

ENGAGE

- How do you define rich or poor?
- Can rich or poor be defined by the attitude of the person rather than the amount in an account? Explain.
- This week there is a large passage (2 chapters) speaking on generosity. The generosity spoken of is financial and has to do with a gift the Church is collecting for others in need.

EXAMINE**A. Examples and encouragement.***1. (1-5) The example of the Macedonian Christians.*

Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia: that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality. For I bear witness that according to *their* ability, yes, and beyond *their* ability, they were freely willing, imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints. And not *only* as we had hoped, but they first gave themselves to the Lord, and *then* to us by the will of God.

- a. The grace of God:** Paul will now write about other churches and their example in giving. In his first few words on this subject, Paul shows he considers both the *opportunity* and the *willingness* to give a gift from **the grace of God**.
- b. The churches of Macedonia:** The northern part of Greece was called **Macedonia**. The southern part was called *Achaia*, and the city of Corinth was in the region of Achaia. Paul writes about the example he sees in **the churches of Macedonia**. The **churches of Macedonia** were in cities such as Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea.
 - c. That in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality:** Paul reports to the Corinthian Christians the example of the Macedonian Christians. The Macedonians, though they were in **a great trial of affliction** and though they were in **deep poverty**, still gave generously (**abounded in the riches of their liberality**).
 - i.** Why did Paul write about giving at all? What was he collecting money for? Paul was raising money to help the Christians in Jerusalem, who were very poor. He had previously mentioned this effort in [1 Corinthians 16:1-4](#).
 - ii.** The poverty of the Macedonians is confirmed by secular history. The Romans took most of their wealth when they conquered this former homeland of Alexander the Great.
- d. For I bear witness:** Paul knew that the Macedonians gave in two ways. First, they gave **according to their ability** in the sense that in total, their gift wasn't very much. It was not a "large" gift in a total dollar

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sense. Secondly, since their heart was **freely willing to give**, and they gave in proportion to the little they did have, they gave **beyond their ability**.

i. The account of the widow's giving in Luke 21:1-4 illustrates the same point. She only gave *two mites*, which was a very small amount of money. In that sense, she gave **according to [her] ability**. Nevertheless, since she gave all she had – after all, she might have kept one mite to herself – she gave **beyond [her] ability**. The same principle of giving was evident in the Macedonian Christians.

ii. "That poor widow's mite was beyond the rich man's magnificence, because it came out of a richer mind." (Trapp)

e. **Freely willing, imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift:** Paul didn't have to beg for money from the Macedonian Christians (which he wouldn't have done anyway). Instead, they were *begging him (imploring us) to receive the gift!*

i. **Imploring us** means that it was the Macedonians who begged Paul for the privilege of giving, not Paul who begged them for money.

ii. So, though the Macedonian Christians didn't have much to give, they really *wanted* to give. They saw it as a *privilege* to give. True Christian generosity can't be measured by how much one has to give. Often those who have less are more generous with what they have.

iii. "The example of the Macedonians is practical proof that true generosity is not the prerogative of those who enjoy an adequacy of means. The most genuine liberality is frequently displayed by those who have least to give. Christian giving is estimated in terms not of quantity but of sacrifice." (Hughes)

f. **Not as we hoped:** The Macedonian Christians gave far beyond what Paul hoped for. What made their giving so spectacular? It wasn't the dollar amount. It was that they **first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God**. Why were the Macedonians such good examples of giving? Because they **first gave themselves to the Lord**; then they gave their trust to Paul and the other apostles.

i. In giving, the real issue isn't giving money. It is giving ourselves to the Lord. If we really give ourselves to the Lord, then the right kind of material giving will naturally follow.

2. (6-8) *Paul's tender, wise encouragement in giving.*

So we urged Titus, that as he had begun, so he would also complete this grace in you as well. But as you abound in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all diligence, and in your love for us—see that you abound in this grace also. I speak not by commandment, but I am testing the sincerity of your love by the diligence of others.

a. **So we urged Titus, that as he had begun, so he would also complete this grace in you as well:** Paul's associate, Titus, as the bearer of this letter, was supposed to encourage the Corinthian Christians to

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actually give him the collection, then he would give it to Paul. He was supposed to make certain that they actually followed through on what they had intended to do earlier.

i. We might imagine that the Corinthian Christians were willing to take up a collection for the saints in Jerusalem and give that money to Paul to take with him to Jerusalem. But when things became difficult between Paul and the Corinthian Christians, they may have been less willing to take up the collection and put it in Paul's hands. One reason Titus was sent with this letter was to **complete this grace** in the Corinthian Christians and make certain they followed through on their original intent.

ii. **Complete this grace:** The Corinthian Christians may have *intended* to give. They may have *thought* about giving. They may have been *favorable to the idea* of giving. Yet all of this was useless unless they did in fact **complete this grace**. Our intentions, vows, and resolutions are useless without action. It was time for the Corinthian Christians to act, and Titus was sent to help them do this.

b. **As you abound in everything:** Is Paul being sarcastic here? Probably. If the Corinthian Christians did indeed abound **in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all diligence, and in... love for Paul**, they had just started to do these things. But the Corinthian Christians probably *thought of themselves* as abounding in all those things. So it is as if Paul is saying, "Very well, I'll take your word for it. You do abound in all these things. So now, **abound in this grace also.**"

i. **This grace also:** Now, for the fourth time since the beginning of the chapter, Paul refers to giving money as a **grace** (*grace of God... receive the gift... complete this grace*). The fact that Paul uses the ancient Greek word *charis* to describe financial giving means a few things.

ii. *The ability to give and the heart to give is a free gift from God.* Giving is a work of God's grace in us. When you see a believer who is truly generous, a great work of God has been done in their heart. We should never say, "Well, they just want to write the checks and not get involved." No, giving *is* getting involved, and it demonstrates a true work of God's grace in the heart.

iii. *Our giving should be like God's giving of grace to us: giving freely, generously, because we want to give.* When God gives to us out of grace, the motive for His giving is in *Him*, not based in the one who receives. That is how we should give – because the motive of the love and generosity of God is so big in our heart that we simply *must* give.

iv. *Our giving, like God's grace to us, should be offered without expectation of payment in return.* God does not give to us expecting "payback." We can never repay God. We can just serve Him and love Him in return.

v. "Once you see the matter of giving is centered in this lovely word *grace*, it lifts the whole act away from mechanics, from pressure and duty, from obligation and mere legalism. It lifts us up into the most lovely atmosphere of an activity which seeks by giving to convey to others all that is lovely, all that is beautiful, all that is good, and all that is glorious. What a lovely word this word is... For there is no area in the Christian life in which grace shines out so much, so beautifully, so delightfully, and so happily as when giving comes from the background of poverty." (Redpath)

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c. **I speak not by commandment:** Paul isn't commanding the Corinthian Christians to give. Paul knew that giving from commandment isn't giving at all; we call that kind of giving *taxation*.

d. **I am testing the sincerity of your love by the diligence of others:** Paul makes two important points here. First, giving can measure the **sincerity of your love**. Second, Paul openly *compared* the giving of the Corinthian Christians to the giving of the Macedonian Christians (**testing the sincerity of your love by the diligence of others**).

i. Many of us like to think that we can love without giving, but what does 1 John 3:17-18 say? *Whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.* Jesus said much the same in Matthew 6:21: *For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.* What we give, and how we follow through on our commitment to give, are valid tests of our love.

ii. Also, it is not unfair to compare our giving with the giving of others, at least in some sense. Jesus compared the giving of the poor widow with the giving of others (Luke 21:1-4). But we shouldn't think that Paul is encouraging a fund-raising competition between the churches of Macedonia and Corinth. He simply uses the Macedonians (who gave so much even in their poverty) as an example of giving.

iii. Since the Corinthians had more than the Macedonians did, they *should* give more. Calvin puts it plainly: "Rich men owe God a large tribute and poor men have no reason to be ashamed if what they give is small."

3. (9) *The second example of giving: our Lord Jesus.*

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.

a. **You know the grace of our Lord Jesus:** From the context, and from how Paul has used the word **grace** in this passage, we know that Paul means, "You know the *giving* of our Lord Jesus."

b. **Though He was rich:** When was Jesus **rich**? Before He added humanity to His deity and walked this earth. Here, Paul subtly, but definitely, points to the deity of Jesus. There is no way Paul could write **though He was rich** if Jesus began His existence in Mary's womb.

i. And what riches! Jesus, as the eternal Second Member of the Trinity, as God the Son, living in the riches and splendor of the ivory palaces of heaven (Psalms 45:8), surrounded constantly by the glory, power, and majesty of God. The riches Jesus enjoyed before adding humanity to His deity make *any* amount of wealth on earth seem poor.

ii. Notice that it says that Jesus **became poor** when **He was rich**. Just as Jesus added humanity but never lost His deity, so He also "added" poverty but never "lost" His riches. "For He assumed poverty,

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yet did not lose His riches. Inwardly He was rich, outwardly poor. His deity was hidden in His riches, His manhood apparent in His poverty.” (Hughes)

c. **Yet for your sakes He became poor:** Jesus lived His earthly life as a poor man. We should not exaggerate the poverty of Jesus; after all, He was not a destitute beggar. Yet He could say of Himself, *“Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.”* (Matthew 8:20)

i. When we contrast the simple life of Jesus (**He became poor**) with His existence before adding humanity to His deity (**He was rich**), we are even more amazed. Poverty always feels worse when one has been rich.

ii. Most amazing of all is *why* Jesus accepted this simple life of poverty: **for your sakes**. This was Jesus’ “giving.” He gave financially in the sense that He accepted a humble life of poverty (when He had all power to live as the wealthiest man in all history), and He did it **for [our] sakes**.

iii. Why would Jesus need to become poor **for your sakes**? How does His poverty benefit us?

- Because it shows us the giving heart of God.
- Because it shows us the relative importance of material things.
- Because it makes Jesus open and accessible to all.
- Because it rebukes the pride that might refuse to come to a poor Savior.
- Because it gave others the privilege of giving to Jesus.
- Because it fulfilled the heart and will and plan of God, making our salvation possible.

d. **That you through His poverty might become rich:** Because of Jesus’ poverty and all that was related to it, we can **become rich**. We have a share in Jesus’ eternal, heavenly wealth because He came and had a share in our poverty.

B. Practical words of advice regarding giving.

1. (10-12) *Follow through on your previous willingness.*

And in this I give advice: It is to your advantage not only to be doing what you began and were desiring to do a year ago; but now you also must complete the doing *of it*; that as *there was* a readiness to desire *it*, so *there also may be* a completion out of what *you* have. For if there is first a willing mind, *it is* accepted according to what one has, *and* not according to what he does not have.

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a. **Now you also must complete the doing of it:** The Corinthian Christians previously expressed a **desiring** and a **readiness** to give. Now, they *actually had to do it!*

i. The Devil will let you *resolve* as much as you like – the more the better – just as long as you never carry it out. “The tragedy of life so often is, not that we have no high impulses, but that we fail to turn them into actions.” (Barclay)

ii. John Trapp wrote more than 300 years ago, “This age aboundeth with mouth-mercy, which is good cheap, and therefore like refuse fruit is found growing in every hedge. But a little handful were worth a great many such mouthfuls.” How much truer is this today!

b. **A completion out of what you have:** We can’t give what we don’t have. God judges our giving against what resources we have. However, the issue of *what and how we spend* is relevant to **what you have**. If you overspend and therefore never have any to give, you can’t excuse it before God by saying, “Well, I don’t have anything to give.”

c. **If there is first a willing mind:** When we give, God looks for **readiness** and a **willing mind**. These are the true marks of a generous heart before God and are no more likely among the rich than the poor.

d. **It is accepted according to what one has, and not according to what he does not have:** Again, God does not expect us to give what we do not have. True Christian giving cannot be measured by the amount. One might give a million dollars and yet not give enough; another may give one dollar and give with tremendous sacrifice and generosity. True giving is measured by obedience, proportion, and need, not by amount.

i. When the issue of giving is brought up many ask, “How much am I supposed to give?” Paul’s principles throughout this letter and other letters remind us that there is no one answer to that question for every believer.

ii. Many go back to the Old Testament law of the tithe, the giving of ten percent unto the Lord. This is a good principle for giving and perhaps a broad benchmark, yet the New Testament nowhere specifically commands tithing. The New Testament certainly does speak of tithing in a positive light if it is done with a right heart (Luke 11:42).

iii. But the New Testament speaks with great clarity on the principles of *giving*. It teaches us that giving should be *regular, planned, proportional, and private* (1 Corinthians 16:1-4) and that it must be *generous, freely given, and cheerful* (2 Corinthians 9).

iv. Since the New Testament doesn’t emphasize tithing, one might not be strict on it for Christians (though some Christians do argue against tithing on the basis of self-interest). However, since giving should be *proportional*, we should give *some* percentage, and ten percent is a good benchmark or goal. However, for some to give ten percent is nowhere near enough; for others, at their present time, five percent may be a massive step of faith.

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v. If our question is, “How little can I give and still be pleasing to God?” our heart isn’t in the right place at all. We should have the attitude of some early Christians, who essentially said: “We’re not under the tithe – we can give *more!*” Giving and financial management are *spiritual* issues, not only financial issues ([Luke 16:11](#)).

2. (13-15) *Understand the cause you give to.*

For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened—but by an equality, *that* now at this time your abundance *may supply* their lack, that their abundance also may supply your lack—that there may be equality. As it is written, “He who *gathered* much had nothing left over, and he who *gathered* little had no lack.”

a. **For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened:** The Corinthian Christians were not giving so that the Jerusalem Christians would get rich and lazy at their expense. Paul was taking the collection so the Jerusalem Christians could merely survive. The goal was not to *burden* the Corinthian Christians, nor was it to make it *easy* for the Jerusalem Christians.

i. Some like to say, “Give till it hurts. Then keep giving until it feels better again.” But God’s goal for us isn’t to “Give till it hurts.” The goal is not to afflict those who give, it is to display the giving heart and love of Jesus Christ.

ii. “This teaching is needed to refute fanatics who think that you have done nothing unless you strip yourself completely and put everything into a common fund.” (Calvin)

b. **But by an equality:** Paul sees that the *spiritual abundance* of the Jerusalem Christians has blessed the Corinthian Christians. Therefore, it should be a small thing for the Corinthian Christians to share with them their *material abundance*.

i. The **equality** Paul mentions here isn’t meant to imply socialism or communism, where all are said to live at the same economic level, and none are supposed to be richer than others are. Of course, communism and socialism themselves are evil, being noble ideas in theory but absolute tyrannies when sharing is commanded at the end of a gun. But this is not the kind of equality Paul means anyway. “I acknowledge indeed that we are not bound to such an equality as would make it wrong for the rich to live more elegantly than the poor; but there must be an equality that nobody starves and nobody hordes his abundance at another’s expense.” (Calvin)

ii. “Thus do the Scriptures avoid, on the one hand, the injustice and destructive evils of agrarian communism, by recognizing the right of property and making all almsgiving optional; and on the other, the heartless disregard of the poor by inculcating the universal brotherhood of believers, and the consequent duty of each to contribute of his abundance to relieve the necessities of the poor. At the same time they inculcate on the poor the duty of self-support to the extent of their ability.” (Hodge)

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c. **Now at this time** reminds the Corinthian Christians that this is just the way it is right now. There may be a time later when the spiritual abundance of the Corinthian Christians may minister to the saints in Jerusalem, and the material abundance of the saints in Jerusalem ministers to the Corinthian Christians.

i. But there is no idea of Jerusalem giving “spiritual” riches in exchange for material help. The saints in Jerusalem were not “selling” spiritual things. “Such an idea as that of the transference of the merits of the saints is, of course, quite foreign to the context.” (Bernard)

d. **He who gathered much had nothing left over, and he who gathered little had no lack:** Paul’s quotation from Exodus 16:18 illustrates his principle. Everyone gathered what they could, some more and some less; but they all shared what they gathered.

i. Hodge makes the point well: “Property is like manna, it will not bear hoarding.”

ii. “All that we have is manna... And just as manna, which was hoarded to excess out of greed or lack of faith, immediately putrefied, so we should have no doubt that riches which are heaped up at the expense of our brethren are accursed and will soon perish and their owner will be ruined with them.” (Calvin)

3. (16-24) *How to receive Titus when he and his companions come for the collection.*

But thanks be to God who puts the same earnest care for you into the heart of Titus. For he not only accepted the exhortation, but being more diligent, he went to you of his own accord. And we have sent with him the brother whose praise is in the gospel throughout all the churches, and not only that, but who was also chosen by the churches to travel with us with this gift, which is administered by us to the glory of the Lord Himself and to show your ready mind, avoiding this: that anyone should blame us in this lavish gift which is administered by us—providing honorable things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men. And we have sent with them our brother whom we have often proved diligent in many things, but now much more diligent, because of the great confidence which we have in you. If anyone inquires about Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker concerning you. Or if our brethren are inquired about, they are messengers of the churches, the glory of Christ. Therefore show to them, and before the churches the proof of your love and of our boasting on your behalf.

a. **But thanks be to God who puts the same earnest care for you into the heart of Titus:** Paul’s intention is to recommend Titus to them as a trustworthy bearer of their money.

b. **And we have sent with him the brother whose praise is in the gospel throughout all the churches:** Commentators have had a field day trying to identify the **brother** mentioned here. Who is he?

i. This **brother** accompanied Titus when he went to Corinth on Paul’s behalf.

ii. This **brother** was well known and praised **in the gospel in all the churches.**

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iii. This **brother** was **also chosen by the churches to travel with** Paul, carrying **the gift**. Beyond these things we know nothing about this man.

iv. As you might expect, Bible commentators have been ready to say whom they believe **the brother** to be. Some of the candidates have been Luke, Barnabas, Silas, Timothy, and a variety of others, but no one really knows. We can confidently say that it doesn't really matter, otherwise, God would have made it clear.

c. **Avoiding this: that anyone should blame us in this lavish gift:** Paul wisely avoided any gossip about his role in the collection by sending Titus and his companion to collect it, and to accompany Paul in carrying it to Jerusalem.

i. **Also in the sight of men** is a reminder that all things financial in the church should be conducted above board and properly. Paul took whatever steps were necessary so no one could blame him with financial impropriety. Paul could write like a poet and think like a theologian; but he could also act with the meticulous accuracy and integrity of the best accountant.

d. **Therefore show to them, and before the churches, the proof of your love and of our boasting on your behalf:** This is a strong encouragement from Paul to give. He says that when Titus and the unnamed brother come, the Corinthians should **show** them a good offering.

· **Show** a good offering because **the churches** will also know about it and thank God for His work among the Corinthians.

· **Show** a good offering because the offering given will be **proof of your love**.

· **Show** a good offering because Paul has been **boasting** to others about what gives the Corinthian Christians had been.

i. The concluding idea is clear. Paul asks them to now come through and give like the good givers he has claimed they are.

Chapter 9

C. Be ready to give.

1. (1-2) *The willingness of the Corinthian Christians to give.*

Now concerning the ministering to the saints, it is superfluous for me to write to you; for I know your willingness, about which I boast of you to the Macedonians, that Achaia was ready a year ago; and your zeal has stirred up the majority.

a. **Concerning the ministering to the saints:** The specific **ministering** Paul has in mind is the financial support of the Jerusalem **saints**. Paul will be in Corinth to pick up this collection for the Jerusalem saints, which he wrote of in 2 Corinthians 8 and in other previous passages (such as 1 Corinthians 16:1-4).

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i. In Acts 11:29, a previous collection for the Jerusalem saints is described: *Then the disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea*. The ancient Greek word translated **ministering** (*diakonia*) is the same word translated *relief* in Acts 11:29.

ii. The same ancient Greek work for **ministering** is used in a spiritual sense in passages like 2 Corinthians 3:8-9 and is used in a practical sense in passages like 2 Corinthians 9:1.

b. **It is superfluous for me to write to you; for I know your willingness:** Here, Paul may be showing his sarcasm again. The basic idea is, “I don’t even need to write this, reminding you about the collection, because you are already ready and willing to give.” Of course, if the Corinthian Christians were really as ready and willing as Paul seems to indicate, he really wouldn’t need to write this at all.

i. At the same time, this is a signal that Paul is done trying to persuade the Corinthian regarding giving, as he did in 2 Corinthians 8, showing the example of the Macedonian Christians and the example of Jesus. Now Paul is encouraging them in their *manner* of giving.

c. **About which I boast of you to the Macedonians:** In the previous chapter, Paul spoke of the **Macedonians** as wonderful examples of giving (2 Corinthians 8:1-8). Now, Paul (sarcastically?) informs the Corinthian Christians that he has boasted to the **Macedonians** about the Corinthian **willingness** to give.

i. This may be a “playful” way of encouraging the Corinthian Christians to really be ready and willing to give. Paul may be saying, “Come now, you really can be ready to give. After all, I’ve already bragged about your willingness to others!”

ii. **Macedonians... Achaia:** *Macedonia* and **Achaia** were regions on the Greek peninsula. *Macedonia* was to the north, and **Achaia** was to the south. Corinth was the leading city of the region of **Achaia**. The region of Macedonia had churches in cities such as Philippi, Berea, and Thessalonica.

d. **Your zeal has stirred up the majority:** Again, Paul seems to be sarcastic – or at least playful – here. He is saying that the Corinthian Christians were so zealous in their willingness to give that they were an example to **the majority** of other Christians. He says that essentially, the good example of the Macedonians (as related in 2 Corinthians 8:1-8) is just a reflection of the good example the Corinthian Christians presented to the Macedonians first.

i. We think Paul is being sarcastic here because if the Corinthians really were such great examples in giving, and if their giving prompted others to give, then Paul would never have to give them as much instruction and encouragement as he does in 2 Corinthians.

2. (3-5) *Paul is sending Titus and the others to pick up the collection.*

Yet I have sent the brethren, lest our boasting of you should be in vain in this respect, that, as I said, you may be ready; lest if some Macedonians come with me and find you unprepared, we (not to mention you!) should be ashamed of this confident boasting. Therefore I thought it necessary to exhort the brethren to go

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to you ahead of time, and prepare your generous gift beforehand, which *you had* previously promised, that it may be ready as *a matter* of generosity and not as a grudging obligation.

a. **Yet I have sent the brethren:** Paul again is giving a little sarcastic twist. It is as if he says, “You all are so ready and willing to give that I’m sure you would bring the collection to me. But in any regard, I’ll send **the brethren** to come pick it up. After all, I don’t want all my boasting about you to have been **in vain**.”

b. **Lest if some Macedonians come with me and find you unprepared:** The playful sarcasm continues. “After all, Corinthians, you don’t want the Macedonians to see that you were unwilling to give. We don’t want a case where **we (not to mention you!) should be ashamed of this confident boasting**.”

c. **Therefore I thought it necessary... that it may be ready as a matter of generosity and not as a grudging obligation:** Paul wanted the whole business of the collection completed before he arrived so that there would be nothing even remotely manipulative in his receiving the collection.

i. Paul was very concerned that giving be a matter of **generosity** and not a matter of **grudging obligation**. God Himself never gives out of an attitude of **grudging obligation**, and neither should we. To be *generous*, in the Biblical idea of the word, has more to do with our *attitude* in giving than with the *amount* that we give, so God wants a willing attitude from givers.

ii. “When God gives grace, He does not reluctantly open a little finger and maintain a clenched fist full of gifts. I would tell you today that God’s hands are nail-pierced hands and they are wide open. This fountain of grace is always pouring itself out with no limitation on heaven’s side at all.” (Redpath)

D. The reward of giving and the right heart in giving.

1. (6) *Our giving should be bountiful, if we would be rewarded bountifully.*

But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.

a. **He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly:** A farmer sowing seed may feel he loses seed as it falls from his hand to the ground, and we may feel we are losing when we give. But just as the farmer gives the seed in anticipation of a future harvest, we should give with the same heart.

i. If a farmer planted only a few seeds because he wanted to “hold on” to as much seed as he could, he would have more seed in his barn after sowing time. But at the harvest, the one who planted more seed would have much more grain in his barn.

b. **Will also reap bountifully:** What do we reap when we give? We reap blessings that are both *material* and *spiritual*.

i. Materially, we can trust that God will provide for the giving heart. The promise of Philippians 4:19 (*my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus*) is made in the

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context of the generous hearts of the Philippians (Philippians 4:15-18). If we give to God, He will give to us materially.

ii. Spiritually, we can trust that God will reward the giving heart both now and in eternity. Jesus spoke to this in Matthew 19:29: *And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life.* Jesus obviously did not mean that we would receive a hundred houses if we gave up our house for Him any more than He meant we would receive a hundred wives if we gave one up for Him! But He did mean that we are *never* the losers when we give to God. The Lord can never be in debt to any man, and we should never be afraid of giving God "too much." Spiritually or materially, you can't out-give God.

iii. "This harvest should be understood both in terms of the spiritual reward of eternal life and also referring to the earthly blessings with which God honours the beneficent. Not only in heaven does God reward the well-doing of the godly, but in this world as well." (Calvin)

2. (7) *Giving should come from a right heart.*

So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.

a. **So let each one give:** Giving is for **each one**. Every Christian should be a giver. Because of small resources some cannot give *much* but it is still important that they give, and that they give with the right kind of heart.

b. **As he purposes in his own heart:** Giving should be motivated by the **purposes** of our **own heart**. It should never be coerced or manipulated. We should give because we *want* to give and because God has put it in our **own heart** to give.

i. This can also be said in the sense that our giving *reveals* the **purposes in [our] own heart**. If we say we love the Lord more than surfing, but spend all our money on surfboards and do not give as we should to the Lord's work, then the way we spend our money shows the **purposes** of our **own heart** more accurately than our words do. Jesus said it simply: *For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.* (Matthew 6:21)

c. **Not grudging or of necessity:** God does not want our giving to be **grudging** (reluctantly, regretfully given with plenty of complaining) or **of necessity** (given because someone has made us or manipulated us into giving). This is more the spirit behind *taxation*, not Biblical giving.

i. "The Jews had in the temple *two chests* for alms; the one was of what was *necessary*, i.e. what the law required, the other was of the *free-will offerings*. To escape perdition some would *grudgingly*, give what *necessity* obliged them; others would give *cheerfully*, for the love of God, and through pity to the poor. Of the *first*, nothing is said; they simply did what the law required. Of the *second*, much is

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said; *God loves them...* To these two sorts of alms in the temple the apostle most evidently alludes.” (Clarke)

d. **For God loves a cheerful giver:** Instead of giving in a **grudging** way or out **of necessity**, God wants us to give *cheerfully*. The ancient Greek word for **cheerful** (*hilaros*, used only here in the New Testament) is the root for our English word *hilarious*. God wants us to give *happily* because that is how God Himself gives.

i. True giving *comes* from a happy heart, and it also *gives* us a happy heart. The English poet Carlyle said that when he was a boy, a beggar came to the door when his parents were gone. On a youthful impulse he rushed to his room, broke his piggy bank, and gave the beggar all the money. He said that never before or since had he known such sheer happiness as came to him in that moment of giving.

ii. Not all giving is **cheerful** giving. “Many gifts are thus given sorrowfully, where the giver is induced to give by a regard to public opinion, or by stress of conscience.” (Hodge) In Acts 5:1-11, Ananias and Sapphira stand as examples of giving for the wrong reasons, not out of a cheerful heart.

iii. “It must be hilarious giving, giving out of the heart, because you love to give, not because you are bound to give.” (Morgan)

iv. God is the ultimate **cheerful giver**. He *delights* to give to us. “It is not difficult to suggest why God delights in the cheerful giver. He himself is such a giver and desires to see this characteristic restored among those who were created in his image.” (Kruse)

3. (8-9) *The right kind of giving is always blessed.*

And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work. As it is written:

**“He has dispersed abroad,
He has given to the poor;
His righteousness endures forever.”**

a. **God is able to make all grace abound toward you:** As we give, we must be persuaded that **God is able** to reward our giving. Just as **God is able** to make the sowing of seed **abound** to a great harvest, so **God is able** to bless our giving.

i. Jesus taught that even the smallest gift, if given with the right heart, would not go without a reward: *And whoever gives one of these little ones only a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple, assuredly, I say to you, he shall by no means lose his reward.* (Matthew 10:42)

ii. In rewarding our giving, God does it with **all grace**. Our giving is rewarded in many different ways, materially and spiritually. Materially, God may bless our giving by promotions with better pay, unexpected gifts of money, or by making things last so we don't suffer the cost of replacing them. Spiritually, God may bless our giving by freeing our hearts from the tyranny of greed and materialism,

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by giving us a sense of blessing and happiness, or by storing up rich reward in heaven. There is no end to the ways we can be blessed when **God is able to make all grace abound toward us**.

b. **Always having all sufficiency in all things:** The ancient Greek word for **sufficiency** (*autarkeia*) may also be translated *contentment*. This is how the same word is used in 1 Timothy 6:6: *Now godliness with contentment is great gain*. God gives a special gift to the giving heart: **always... all contentment in all things**. That is a lot of **all!**

i. Materially speaking, how can someone **always** have **all contentment in all things**? By receiving this contentment God blesses the giving heart with.

ii. It's easy for many Christians to *say* they have this contentment; but whether they have it or not is often more truthfully known by their spending and shopping habits. How much of a place does shopping and buying have in your life? How does material loss affect your happiness? How happy do you get from having some material thing?

iii. When we live and act without contentment, we are trying to fill needs in our lives. It might be the need to be "somebody," the need to feel secure or cared for, or the need to have excitement and newness in our lives. Most people try to fulfill these needs with material things, but they can only really be met by a spiritual relationship with the God who made us.

iv. Barclay says of this ancient Greek word *autarkeia*: "By it they meant a complete *self-sufficiency*. They meant a frame of mind which was completely independent of all outward things, and which carried the secret of happiness within itself. Contentment never comes from the possession of external things." "The apostle useth many 'alls' on purpose to cross and confute our covetousness, who are apt to think we have never enough." (Trapp)

v. With this contentment, we can be the richest people in the world. A man might have the wealth of the richest man in the world, yet lack contentment. But if we have this contentment, it really does make us better off than the wealthiest people who don't have it.

c. **May have an abundance for every good work:** God blesses us materially and spiritually so that we will **have an abundance for every good work**. We are blessed so that we can be a blessing to others. God wants us to be *channels* of blessing, not *reservoirs* of blessing.

d. **His righteousness remains forever:** In the quotation from Psalm 112:9, Paul is not trying to say that generous giving *makes* us righteous but gives evidence of a right standing with God.

4. (10-11) Paul prays for blessing for the giving Corinthian Christians.

Now may He who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food, supply and multiply the seed you have sown and increase the fruits of your righteousness, while you are enriched in everything for all liberality, which causes thanksgiving through us to God.

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- a. **May He who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food:** Paul recognizes God as the great supplier. Whatever we have to give was first given to us by God.
- i. "Our translators render it in the form of a prayer; which yet being the prayer of the apostle, put up in faith, doth virtually contain a promise both of a temporal and a spiritual increase." (Poole)
- b. **Supply and multiply the seed you have sown:** Paul prays that God would **supply** resources to the Corinthian Christians so that they may give, and at the same time **multiply** what they give.
- c. **Increase the fruits of your righteousness:** The giving of the Corinthian Christians (represented by **the seed you have sown**) will give a harvest, **the fruits of your righteousness**. Paul prays that God would **increase** these **fruits** that grow from their giving.
- d. **While you are enriched in everything:** Paul prayed that the Corinthian Christians would be **enriched** by their giving, both materially and spiritually.
- e. **For all liberality:** This is the reason why the Corinthian Christians should be **enriched in everything**. Not for their own riches or lavish lifestyles but **for all liberality** – that is, for all generous giving.
- i. "No man ought to live to himself; the two great ends of every Christian's life ought to be, the glory of God, and the good of others, especially such as belong to the household of faith." (Poole)
- f. **Which causes thanksgiving through us to God:** After all the giving is done, and **all liberality** is shown by the Corinthian Christians, the **thanksgiving** is directed **to God**.
- i. In his translation of the New Testament, J. B. Phillips carries the sense of this prayer: "He who gives the seed to the sower and turns that seed into bread to eat, will give you the seed of generosity to sow and, for harvest, the satisfying bread of good deeds done. The more you are enriched by God the more scope there will be for generous giving, and your gifts, administered through us, will mean that many will thank God."

5. (12-14) *Four benefits of the giving from the Corinthian Christians.*

For the administration of this service not only supplies the needs of the saints, but also is abounding through many thanksgivings to God, while, through the proof of this ministry, they glorify God for the obedience of your confession to the gospel of Christ, and for your liberal sharing with them and all men, and by their prayer for you, who long for you because of the exceeding grace of God in you.

- a. **Not only supplies the needs of the saints:** First, on the most practical level, the giving of the Corinthian Christians will supply **the needs of the saints**. This is a good thing in and of itself, but their giving did far more than that.
- b. **Many thanksgivings to God:** Secondly, their gifts also caused thanksgiving to God. They were giving more than money for food; they were giving people a reason to thank God.

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c. **The obedience of your confession:** Third, the giving of the Corinthian Christians was evidence of God's work in them. When those in need received the gift, they would **glorify God for the obedience of your confession to the gospel of Christ, and for your liberal sharing**. The thanksgiving coming from the gift of the Corinthian Christians would be for more than the gift itself. They would also **glorify God** as they understood the gift meant **the obedience of your confession to the gospel of Christ**, and it meant the Corinthian Christians had hearts of **liberal sharing**.

i. Paul puts it boldly. Giving among the Corinthian Christians was evidence of their **obedience** to their **confession to the gospel of Christ**. If a person does not have a generous heart, there is a sense in which they are not *obedient* to the **confession of the gospel of Christ**.

ii. Others would also thank God because the gift from the Corinthian Christians will show that they have hearts of **liberal sharing**. This meant God was really doing a work in the hearts of the Corinthian Christians, and that was something worth thanking God for.

iii. **Liberal sharing:** The ancient Greek word translated **sharing** is *koinania*. This is the same word used for the ideas of *fellowship* and *communion* – it means the sharing of things in common.

· When we share our lives, *koinania* is called *fellowship*.

· When we share remembrance of Jesus' work for us through the Lord's Supper, *koinania* is called *communion*.

· When we share our resources so none would be destitute, *koinania* is called **sharing**.

d. **And by their prayer for you:** The fourth benefit from the gift of the Corinthian Christians was that it would prompt the Jerusalem Christians to pray for them. Paul expected that the Jerusalem Christians would pray for the Corinthian Christians. This is something that we can do when others give to us, and when we need their gifts. We can pray for them.

6. (15) Praise to God for the greatest gift.

Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!

a. What is **His indescribable gift**? Some think it is the gift of salvation; others think it is the gift of Jesus Christ. Why not both? Salvation is given to us in Jesus Christ.

i. Paul wants to leave the discussion of giving by reminding us again that God is the greatest giver. He gives the **gift** beyond description: *For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. (John 3:16)*

b. **Indescribable gift:** This means that Jesus is a **gift** and salvation is a **gift**. We do not earn it. We receive Jesus and we receive salvation exactly as we would receive a **gift**. If we earn it, it is not a **gift**.

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c. **Indescribable gift:** This means that Jesus is an **indescribable gift**, and salvation is an **indescribable gift**. The glory of the gift of Jesus and the greatness of the gift of salvation cannot be adequately described.

i. Paul isn't saying that we *shouldn't* describe the gift of Jesus or the gift of salvation. He is simply saying that it is impossible to *adequately* describe the gift. It is beyond full description.

ii. "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." (Clarke)

iii. "Ah, how many times have I, for one, spoken upon this gift during the last forty years! I have spoken of little else. I heard one who said, 'I suppose Spurgeon is preaching that old story over again.' Yes, that is what he is doing; and if he lives another twenty years, and you come here, it will be 'the old, old story' still, for there is nothing like it." (Spurgeon)

iv. "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." (Spurgeon)

v. In fact, when Paul writes **His indescribable gift**, the ancient Greek word he uses for **indescribable** (*anekdiegetos*) is not found in any ancient writing before this time. Apparently, Paul made up the word to describe the indescribable.

d. **Thanks be to God:** This means God's **indescribable gift** should fill us with gratitude. If we really understand and appreciate the **indescribable gift** God gives us, our lives will be saturated with gratitude.

i. "Our affliction we scarcely ever forget; our mercies we scarcely ever remember! Our hearts are alive to *complaint*, but dead to *gratitude*. We have had ten thousand mercies for one judgment, and yet our complaints to our thanksgivings have been ten thousand to one! How is it that God endures this, and bears with us?" (Clarke)

e. **His indescribable gift:** How fitting for Paul to conclude these two chapters about giving with a focus on this! The best motivation for giving is always gratitude for the **indescribable gift** of God to us. God's **indescribable gift** is what inspires all true giving.

i. "The apostle concludeth this whole discourse about contributing to the relief of these poor members of Christ, who is the Author and Finisher of all grace... that without the influence of his grace they would, they could do nothing." (Poole)

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QUESTIONS**REVIEW QUESTIONS FOR THE CHAPTER**

- 1) **What are the main points of this chapter?**
 - Macedonia's example in giving (1-5)
 - Paul's exhortations to the Corinthians (6-15)
 - The messengers administering the collection (16-24)
- 2) **What was the condition of the churches in Macedonia? Yet what did they have in abundance? (2)**
 - They were in a great trial of affliction and had deep poverty
 - Their joy
- 3) **What three things are said in how they gave? (3-4)**
 - Beyond their ability
 - Freely willing
 - Imploring with much urgency that their gift be received
- 4) **How did they go beyond Paul's expectations? (5)**
 - By giving of themselves first to the Lord, and then to others
- 5) **Why did Paul send Titus? (6)**
 - To complete this grace in them, i.e., help them to prepare their gift
- 6) **What two examples did Paul use motivate them to give? (8-9)**
 - The diligence of others (e.g., the Macedonians)
 - The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ
- 7) **What three guidelines does Paul give to govern their giving? (12-14)**
 - There must first be a willing mind
 - It is to be according to what one has
 - The idea is equality
- 8) **What three men were sent to administer this collection? (16,18,22)**
 - Titus
 - The brother whose praise is in the gospel
 - The brother who has often proved diligent in many things
- 9) **Why were these men handling the collection, and not Paul? (20-21)**
 - To avoiding possible blame; to provide things honorable in the sight of the Lord and men
- 10) **What did Paul want the Corinthians to show to these men and the other churches? (24)**
 - The proof of their love and of Paul's boasting in them

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR CHAPTER 8

vs 1-8 In what ways is it appropriate to compare ourselves or our church to other Christians and other Churches?

How might a healthy sense of competition edify the church?

How might it divide?

What particular characteristics of the Macedonian churches impressed Paul?

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vs 9 How has Christ enriched you?

In what ways did he become poor?

How have we or might we make ourselves poor for the sake of others?

vs 10-12 What hinderances do you find you face between your desire to give and your actual giving?

vs 13-15 What political-economic ideas might be inferred from these verses?

What attitudes does it promote?

vs 16-19 What dangers did the administrators of the gift face in delivering the gift?

What words in this chapter most characterize givers like Titus? (You might also consider the next chapter)

Have you ever thought of taking your own initiative in doing some ministry?

vs 20-24 What did Paul do to assure the Corinthians that their money would be handled properly?

Review Questions for chapter 9

REVIEW QUESTIONS FOR THE CHAPTER

1) What are the main points of this chapter?

- Purpose of the messengers (1-5)
- Encouragement to give liberally (6-15)

2) Why was Paul's writing to the Corinthians about this collection superfluous? (1-2)

- For he knew of their willingness, of which he boasted to the Macedonians
- Their zeal had stirred up the majority

3) Why were the messengers being sent? (3-5)

- Lest Paul's boasting about the Corinthians be in vain
- That their gift might be ready, and one of generosity

4) What is the relation between sowing and reaping? (6)

- As you sow, so shall you reap (cf. **Ga 6:7**)

5) What kind of giving pleases God? (7)

- Cheerful giving, not grudgingly or of necessity

6) What is God able to do? (8a)

- Make all grace abound toward us, that we might have all sufficiency in all things

7) What is the purpose of the abundance we receive from God? (8b)

- For every good work

8) Why did Paul pray that God supply and multiply the seed sown by the Corinthians? (10)

- To increase the fruits of their righteousness

9) When one is enriched in everything, for what purpose is it? (11)

- For all liberality

10) What four things did the administration of this service (the collection) supply? (12-14)

- The needs of the saints
- Many thanksgivings to God

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- Glory to God for the givers' obedience to the gospel and their liberal sharing
- Prayer and longing for the givers in the hearts of the recipients

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR CHAPTER 9

vs 1-5

- What words describe the Corinthian's attitude towards giving?
- If you were to motivate people to give, what kind of hinderances and reluctance would you have to overcome?
- How do you keep aware of the needs of the saints?
- What techniques will help to make us reliable givers?

vs 6-15

- How much does Paul advocate people give?
- Does he even mention tithing (10% giving)?
- What benefits may the giver receive from his generosity?
- Besides meeting material needs, how might meeting material needs benefit the ministry spiritually?

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