

## 2 Corinthians 8 & 9

### Introduction

2 Corinthians deals with many vital themes at the heart of the Christian faith, and among these central themes is giving. Large space is given to it, in fact, one sixth of the epistle (in our Bible, that is two chapters). Paul was very clear about the subject and the principle behind it. The Bible does not have the embarrassment that we often have about the subject. Paul simply states the facts, he does not dictate or browbeat. He does not tell them what they have to give in detail, but appeals lovingly to them to act in the light of the facts.

The Jerusalem church was in trouble. It was a very poor church. Possibly the Christians had lost their jobs because they were Christians. They were often in need. The church in Syrian Antioch had sent aid (Acts 11:27-30). Paul had earlier appealed to the Corinthians to have a collection for the saints (1 Corinthians 16:1). Now he makes another appeal here. There is a reminder in Galatians to do good to all men, especially those of the household of faith (Galatians 6:10). Giving is a practical expression of Christian care and love.

Information is given that three men are to collect the gift – Titus, Paul's partner and fellow-worker, a brother whose praise is in all the churches (Luke?), and another brother who is zealous (2 Corinthians 8:17-19). Three men of fine character. Paul is anxious to avoid criticism or suspicion which might arise about the handling of money. Therefore others were to share in taking up the collection.

We are all urged to do what is right in the eyes of God and of men. Men of the highest integrity should be in charge of handling the money. They should be open, candid and frank, and careful not to do anything which invites suspicion or criticism. Proper accounting and auditing of books is essential, even in Christian circles, for the protection of everybody.

### Model of giving

Two examples are held up to the Christian church, human and divine. The human example is the Macedonian churches (Thessalonica, Berea and Philippi). Paul uses the friendly rivalry between the churches to stir up his Corinthian readers. The Macedonian churches were very poor (the Romans had plundered the area a century before, and it had not recovered), and they were also persecuted. Yet they were extremely generous, and gave as much as they were able, and beyond. Paul did not feel like asking them for more, but **urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in service to the saints** (2 Corinthians 8:4).

The secret of generosity is to first give themselves to the Lord, **and then to us in keeping with God's will** (2 Corinthians 8:5). First give yourselves to the Lord – here is the key to giving money, time, talents, service, interest and prayer. There are enormous problems in some churches about these issues, and they would be sorted out immediately if people gave themselves to the Lord. Regarding finance, some churches

have to rely on emotional appeals, use of missionary success stories and stewardship campaigns, when these could all be passed by if only people gave themselves to the Lord. The main way to deal with problems in churches is to urge the members to give themselves to the Lord.

Then Paul gives the divine example, through reference to God's gift in Christ. **For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich** (2 Corinthians 8:9). He was rich in glory and majesty, but He became poor for our sakes. He borrowed a place for His birth, a house to live in, a boat to preach from, an ass to ride on, a room for the Lord's Supper, a tomb to be buried in. On the Cross he was in utter desolation. As He died, he was forsaken not only by men but also by God as He bore our sins. The result of His humiliation for us is that we become rich in grace, forgiveness, eternal life, fellowship with God.

Think of your debt to Christ. And as we minister to one another, we are ministering to Him. **Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift** (2 Corinthians 9:15). Our motive for giving – look at Jesus Christ. He shows us how it is done, and the costly lengths to which we ought to go.

#### Method of giving

Paul did not dictate or command them to give. He did not get the big stick out. But tactfully and graciously he lays down simple Christian principles. He realized that a vital part of his ministry was to educate Christians and teach them their responsibility to God and to others. Now the Corinthians had intended for the last twelve months to give to the work, so it was important at this point for them to put their good intentions into action. This giving was to be an expression of their love (2 Corinthians 8:8), a sign of their spiritual health, and proof that their profession was real and true.

Giving should always be willing, free, deliberate and cheerful. **Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion for God loves a cheerful giver** (2 Corinthians 9:7). We must not give grudgingly or moaning. George Duncan once remarked, "I have heard many 'hallelujah's and 'praise the Lord's in meetings, but I have never heard 'praise the Lord' when the offering is announced." The happy people in church are the givers of money, time, strength and prayer. **It is more blessed to give than to receive** (Acts 20:35).

Yet at the same time, care and wisdom is important. We are not meant to impoverish ourselves or those dependent on us. We have a duty to our families. Giving does not have to be a burden. **Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard-pressed** (2 Corinthians 8:13). God knows our limits, and does not expect us to give what we don't have, nor does he expect us all to give the same amount. It is possible to give too much, as it is possible to give too little. Our giving is to be controlled by God's will. "Be just before you are generous". God knows our responsibilities. He is not unfair or unreasonable, nor does He expect the impossible.

The main thing is our willingness, desire and intention, and this is God's concern. That is why the conception of the tithe is so fair and sensible. It is a good guideline. It was an Old Testament practice, which the Christian ought to at least match, if not

exceed. The principle here is of proportionate giving. In extreme cases, it may be too much, if the person is in grinding poverty with barely enough to clothe and feed a family. For others, a tithe is too little. But it is a useful guideline.

Our giving is to be generous, regular, systematic (a process and not an explosion), wise and proportionate. This is good stewardship, and it is not an option but an essential part of real discipleship for all Christians. It is a policy to be carried through life, but it should be a delight, not an obligation.

### The means of giving

But where are we going to get the money from? Shall we not be impoverished? Giving does not mean we are to be gradually drained of all resources. But the giver must be aware of greater stores God has put at his disposal. God's resources cannot be impoverished. The more we give, the more we can draw on Him.

**God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work (2 Corinthians 9:8).** "All grace" – nothing a believer really needs is kept from him. No gift will be denied him. "At all times" – the Christian will never suffer if he is trusting the goodness of God. He may not supply his need far in advance, but he will have what is necessary for the moment. "All that you need" – all sufficiency, God can provide for every situation, and His gift is always adequate. He promises all necessities, down to the smallest detail.

Nothing is too small or unusual that it cannot be talked over with the heavenly Father. He wants us to abound in every good work. This does not mean He will enrich us to coddle us or to gratify every whim, but He will answer prayer if our desire is to live and give ourselves to His will and His work. Sufficiency for every task. When God sends us on His errands, He will supply the means.

The best way to obtain these blessings from God is to use what we have unselfishly for Him, and expect Him to replenish our supplies as needed. As our means are consumed in His service, He will give more. As we spend in His bounty, He will increase the supply. If we sow sparingly, we will reap sparingly.

Christian giving is a wise investment of money, time and strength. If we are givers, God will ensure we always have something to give. Here is a strong argument against those who insist a church cannot afford to give to foreign missionaries, because of the needs at home. The fact is that churches who give generously to missionary work always seem to have the wherewithal to meet the needs at home.

The result of all this is a spirit of praise and thankfulness to God. **You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God (2 Corinthians 9:11).** At the same time, others will be blessed and benefited, and will praise God too. Generosity is proof of the reality of the profession of faith. It deepens the bonds of Christian fellowship. It extends the fellowship of mutual prayer.

The giving Christian and the giving church receives so much in return, often materially, and always spiritually. **Give and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over will be poured into your lap. For with the same measure you use, it will be measured to you** (Luke 6:38). The liberal giver need not fear destitution. The generous man receives in return gifts out of all proportion to his own. **A generous man will prosper; he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed** (Proverbs 11:25).

It is good to note that Paul's appeal was not in vain. Some months later he writes to the Romans, **It pleased those from Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor among the saints who are in Jerusalem** (Romans 15:26,27).

### Conclusion

Paul provides two models of giving – the example of other Christians, and above all God Himself. Our method should be wise, systematic, generous, proportionate and cheerful. God has provided the means adequately for us to be generous.

Giving does something for others. It relieves their need. It also does something for ourselves. It proves the reality of our profession and brings us the love and prayers of others. It does something for God. It brings thanksgiving and praise to His holy name. **When men see your good works they will glorify your Father which is in heaven** (Matthew 5:16).