

“Faithful and Fruitful Giving”

2 Corinthians 8:16-9:15

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Commendation of Titus

16 But thanks be to God, who put into the heart of Titus the same earnest care I have for you. 17 For he not only accepted our appeal, but being himself very earnest he is going to you of his own accord. 18 With him we are sending the brother who is famous among all the churches for his preaching of the gospel. 19 And not only that, but he has been appointed by the churches to travel with us as we carry out this act of grace that is being ministered by us, for the glory of the Lord himself and to show our good will. 20 We take this course so that no one should blame us about this generous gift that is being administered by us, 21 for we aim at what is honorable not only in the Lord's sight but also in the sight of man. 22 And with them we are sending our brother whom we have often tested and found earnest in many matters, but who is now more earnest than ever because of his great confidence in you. 23 As for Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker for your benefit. And as for our brothers, they are messengers of the churches, the glory of Christ. 24 So give proof before the churches of your love and of our boasting about you to these men.

The Collection for Christians in Jerusalem

9 Now it is superfluous for me to write to you about the ministry for the saints, 2 for I know your readiness, of which I boast 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. 3 But I am sending the brothers so that our boasting about you may not prove empty in this matter, 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—for being so confident. 5 So I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to go on ahead to you and arrange in advance for the gift you have promised, so that it may be ready as a willing gift, not as an exaction.

The Cheerful Giver

6 The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. 7 Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. 8 And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work. 9 As it is written,

*“He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor;
his righteousness endures forever.”*

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. 11 You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. 12 For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God. 13 By their approval of this service, they will glorify God because of your submission that comes from your confession of the gospel of Christ, and the generosity of your contribution for them and for all others, 14 while they long for you and pray for you, because of the surpassing grace of God upon you. 15 Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!

We're continuing to make our way through this centrally important passage on the grace of giving here in 2 Corinthians 8-9. Last week, we focused on the truth Paul emphasizes early in chapter 8 that generous giving is a manifestation of the grace of God in our lives. A spirit of kingdom-minded selfless generosity is a gift of God's grace, and we are to strive to earnestly and zealously walk in the grace, to grow in this grace of the Lord in our lives.

Today, we're continuing to focus on the rest of what Paul says in chapters 8 and 9, where he gives some practical guidelines for faithful giving and the faithful administration of that giving and then his description of the fruitful effects of generous giving both in the life of the giver and in the lives of those who receive the giving and those who witness the generous giving.

Faithful Administration of Giving, 8:16-23

Sadly, one of the biggest sources of scandal and disillusionment in the history of the church has come from financial mismanagement. Sometimes, wolves in sheep's clothing masquerade as sincere Gospel preachers when really they're just money-grubbing thieves. These men often distort the Gospel by half-truths in ways that make it harder to teach about giving without at least some people lumping all preachers who talk about money into the same pile of untrustworthy, self-seeking preachers.

At other times, however, it's not been outward manipulation to generate more generous giving but the unwise and unfaithful administration of that giving that is the problem. Some churches have had Deacons, secretaries, etc. who have quietly helped themselves to money from the church funds. Or sometimes, churches can give to support ministries in good faith only to learn later that those ministries were mishandling the funds given to them.

Paul sets a good example in 2 Corinthians 8 of how to faithfully administer a sizable gift entrusted to the care of the church. He had already laid the groundwork for this care in 1 Corinthians 16:1-4 –

Now concerning the collection for the saints: as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do. ² On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come. ³ And when I arrive, I will send those whom you accredit by letter to carry your gift to Jerusalem. ⁴ If it seems advisable that I should go also, they will accompany me. (ESV)

"I will send those whom you accredit by letter to carry your gift to Jerusalem." Multiple trusted people would accompany the Corinthians' gift for the relief of the poor. And we see that here in 2 Corinthians 8, probably written about a year later, Paul has selected two men to go to Corinth with Titus. These trusted men will oversee the collection and may also be the same men who see that it makes it safely to Jerusalem:

¹⁶ But thanks be to God, who put into the heart of Titus the same earnest care I have for you. ¹⁷ For he not only accepted our appeal, but being himself very earnest he is going to you of his own accord. ¹⁸ With him we are sending the brother who is famous among all the churches for his preaching of the gospel. ¹⁹ And not only that, but he has been appointed by the churches to travel with us as we carry out this act of grace that is being ministered by us, for the glory of the Lord himself and to show our good will. ²⁰ We take this course so that no one should blame us about this generous gift that is being administered by us, ²¹ for we aim at what is honorable not only in the Lord's sight but also in the sight of man. ²² And with them we are sending our brother whom we have often tested and found earnest in many matters, but who is now more earnest than ever because of his great confidence in you. ²³ As for Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker for your benefit. And as for our brothers, they are messengers of the churches, the glory of Christ.

Now, we don't know who these two other brothers are, but the Corinthians would have known who they were. They are men of good reputation, well-known in all the churches for their faithful and fruitful Gospel ministry.

Scripture says that every matter should be established by 2 or 3 witnesses, and this becomes a core biblical principle applicable in a wide variety of contexts. Here's the integrity of the administration of the gift, from ensuring that the collection of it among the Corinthians is honorable and not manipulative and also keeping it safe and making sure it all reaches its intended destination in Jerusalem – all of this is established above reproach by the participation of three men. And while we don't know who these three men are, they are evidently not all three just close associates of Paul. The first brother, in verse 19, is identified as "*the brother who is famous among all the churches for his preaching of the gospel.*" And in verse 20, Paul says, "*he has been appointed by the churches to travel with us as we carry out this act of grace.*"

By the way, this whole process is a key piece of biblical evidence in support of a connectional form of church government. The churches are connected to one another and are coordinating their efforts together through their elders. These are not isolated, wholly self-governing and unconnected congregations.

Right Motivation for Faithful Giving: Willing & Zealous Love, 8:24 – 9:5

At the end of chapter 8 and the beginning of chapter 9, we get a section of verses that tell us of the right motivation for faithful giving:

24 So give proof before the churches of your love and of our boasting about you to these men.

9 1 Now it is superfluous for me to write to you about the ministry for the saints, 2 for I know your readiness, of which I boast 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. 3 But I am sending the brothers so that our boasting about you may not prove empty in this matter, 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—for being so confident. 5 So I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to go on ahead to you and arrange in advance for the gift you have promised, so that it may be ready as a willing gift, not as an exaction.

Generous giving, done rightly and faithfully, should be the outward evidence of love – love first for God in gratitude for all He has given, and then love for His people as our brothers and sisters in Christ and love for our neighbors as those who bear God's image. Only love is the right and God-honoring motivation for giving to God and others in His name – not self-promotion or a sense of lawful duty or obligation or a desire to put someone else in our debt.

But how do we know if we're being motivated by love? Paul gives us three key descriptors: readiness and zeal in verse 2 and then willingness in verse 5. The Corinthians were ready, willing, and zealous to give or, at least, Paul was trusting that they were because readiness, zeal, and willingness would be proof of their love, where as hesitation, half-heartedness, and reluctance would all be indicators that their giving was motivated by joyless duty or mere obligation or peer pressure or guilt or pride or some other lesser motivation.

The proper motivation for giving is summarized again in verse 7: "*Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.*" God loves a cheerful giver because only a cheerful giver is one who is giving out of love. When we give out of love, we are eager to give, we can't wait to give. It's exciting. We're cheerful, so happy to give. Giving in love is enjoyable and not burdensome.

It's clear from this whole passage that it matters very much why we do the good things we do; right motivation is as vital as the action itself.

Fruitful Giving: Sowing & Reaping, 9:6-11

So, what is the fruit that comes from faithful giving faithfully administered? Paul draws attention to two kinds of fruit, that which benefits the givers themselves and then that which benefits others, not only those who receive the generous giving but also others in the church and the world.

So, first, Paul addresses the benefits for the givers themselves, and this is where we need to be careful to understand and believe what the Scriptures say and why they say it without having our minds distracted or polluted by the underhanded manipulation tactics of prosperity Gospel TV preachers.

⁶ The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. ⁷ Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. ⁸ And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work. ⁹ As it is written,

*“He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor;
his righteousness endures forever.”*

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. ¹¹ You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. (ESV)

Paul highlights the foundational biblical principle of sowing and reaping. Paul states another form of this principle on Galatians 6:7: “*Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap.*” Sowing and reaping is a basic principle of God’s created order: What you sow determines what you reap, and how much you sow determines how much you reap. Now, God’s grace and mercy can often override this creation principle. Sometimes God allows His people to reap where they have not sown; sometimes that means that someone else will sow without reaping.

For example, in judgment, God told His people through Micah, “*You shall sow, but not reap; you shall tread olives, but not anoint yourselves with oil; you shall tread grapes, but not drink wine.*” (Micah 6:15). On the other hand, Jesus told His disciples at the Samaritan village of Sychar after He had talked with the Samaritan woman at the well, “*Do you not say, ‘There are yet four months, then comes the harvest’? Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest. Already the one who reaps is receiving wages and 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 4:35-37)*

So, we can’t take even core biblical principles which are woven into creation by God and try to use them as absolutes that bind God and compel Him to act according to our expectations. Prosperity Gospel preachers make two fundamental errors when they use 2 Corinthians 9:6 to support their formulaic prosperity teaching that “you can’t outgive God” and “whatever you give to God will be returned to you ten-fold,” which sounds biblical.

1. Their first error is in trying to think we can use the Scriptures to control God, to bind Him to do our will. I need \$1,000 for something by this weekend, so I’m going to put \$100 in the offering plate today, and then God is obligated to give me \$1,000 by the week’s end. That’s not how God works.
2. The second error is in misunderstanding the ways or the reasons why God blesses abundantly those who give generously. When God blesses His children, it is always with a good purpose in mind. It’s not just so He can have “rich kids,” as some say. What do verses 10-11 say? God will “*multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way*” (ESV). God blesses us so we can spread righteousness and generosity in every way. It’s not primary

about financial wealth but about an abundance of righteousness and a wealth of generosity in every way, which includes money but also time and prayer and mercy.

So, how should we understand what Paul is saying? Well, in Luke 16:10, Jesus said, “*One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much.*” If we give generously and lovingly, we can expect (not demand or know automatically, but expect) that God will continue to bless us with opportunities to give generously and lovingly. We are blessed to be able to give and God continues to bless us by continuing to enable us to give.

Fruitful Giving: Thanksgiving to God, vv. 12-15

When we do give generously and lovingly, the impact on others is profound, too:

12 For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God. 13 By their approval of this service, they will glorify God because of your submission that comes from your confession of the gospel of Christ, and the generosity of your contribution for them and for all others, 14 while they long for you and pray for you, because of the surpassing grace of God upon you. (ESV)

The first and most obvious fruitful benefit of the giving is that it will bless those who receive the gift by supplying their needs. The needy and hungry families of believers in Jerusalem and Judea will eat. Praise the Lord for that!

But also, Paul says, as the needs are met, the generous giving of God’s faithful people will overflow in many thanksgivings to God. God is glorified because people will see that the Gospel of Jesus Christ truly rules the hearts of His people, not money or cultural prejudice. This will assure the believers in Judea that the believers in Greece are true believers, their genuine brothers and sisters in Christ, and so the Judean believers will long for and pray for the Greek believers faithfully. Why will they long and pray for the Corinthians? For the same reason that the Corinthians will give generously in genuine love: “*because of the surpassing grace of God upon you.*” The surpassing grace of God is the salvation we have received in Jesus Christ our Lord. It is because of this surpassing grace alone that we love, long for, and pray for one another.

So, the whole church will be strengthened with joy in the Lord and the Lord will be glorified among His people.

Closing: All Glory to God!

As Paul reflects on the effects this generous gift will have in the hearts and lives of God’s people, and as he meditates on the “surpassing grace of God” that is the root cause of this generosity and love, he exclaims in praise: “*Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!*”

Paul knows that this profound spiritual unity and powerful love overflowing in the grace of generous giving is only possible because of God’s greatest gift, His inexpressible gift of His Son, Jesus Christ. Because God gave the highest and best, His love transforms our hearts and empowers all of our giving for His glory as a reflection and response to this inexpressible gift.

Paul doesn’t explicitly say precisely what the “inexpressible gift” of God is. This has raised an intense debate among Bible scholars: Is the inexpressible gift Paul gives thanks for Jesus Christ or our salvation in Jesus Christ?

Adam Clarke, in his commentary on this verse, says, “*Jesus Christ, the gift of God’s love to mankind, is an unspeakable blessing; no man can conceive, much less declare, how great this gift is; for these things the angels*

desire to look into. Therefore, He may be well called the unspeakable gift, as he is the highest God ever gave or can give to man . . .

The conversion of a soul from darkness to light, from sin to holiness, from Satan to God, is not less inconceivable. It is called a new creation, and creative energy cannot be comprehended. To have the grace of God to rule the heart, subduing all things to itself and filling the soul with the Divine nature, is an unspeakable blessing; and the energy that produced it is an unspeakable gift."

Adam Clarke thinks that the inexpressible gift Paul is giving thanks for is not Jesus Himself but our salvation in Jesus. But, why can't it be both? After all, Jesus Christ is our salvation, and our salvation is Jesus Christ and Him alone. As Paul himself said in 1 Corinthians 1:30-31 *"And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord." (ESV)*

Surely, we can speak accurately, clearly, and faithfully of Jesus Christ and our salvation in Him. If we couldn't, why would we read the Bible or preach or teach or gather for worship, if Jesus and salvation were utterly inexpressible? We can speak clear and accurate truth about Jesus Christ and salvation, but we can never express the fullness of the depth of the riches and wisdom of God found in Jesus Christ.

Charles Spurgeon said, *"If you preach Christ, you will never run short. If you have preached ten thousand sermons about Christ, you have not left the shore; you are not out in the deep sea yet. Dive, my brother! With splendour of thought, plunge into the great mystery of free grace and dying love; and when you have dived the farthest, you will perceive that you are as far off the bottom as when you first touched the surface."*

We never get to the end or the bottom of the wonderful treasure of Jesus Christ and our salvation in Him. But we know Him as He has been revealed to us and we have truly received salvation in Him. We believe Him as we know Him, and we trust Him beyond what we can see and know. That's faith. And that's joyful worship in the Lord. So, *"Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!"*