that they are going to follow through and be ready with the gift. He says, **For it is superfluous for me to write to you about this ministry to the saints; 2for I know your readiness, of which I boast about you to the Macedonians, namely, that Achaia has been prepared since last year, and your zeal has stirred up most of them.** Before we launch into these verses we want to do a little geography. Macedonia is the northern province of Greece. It was named after Phillip of Macedon, father of Alexander the Great and it houses many of the cities you are well aware of from Paul's travels; cities like Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea and so forth. There were churches in these cities planted by Paul and so when Paul refers to the **Macedonians** in verse 2 he's referring to the believers in these cities. The other region mentioned is **Achaia** and **Achaia** is the southern province of Greece, in the main this large peninsula known as the Peloponnesian Peninsula. There were well-known cities here as well; cities like Athens, Corinth, Sparta and lesser known cities like Cenchrea and Lechaum. We suspect there was a church in Athens and Cenchrea and Lechaum and so when Paul refers to **Achaia** in verse 2 he's referring to the believers in these cities. So you have the believers in Macedonia and the believers in Achaia and Paul was boasting on behalf of each of these groups to the other group. He was proud of them and he wanted them to mutually stir one another up to give to the saints at Jerusalem who were in need.

And now that we know who we're talking about he says several things in verse 1 to the Corinthians who were of Achaia. First, **it is superfluous for me to write to you about this ministry.** By **ministry** Paul is referring to the financial contribution. Making a financial contribution to other believers in need is classified as **ministry.** **Ministry** is not just what some people called clergy engage in. Ministry is something all believers are to engage in and one way that believers can minister to others is by giving a financial contribution to believers in need. Second, Paul says **it is superfluous to write** to them about the contribution, meaning in his mind it was unnecessary. But he writes all the same and the Holy Spirit has inspired the writing and therefore from God's point of view it was necessary for him to write to them about the contribution to the saints. Third, this ministry is **to the saints** and we've already identified these saints as the believers in

Jerusalem who were in special need at the time. The designation **saints** can also be translated the “holy ones.” All believers are saints or holy ones. This is not a designation used of a special group of believers as it is done so prominently in the Roman Catholic Church. It is unbiblical to assign the designation **saint** only to a special subset of believers. All believers are saints. The designation saints means “one set apart.” All believers have been set apart by God for His use. We are set apart at the moment we believe the gospel. Even the Carnal Corinthians were called “saints” and Paul says in 1 Corinthians they were “sanctified.” So the word does not refer to any acts of holiness done by us but rather to God’s work of setting us apart for Himself. Therefore if you are a believer you are a saint and you can tell your friends to call you saint so and so and that will be perfectly biblical. And if you are reticent to ask your friends to call you that then it’s because you’re still clinging to the unbiblical concept of a saint. You are a saint. God made you a saint so consider yourself a saint.

Now the reason in verse 1 that Paul thought it superfluous to write about the financial contribution is explained in verse 2. **For I know your readiness**, Paul already knew they were ready to make a contribution. How did Paul know this? Because if you scan back up to 8:10 you will recall that they had begun a year ago to take up the contribution. So Paul had known of their readiness to give for a year. And even up to a year before he says he had boasted about them **to the Macedonians**. And now that you know your geography you know that the **Macedonians** are the churches of northern Greece. So he was boasting to the Macedonian churches about how ready they were to give and it was designed to stir them up to give as well.

His specific boast is recorded in verse 2, **namely, that Achaia has been prepared since last year**. And now that you know where **Achaia** is then you know that it refers to the churches of southern Greece, including, and in the main, Corinth, but other cities as well. And so the boast by Paul was on behalf of Achaia to the Macedonians. They had been prepared, they had been ready for a year. And you can glimpse faintly where Paul is going with this line of argument. If they had been ready for a whole year then what’s the argument Paul is making? Finish. It doesn’t look good to start and not finish. You made a good start a year ago but let’s not procrastinate boys, it’s time to finish. The great fear of Paul is that they would fail to finish. That they would be like so many believers and start well but not finish. There are far

too many people who start and never finish. We need fewer starters and more finishers. And that's what Paul is going to call for here that they become finishers.

Now back when they started notice what it caused at the end of verse 2, **and your zeal has stirred up most of them.** When the Achaian's started to give a year ago Paul started to boast about them to the Macedonians and what it did in the Macedonians is it stirred up **most of them** to give. The Greek stirred up means it "excited" them to give. Now I don't know if that's ever happened to you but it happened to them. In the early church people wanted to be a part of ministry and one of the ways they could minister was to give. So if there was a genuine need by a group of believers and one group of believers started giving and this was told to other groups of believers then it often stirred them to give as well. That is what had happened a year before. The believers of Achaia heard of the need in Jerusalem and so they started to give. Paul told the Macedonians how eager they were to give and this stirred most of them up to give too. The difference is that the Macedonian's followed through, they finished giving but the Achaian's spun out, they didn't finish the project. They had made a good start but they did not know how to finish. And again, that's really what the first four verses are about. Paul is concerned that they are not going to follow through and finish what they started a year before.

But, in verse 3, he's taking steps to ensure that they do finish. **But I have sent the brethren, in order that our boasting about you may not be made empty in this case, so that, as I was saying, you may be prepared; otherwise if any Macedonians come with me and find you unprepared, we—not to speak of you—will be put to shame by this confidence.** Now you can see Paul is planning a third trip to Corinth. He had already been to Corinth twice before. The first visit was his missionary journey in Acts 18 when they were converted, five years before, the second visit was his sorrowful visit mentioned in 2 Cor 2 when he was offended by an opponent and here he refers to a possible third visit along with some **Macedonians**. I say possible because it's a third class condition and so he has plans to go but he leaves open the possibility that God may change those plans. But ahead of his possible plans to come a third time he says **I have sent the brethren**, this refers to Titus, the famous brother and the well-tested brother of chapter 8, and they are to take up the generous contribution

so that, and notice the first reason in verse 3, **that our boasting about you may not be made empty in this case**, that is turn out to be vain. At this point there is a very real question whether the Corinthian's good start will turn out to be nothing more than a lot of hot air and baloney talk. And Paul doesn't want to be made a fool. He's been boasting about them but all that boasting would be in vain if they didn't come through. So to encourage them to get ready, really ready, he says I've sent this delegation.

Now if they don't get ready, he says, and I and some **Macedonians come**, the very people they had stirred up to give a year before, and we get there and you're **unprepared, we—not to speak of you—will be put to shame by this confidence**. Why we'll all be humiliated, we've been boasting about you and giving you good compliments and then you don't follow through, how embarrassing not to speak of you, just think how embarrassed you will be to have pledged to give a certain amount and then to fail to give that amount and the very amount you pledged to give stirred others to give, and they gave but you didn't, how humiliating. A. T. Robertson says this is "a bold and daring challenge." He's challenging them to fulfill their word, to put forth the amount originally pledged so that when the delegation comes everything is ready. And then Paul's boasting in them will not be made empty and they themselves will not be humiliated.

So while Paul thought it superfluous to write in verse 1, in verse 5, he **thought it necessary to urge the brethren that they would go on ahead to you and arrange beforehand your previous promised bountiful gift, so that the same would be ready as a bountiful gift and not affected by covetousness**. See, they had already pledged a certain bountiful gift. It was apparently a very liberal gift. And this was good. But to not follow through would not be good. So he sent Titus, the famous brother and the well-tested brother **ahead to...arrange** the promised gift **before** Paul came. This way, Paul says at the end of verse 5, the gift would not be affected by **covetousness**. The Greek word is *pleonexia* and means "greedily, grudgingly." It's the idea of desiring to have more. They had promised this money, they needed to remain true to their promise. The word is used elsewhere to describe a lust of the flesh (Rom 1:29; Eph 5:19; 5:3), a characteristic of unbelievers (2 Pet 2:3, 14) and that which amounts to idolatry (Col 3:5). It borders on avarice, the strong desire for the things of the world and the incapability of being satisfied by them when received. It's the

attitude that I've got to have, have, have and every little thing I have I think will satisfy me but when I get it then what? I'm not satisfied and I have to have something else. That's avarice and this word is bordering on that word and preliminary to it! Paul detects that this attitude may be at work in the Corinthian's flesh and if it is it would result in a kind of giving with regret. They wouldn't really want to give because they'd rather spend it on their next toy, in hope that that would satisfy them. Now that's what's really going on here. They've put off giving the pledged amount for a year now and there could be a hesitancy rising up in them because they want to spend their money on something else, some little toy to make themselves happy. So Paul sent the delegation ahead to get the promised gift ready so this desire that might be at work would be headed off at the pass before it resulted in them giving with a grudge. We should not give with a grudge. That's what vv 6-7 are getting at when it leads to the climax of God loving a cheerful giver.

Now the beginning of verse 6 is poorly translated in the NASB, the KJV, the NKJV, the NIV and most other Bible translations. The Greek is *touto de* which just means "now this," but it's an ellipsis and BDAG says it should be translated, "The point is this..." In other words, Paul is now telling us the main point. He's summing up what he has just said about the danger of being affected by covetousness that leads people to giving with a grudge, with a chip on their shoulder. And consequently both vv 6-7 are famous for giving the proper way to think about giving; they are the main point of what Paul has been saying. "The point is this," Paul says, **he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully**. The verse is an allusion to Prov 11:24ff. The point there is that if a person gave freely he always had plenty whereas if he withheld he always was in need. The point here is similar. Don't be covetous, don't be greedy, and don't be stingy. If you are a farmer and you go out in your field and you are stingy with the seed then you'll sow sparingly and then what can you expect except to reap but a little crop, to **reap sparingly**. But if you are generous and you sow bountifully, then you will also reap bountifully. So the principle is that you cannot reap more than you sow so your attitude toward giving should be to give bountifully.

Now that is all that this verse is really teaching but since the 1950's this verse has been used by advocates in conjunction with others to support prosperity theology; also known as the health and wealth gospel and so we

want to deal with this theology for a moment. Prosperity theology teaches that it is God's will for all believers to be healthy, wealthy and demon free and the only thing standing in the way of you having all three is your lack of faith. It is a theology of human determinism in the sense that all you have to do to have it is name it and claim it and continue to claim it by exercising a continual force of faith and speaking positively. Popular advocates of this false theology today include Joel Osteen, pastor of the Mega-Church in Houston, Bruce Wilkinson, in his popular book *The Prayer of Jabez*, Kenneth Hagin, founder of RHEMA Bible Training Center, Robert Tilton through Trinity Broadcasting Network, T. D. Jakes, Kenneth Copeland and others. The movement began in the 1950's and seems to be a blend of positive thinking and the faith healing movement. It has now spread worldwide and tends to attract the poor since they are promised riches and miracles through faith healing and positive speaking. The teachers advocate a law they call the law of compensation, sometimes referred to as the law of sowing and reaping. This doctrine teaches that if you give to others, whether money or material goods, then God will give you ten-fold in return. Advocate Kenneth Copeland explains it this way, "You give \$1 for the gospel's sake and \$100 belongs to you, give \$10 and receive \$1,000; give \$1,000 and receive \$100,000.... Give one house and receive one hundred houses or one house worth one hundred times as much...."ⁱ Popular televangelist Robert Tilton says it worked this way in his life. "I started noticing good things showing up around me. I gave away a pair of shoes, then I noticed three or four pairs came back. I kept giving watches away, then I noticed a very expensive Rolex watch jumped onto my wrist."ⁱⁱ What these prosperity teachers fail to notice is that this verse does not at all support the idea that God will give you ten-fold return on what you give. If the verse were to be used that way it would only say that you reap what you sow, not more. If you sow sparingly you will reap sparingly, if you sow bountifully you will reap bountifully. But the verse clearly does not say that if you sow sparingly you will reap bountifully. It's a violation of the text. Sometimes Mark 10:29-30 is called on to support the idea that you can sow sparingly and reap bountifully. This passage says, "Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or farms, for My sake and for the gospel's sake, but that he will receive a hundred times as much now in the present age, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and farms, along with persecutions; and in the age to come, eternal life." Yet all the passage really teaches is that if a Jew became a true disciple of Christ he would be cut

off from his family and possessions but he would find a new family among Christ's true disciples in whose homes he could live. Never mentioned by prosperity advocates is the persecutions that will come or emphasis in the millennial age to come when a higher quality of eternal life will be enjoyed by those who left all to follow Christ. The context is completely ignored by prosperity advocates. In our own passage where the law of compensation is claimed, neither the verse nor the context says that the giver will reap money or other material goods in return. It says in verse 8 that they will have an abundance for every good deed, not for slapping Rolex watches on their wrist. It says in verse 10 that they will reap a harvest of righteousness, not dollar bills. It says in verse 11 that they will have the ability to touch more lives, not fill up their bank account. Prosperity theology is nothing more than baptized materialism. We could go on and on but every passage they use is a misuse taking the verse out of context. Prosperity theology is a bunch of bull used to prey on the poor by promising them health and wealth so that the advocate gets a lot of money that he can spend on making himself rich.

All that verse 6 means is to explain the last word of verse 5, **covetousness**. Paul doesn't want them to be greedy when they give. He says if they're greedy, it's like a farmer who sows sparingly and consequently only reaps sparingly. Instead they should be like a farmer who sows bountifully and reaps bountifully. Don't be greedy in your giving, that's all Paul is saying.

Then in verse 7 Paul continues to encourage the Corinthians to follow through with what they had promised to give a year before. They should not recoil from the original amount they had pledged. He says it this way, **Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart**. The Greek verb **purposed** means "decided." It's the middle voice so it means decided within himself without any external influence. It's a perfect tense meaning a past completed decision. Paul is saying that a year before each of them had decided in their hearts how much to give and they should now do accordingly by giving exactly what they decided a year before.

Then Paul says I don't want you to give in two ways. First, **not grudgingly**. As we've seen, to give grudgingly was a very live threat. If they were greedy or worse, avarice had set in, then to give what they had originally purposed in their heart would not be comfortable. They would be giving reluctantly. And if you give reluctantly, you hesitate in the giving and that's not giving in

faith; that's doubt and whatsoever is not of faith is sin. So you shouldn't be hesitating when you give, you shouldn't be reluctant to depart with the money, you should be certain, you should be purposeful and, as we'll see, joyful. So first, Paul didn't want them to give **grudgingly**. Second, nor **under compulsion**. Compulsion means with pressure. They had already decided for themselves how much to give a year ago. They should not allow anyone else to influence a change of mind away from their original decision that was purposed in their heart. Pressure, even subtle pressure to change their mind away from what they had originally planned to give is what Paul is condemning here. So while others may pressure them to give more or less than they originally purposed, Paul's instruction is for them to stand firm on what they had originally purposed in their heart.

And why? **for God loves a cheerful giver**. Or rather, in the Greek, "a cheerful giver is loved by God." **Cheerful** is emphatic because that is to be the emphasis in giving, we are to be joyful when we give, not giving reluctantly or grudgingly or because of pressure. The Greek word for **cheerful** is *ilaron* from which we get our word "hilarious." Of course we are not to give hilariously which conveys the idea of no thought, but we are to give with thought that brings cheer. It may be wondered how a man can give cheerfully when he is departing with his money? The answer is by God's grace. When we depend upon Him we realize that everything we own belongs to Him anyway. God loves it when we realize that everything we have belongs to Him and that by sharing some of it with others in need we are only passing along what He has given to us. If everything we have was given to us by God then why doesn't God just give to those in need? Because He enjoys bringing us into the process. He wants us to get some of the joy of what it is to give to others. When we do we receive God's loving approval.

In summary, in verse 1 Paul thought it was superfluous to write to the Corinthians about this contribution since in verse 2 they had been ready since the prior year. Their prior readiness even gave Paul reason to boast and thus stirred up most of the churches of Macedonia to give. But in verse 3 Paul sent the delegation anyway to make sure they were really prepared so that Paul's boasting in them would not be empty. Otherwise, verse 4, if Paul arrived with some of the Macedonians who were stirred up by their initial pledges, and they found them unprepared to fulfill those pledges, it would be humiliating to Paul, not to speak of the humiliation of the Corinthians

themselves. So, verse 5, Paul thought it was necessary to urge the delegation to go on ahead of himself in order to arrange this previously promised gift so that the exact amount they had pledged would be ready and not affected by any greed that might have crept in. The main point, in verse 6 is that they should give bountifully as they had previously pledged and not greedily as one who sows sparingly. Finally, in verse 7, each one should do as he had purposed in his heart a year before, he should not give grudgingly, hesitatingly or reluctantly, nor should he give under compulsion, allowing anyone to change his mind about the original amount he had pledged, for God loves a cheerful giver and a cheerful giver is one who is giving in response to God's grace and in accordance with his own desires.

In conclusion, what can we learn? First, when giving between churches is publicized it can stir up other churches to give. In verse 2 Paul boasted of the Corinthians to the Macedonians and it stirred them up to join the effort. This is valid as a principle of notifying other churches of needs and trying to stir them up to join in the efforts of helping needy believers. Second, it is important to decide in your own heart how much to give. In verse 7 they each purposed in their own heart. It must be a settled conviction in your own heart and once you have decided it is best not to allow that conviction to be altered. Third, it is important not to allow greed or avarice to set in after we have decided on an amount to give. In verse 5 and 7 the warning against giving with a grudge is clear. God doesn't want us to give with a grudge. He wants us to give with cheer according to our purpose in our heart. Fourth, it is important not to allow compulsion to be the motivating factor in giving. In verse 7 Paul says not under compulsion. Peer pressure from others should not be the main reason we give or do not give; the pressure could be either way. Instead, the rule of thumb is to give as one has purposed in his own heart and to remain true and steadfast to that purpose.

ⁱ (1986). *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 143(572), 333.

ⁱⁱ (1986). *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 143(572), 335–336.

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