

**A Symposium on Christian Stewardship:
Raising up a Generation of Godly Givers**

**Laying the Foundation:
The Scriptural Basis for Godly Giving**

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As I begin this presentation I would like to express my appreciation to the congregation I served for twenty years, Apostles, San Jose, California, for its enthusiastic reception of and response to Bible classes that for the most part consisted of the study of whole books of the Bible. Through these Bible classes we explored in context what God wants us to learn and believe and do. Over the course of time we covered all of Christian doctrine, since all sound doctrine is, of course, drawn from the Scriptures.

Studying the Scriptures book by book rather than topic by topic helps to assure that we don't superimpose our pre-conceived ideas on what the Lord says in his Word. It also challenges the members of the class to discover for themselves what the Scriptures say, as contrasted with a topical approach that does a bit more spoon-feeding. If you haven't made the study of Bible books the heart of your Bible class curriculum, I would encourage you to think strongly about doing so.

That is what we are going to be doing this afternoon. We're not going to be studying a whole book of the Bible, but we are going to be looking at a sizable portion of one book. We will be talking about stewardship, Christian stewardship, Christian stewardship of money in particular, under the general theme: "Raising Up a Generation of Godly Givers." My assignment is to present the biblical basis for this topic. To do that, rather than having you look a list of proof passages gathered from various places in the Scriptures, which would certainly be a legitimate way to approach this subject, we are going to let the Apostle Paul speak to us in the lengthiest consecutive section of the Scriptures that speaks to us on stewardship of giving: 2 Corinthians 8 and 9, where we find much in the way of encouragement and guidance for godly giving.

In addition to the sacred text itself, I am indebted to four studies of these chapters by former Seminary colleagues: David Kuske, Wayne Mueller, Armin Panning, and Richard Balge. Their essays appeared in the Fall 1987 (84:4), Winter 1988 (85:1), Summer 1988 (85:3), and Spring 1989 (86:2) issues of the *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*. I have found Lenski's commentary, with its careful exegetical approach, to be helpful in my study and, of course, J. P. Meyer's fine 2 Corinthians commentary, which was published in 1963 as a part of the centennial observance of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. I have also consulted some of the more modern commentaries, but for the most part have found them lacking. They tend to be long on shaky speculation and short on sound exegesis.

With that by way of introduction, let's take a brief look at the setting for these two chapters of 2 Corinthians. Paul had been intending to visit Corinth upon leaving Ephesus at the close of what we today call his Third Missionary Journey; but he decided to send Titus instead. Paul did not want to make another "painful visit" (2 Cor 2:1) to Corinth, a reference to a visit subsequent to his first visit, which took place on his Second Missionary Journey. What no doubt pained Paul about that visit, the details of which are not recorded in Acts, can be seen in the content of 1 Corinthians. Cliques were splintering the congregation. Members were instituting litigation against fellow members. There was sexual immorality, even toleration of a case of incest. There was failure to hold to the proper roles of men and women. There was abuse of Christian freedom, of the Lord's Supper, and of spiritual gifts. There was even denial of the resurrection of the body.

After his visit to Corinth, Paul had written to the congregation. In this letter, which has not been preserved for us, he had addressed at least some of these issues, the immoral practices in the congregation in particular (cf. 1 Cor 5:9). That was followed by a second letter, which we today call 1 Corinthians, a letter in which Paul specifically addressed the many problems in the Corinthian congregation. This is sometimes called the "sorrowful letter," a letter that Paul wrote "out of great distress and anguish of heart and with many tears" (2 Cor 2:4). Instead of visiting Corinth immediately following his stay at Ephesus, as he originally had planned to do (cf. 2 Cor 1:16), Paul had sent Titus from Ephesus across the Aegean Sea to Corinth with this letter in the hope that its message would touch the hearts of the Corinthians, lead them to repentance and, with that, a turn-around in their lives.

The letter accomplished what Paul hoped for. Titus and Paul met in Macedonia, Paul having crossed over the Aegean from Troas and Titus having traveled north from Corinth. Writing to the Corinthians from Macedonia in what we today call 2 Corinthians, Paul says, "God...comforted us by the coming of Titus....He told us about your deep sorrow" (2 Cor 7:6,7). "Even if I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it," Paul writes, "...because your sorrow led you to repentance" (2 Cor 7:9).

Paul then closes the first section of 2 Corinthians with these words, “I am glad I can have complete confidence in you” (2 Cor 7:16). The NIV translation is a bit misleading. The Greek has no “can” in it: χαίρω ὅτι ἐν παντὶ θαρρῶ ἐν ὑμῖν (“I rejoice that in everything I have confidence in you”). With that, but not before that, Paul was ready to move on to the subject of the gathering of the offering for the church in Jerusalem. Very clearly, Paul considered this offering that would provide physical relief for the poor believers in Jerusalem to be a spiritual endeavor, a fruit of repentance. Therefore, before he got into the subject he wanted to be sure he was addressing repentant hearts; for without repentance, there can be no fruits of repentance. Having heard from Titus of the “godly sorrow” (2 Cor 7:10), the repentance, of the Corinthians, Paul is now ready to encourage the Corinthians to complete their offering for the saints in Jerusalem.

Let’s listen to Pastor Paul as tactfully and evangelically he provides encouragement and guidance to the Corinthians and see what we can learn for our lives as shepherds or future shepherds of flocks of God.

2 Corinthians 8:1-15 – Encouragement to Complete the Offering

8:1-5 The Example of the Macedonian Believers

1 Γνωρίζομεν δὲ ὑμῖν, ἀδελφοί, τὴν χάριν τοῦ θεοῦ τὴν δεδομένην ἐν ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις τῆς Μακεδονίας, 2 ὅτι ἐν πολλῇ δοκιμῇ θλίψεως ἢ περισσεΐα τῆς χαρᾶς αὐτῶν καὶ ἢ κατὰ βάθους πτωχεΐα αὐτῶν ἐπερίσσευσεν εἰς τὸ πλοῦτος τῆς ἀπλότητος αὐτῶν· 3 ὅτι κατὰ δύναμιν, μαρτυρῶ, καὶ παρὰ δύναμιν, αὐθαίρετοι 4 μετὰ πολλῆς παρακλήσεως δεόμενοι ἡμῶν τὴν χάριν καὶ τὴν κοινωνίαν τῆς διακονίας τῆς εἰς τοὺς ἁγίους, 5 καὶ οὐ καθὼς ἠλπίσαμεν ἀλλ’ ἑαυτοὺς ἔδωκαν πρῶτον τῷ κυρίῳ καὶ ἡμῖν διὰ θελήματος θεοῦ.

And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. ² Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. ³ For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, ⁴ they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints. ⁵ And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God’s will. (NIV translation here and throughout)

In these verses Paul holds up the churches in Macedonia (Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, perhaps others we don’t know about) as an example for the Corinthians. We will want to take careful note of how Paul does this.

“And now” (δέ) is transitional, not adversative: “Now, knowing that things are right between you and God, we can start to talk about the offering.” Paul addresses the Corinthians as “brothers” (ἀδελφοί). He is talking to fellow Christians. In the Greek the first word is Γνωρίζομεν, which the NIV translates with “we want you to know.” The subject of the offering, which provides Paul an opportunity to talk about giving in general, is not meant to be “hush-hush.” Of the thirteen chapters in 2 Corinthians two full chapters are devoted to this one subject. Pastor Paul doesn’t hesitate to talk about giving. Pastors today shouldn’t be reticent about this subject either.

What moved the Macedonian Christians to give? Paul tells the Corinthians that it was “grace” (χάρις), grace that was “given” to them by God. Paul uses a passive participle (δεδομένην, perfect tense, with action in the past, the results of which continued) to emphasize strongly that what motivated and empowered the Macedonians to participate in the offering was not a self-created philanthropic spirit. It was something from outside of themselves. It was grace, God’s grace, that moved them to give, the same grace of God that had saved them (Eph 2:8) and that had led Christ to humble himself to become their Savior (2 Cor 8:9).

Nine times in these two chapters Paul uses the word χάρις. The shading of translation varies a bit, from “grace” (8:1 and 9:8); to “kindness” or “favor” (8:4); to “a gracious gift” (8:6,7,19); to

“thanksgiving,” the Christian’s response to grace (8:16 and 9:15). But you can’t miss Paul’s insistence that godly giving is inseparably bound up with the grace of God in Christ.

Nothing else but the grace of God could explain the Macedonians’ whole-hearted participation in this offering. Paul talks about a “severe trial” (πολλή δοκιμὴ θλίψεως) the Macedonians were undergoing. Just what that affliction was, we are not told; but it likely had to do with persecution (recall the beating of Paul and Silas in Philippi and the mob action against Paul at Thessalonica; also 1 Th 2:14, “You [Thessalonians] suffered from your own countrymen”). He also mentions their “extreme (κατὰ βάθους, bottomless) poverty” (πτωχεΐα, the poverty of a beggar, who has absolutely nothing). Their poverty could have led them to ask to be excused from the offering. But it had just the opposite effect. Not just their “overflowing joy” in the Lord, but also their “extreme poverty” overflowed (ἐπερίσσευσεν) in “rich generosity.”

Paul presents six ways by which the grace of God manifested itself in the giving of the Macedonian Christians:

1. *The Macedonians gave “single-mindedly.”* The Greek word is ἀπλότης. The NIV translates it with “generosity” (v. 2) While the giving of the Macedonians may well have been generous, that is not the thrust of this word. It doesn’t have to do so much with the amount they gave as it does with the attitude with which they gave.

Jesus used the adjectival form of the word (ἀπλοῦς) in his Sermon on the Mount. “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth....Store up for yourselves treasures in heaven....For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also....No one can serve two masters....You cannot serve both God and Money” (Mt 6:19-21, 24). It is in this connection that Jesus talked about the need for one’s eyes to be “good” (v. 22, NIV). The word he used was ἀπλοῦς, “single.” The eyes of his disciples should focus on only one thing, on treasures in heaven rather than treasures on earth, on God rather than money.

The Apostle Paul used this word in Romans 12. “If it [i.e., your χάρισμα] is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously (ἐν ἀπλότητι, with single-mindedness).” That is the way the Macedonian Christians gave. There were no ulterior motives, no hidden agendas. They hadn’t given to show off. They hadn’t given to get Paul off their backs. Their giving certainly wasn’t an attempt to gain merit in the eyes of God. It was a single-minded response to the grace of God. Grateful for what the Lord had done for them in Christ, grateful, even joyful, for his continued blessings in the midst of poverty and persecution, they gave.

2. *The Macedonians gave beyond what they were able to give* (κατὰ δύναμιν...καὶ παρὰ δύναμιν, according to ability, even beyond ability). Their giving was extravagant, like the gift of the widow, who in the offering of her mite gave all that she had. Lenski comments: “They enjoyed robbing themselves.” Others may have called them foolish, but, compelled by the grace of God, they could do no less. Again, note that the emphasis is on attitude. Paul is holding before the eyes of the Corinthians the joyful, single-minded, even extravagant response of those who have been set free by the grace of God.

3. *The Macedonians gave of their own accord* (“entirely on their own,” NIV). The Greek is αὐθαίρετοι, a compound of αὐτός and αἰρέομαι, to choose for oneself. This word will appear again in verse 17, where it is used of Titus, who was going to come to Corinth and help them with the offering “on his own initiative.” It wasn’t in response to Paul’s appeal that the Macedonians decided to help the Jerusalem saints. In fact, in view of their abject poverty, Paul may well have discouraged them from taking part in the offering. They gave of their own accord. Though they didn’t give in a vacuum (as we’ll see, they gave in response to a need), their giving was spontaneous. Spontaneity, rather than response to rules, is a characteristic of sanctification. Offerings seen as “dues,” giving one’s “fair share,” giving to fill one’s “quota,” or to meet a budget, all of that is a far cry from the attitude of the Macedonians that Paul holds up to the Corinthians.

4. *The Macedonians begged to take part in the offering* (μετὰ πολλῆς παρακλήσεως δεόμενοι ἡμῶν, with much urging, pleading with us). They pleaded that Paul would show τὴν χάριν καὶ κοινωνίαν τῆς διακονίας τῆς εἰς τοὺς ἁγίους. It is best to take the καὶ epexegetically here: “the favor, or kindness, of [permitting their] sharing in this service to the saints.” In the minds of the Macedonians, it would be an act of kindness on Paul’s part to accede to their request to be included in the offering.

Note the words κοινωνία and διακονία. Christians express their fellowship with one another when they give. When one part of the body hurts, the whole body hurts. When one part rejoices, the whole body rejoices. And Christians “minister” to one another when they give. In discussion of the doctrine of the ministry in recent years, in an attempt to distinguish between the public διακονία of the gospel and other forms of διακονία, quite a bit of attention has been given to how best to translate the word διακονία. To keep things clear, it has been suggested that we reserve the translation “ministry” for activities relating to the public ministry and that we use the translation “service” for all other forms of διακονία. To avoid confusion, it is probably helpful to do this. But in so doing, we won’t want to lose sight of the fact that διακονία of God, whether it be public preaching and teaching of the gospel or giving of offerings, is a spiritual endeavor. The preacher who preaches is rendering divine service to the Lord; so is the giver who gives.

5. *The Macedonians gave in response to a need.* The specific need they responded to was that of the “saints” in Jerusalem. The poverty of the Jerusalem church seems to have been a perennial problem. At times famine was a contributing factor (Ac 11:27-29); but most likely persecution was the main cause of their poverty. Philip Hughes writes in his commentary on 2 Corinthians about the Jews in Jerusalem who had become followers of Christ: “Coming as they did from the background of Jewish fervor and exclusivism, it needs no demonstration that they must have become, in consequence of their conversion, the victims of social and economic ostracism, ecclesiastical excommunication, and national disinheritance. Their business enterprises must in most cases have collapsed in ruins and family bonds been heart-breakingly severed.”

Right from the beginning of Paul’s ministry, when it was agreed that Peter and James, the Lord’s brother, would concentrate their ministry on the Jews and Barnabas and Paul on ministry to the Gentiles, the request was made of Barnabas and Paul “that we should continue to remember the poor,” which, said Paul, “I was eager to do” (Ga 2:10). Not only was he eager to do this, he did it. Writing to the Romans from Corinth at the close of his Third Missionary Journey, Paul says, “I am on my way to Jerusalem in the service of the saints there. For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem” (Ro 15:25-26). That is the offering Paul is talking about in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9. Along with their brothers and sisters in Achaia, and apparently also in Asia and Galatia (cf. Ac 20:4), the Macedonian Christians saw this need as an opportunity to express their Christian fellowship; and they responded accordingly.

Sometimes “need” giving is disparaged as being less noble than “pure” giving, giving that gives without concern about the destination of the offering. There is an element of truth in that contention. Christian giving is first and foremost a response to the gospel. We give, not so much because we see a need out there, but because of what God has given to us in Christ. God’s grace in Christ moves us to give back to him our thank offerings, whether they be in the form of our time, our talents, or our treasures. Christians don’t ask first of all, “What’s it going to go for?” but “What can I give since God has so graciously given to me?”

But there is more involved than that. Giving to fill a need is perfectly legitimate. It is a way by which Christians can exercise responsible stewardship. There are almost an infinite number of ways Christians can use the money God has entrusted to them; but the money we possess, even though for most of us (students perhaps excluded) it’s a lot of money, is finite. So the Christian asks, “Where will my gifts of money do the most good? What needs will they fill?” In this connection, there are a couple of ways by which congregations and church bodies can assist their members in making good choices and

also in attracting the offerings of their members: by making it very clear how their offerings are going to be used, i.e., the needs they will be filling; and by making sure that their gifts will be used responsibly, that is, in ways that truly benefit the church's work of proclaiming the gospel.

6. *The Macedonians gave themselves first to the Lord.* In the Greek *ἑαυτούς* is in the emphatic position: "Themselves they gave first to the Lord." Later in this letter Paul would tell the Corinthians, "What I want is not your possessions, but you" (12:14). That is what the Lord looks for above all: not the contents of our pocketbook, but the whole of our heart. And that is what, to Paul's joy, the Macedonians offered. God gave his grace to them (8:1); they in turn gave themselves back to God.

This serves as a reminder to us that stewardship endeavors in the church need to be about much more than dollars and cents. Hearts and souls, brought low by the law and lifted up by the gospel, that's where godly giving begins.

Conspicuous by its absence in Paul's use of the Macedonians as examples for the Corinthians is any mention of the amount they gave. His entire emphasis is on attitude. Does this mean we should never mention amounts when pointing to the example of others? Not necessarily. King David didn't hesitate to talk publicly and in some detail about his own personal gifts for the construction of the temple (1 Chr 22:14). The Lord did not admonish him for doing this.

But we will want to take care that we do not use what others have given as a "prod" to get our people to give more. It is the grace of God in Christ that fuels the Christian's life of sanctification. It is the grace of God, therefore, that should be propelling our members to give. That means: Preach the law. Preach the gospel. Let God's grace in Christ open hearts, and then pocketbooks—in that order. That's the example the Corinthians had in the Macedonians.

8:6-7 The Spirituality of the Corinthians Themselves

6 εἰς τὸ παρακαλέσαι ἡμᾶς Τίτον, ἵνα καθὼς προενήρξατο οὕτως καὶ ἐπιτελέσῃ εἰς ὑμᾶς καὶ τὴν χάριν ταύτην. 7 ἀλλ' ὡς περ ἐν παντὶ περισσεύετε, πίστει καὶ λόγῳ καὶ γνώσει καὶ πάσῃ σπουδῇ καὶ τῇ ἐξ ἡμῶν ἐν ὑμῖν ἀγάπῃ, ἵνα καὶ ἐν ταύτῃ τῇ χάριτι περισσεύητε.

⁶ So we urged Titus, since he had earlier made a beginning, to bring also to completion this act of grace on your part. ⁷ But just as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us—see that you also excel in this grace of giving.

With the introductory word "So" the NIV is taking the prepositional clause, *εἰς τὸ παρακαλέσαι ἡμᾶς Τίτον*, "so that we encouraged Titus," as a result clause, which seems to fit the context well. "So, knowing how well the Macedonians are doing with the offering and also knowing that you are now spiritually ready to be considering the offering once again, I am sending Titus to help you finish what you started." Paul calls the offering an "act of grace," a *χάρις*. It is a freely given response to the grace of God. Paul urges a continuation of that response.

Titus was a natural choice for this assignment. He had worked with the Corinthians in the early stages of the offering, which they had begun to gather already a year ago (9:2). He had just been in Corinth and had successfully worked through with them the many spiritual problems that were hampering their walk with the Lord. He loved these brothers and sisters (7:15). And it appears that the Corinthians held him in high regard. We will have more to say in a few moments about the role of Titus in helping to gather the offering; but it is not superfluous to mention already at this point that spiritual leaders play an important role in encouraging and guiding godly giving on the part of God's saints.

Paul tells the Corinthians that they "excel in everything" (*ἐν παντὶ περισσεύετε*). This is the third time he has used the verb *περισσεύω* or noun *περισσεύω* in this chapter. The word has in it the idea of having more than enough, an abundance. He had used these words to describe the Macedonians' joy and their single-mindedness of purpose as they participated in the offering. Now he uses it to describe the Corinthians. They overflowed in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in zeal to do the Lord's will, in their love

for Paul and his co-workers (“our love for you,” as in the UBS text, is not well attested). Now, says Paul, “Overflow [the fourth use of this word] one more time: in this act of grace.” The ἵνα clause at the end of verse 7 introduces a “soft” imperative, something like our, “Please excel also in this grace of giving.” It is evangelical encouragement at its best.

Paul is not using flattery here. He is not buttering the Corinthians up in an underhanded attempt to get them to finish the offering. He is approaching them as brothers and sisters in Christ. He is speaking to the new man, which rejoices to hear and do what God says. He knows he can expect the best from the Corinthians, not because they are gifted with a lot of money but because of the new life that the Spirit has created within them and, along with that new life, a grace-driven zeal to do God’s will.

Pastors today, too, while recognizing that the Old Adam will never be totally eradicated, will want to expect nothing but the best from God’s children. It is not flattery to talk to our people about the gifts God has given to them. And it is not unrealistic to anticipate that they will rejoice to serve God—also in their giving.

8:8-9 The Sacrifice of Christ

8 Οὐ κατ’ ἐπιταγὴν λέγω ἀλλὰ διὰ τῆς ἐτέρων σπουδῆς καὶ τῆς ὑμετέρας ἀγάπης γνήσιον δοκιμάζων·⁹ γινώσκετε γὰρ τὴν χάριν τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὅτι δι’ ὑμᾶς ἐπτώχευσεν πλούσιος ὢν, ἵνα ὑμεῖς τῇ ἐκείνου πτωχείᾳ πλουτήσητε.

⁸ *I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others.* ⁹ *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.*

“I am not commanding you,” says Paul. Godly giving is a part of the Christian’s life of sanctification. It cannot be force fed. It is not commanded, but encouraged. Good stewardship practices are not inculcated through legalistic demands but through careful teaching and, above all, gospel motivation.

Paul speaks of testing (δοκιμάζων, to prove by testing, to verify) the sincerity (γνήσιον, the genuineness) of the love of the Corinthians, their love for God first of all, and also their love for Paul and his ministry and for the saints in Jerusalem. How can the sincerity of their love be tested? Once again, Paul encourages them to compare themselves with the Macedonians. They should not compare the amount that the Macedonians are giving with the amount that they have given to this point or might give in the future. Rather, they should look at the “earnestness” (σπουδῆ, zeal) that the Macedonians are displaying, a zeal to serve that Paul has just said the Corinthians are displaying also. This fruit of faith, this zeal to serve, verifies the genuineness of the Corinthians’ love. They will not just be going through the motions with this offering, but will be using it as an opportunity to express their love to God and their neighbor.

Why will the Corinthians want their zeal to be like that of the Macedonians? Why will they want to “excel in the grace of giving” just as the Macedonians are doing? “For” (γάρ), says Paul, and then he gives the reason why the Corinthians will want to do this. They have personally experienced (γινώσκετε) the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. The ὅτι clause is exegetical. It unfolds what the grace of Christ is. “For your sakes,” says Paul, δι’ ὑμᾶς being in the emphatic position, Christ, though he was in a continuous state of being rich (πλούσιος ὢν) from all eternity, became poor. Paul uses ἐπτώχευσεν, a form of the same word he had used to describe the abject poverty of the Macedonians (8:2). But it was a much deeper poverty than that. With these words all of Christ’s state of humiliation is projected before our eyes, culminating in his suffering and death.

Its purpose? The ἵνα clause answers that question: “so that *you* (the Greek has an emphatic ὑμεῖς) through his poverty might become rich.” “We are rich, for he was poor. Is not this a wonder!” Christ, who traded unparalleled riches for abject poverty so that we might become rich, is a wonderful Example

of giving for the Corinthians; but he is much more than that! He is first of all Savior. We love, because he first loved us. We give, in fact, we cannot help but give, because he gave first.

8:10-15 An Appeal to Complete the Offering

10 καὶ γνώμην ἐν τούτῳ δίδωμι· τοῦτο γὰρ ὑμῖν συμφέρει, οἵτινες οὐ μόνον τὸ ποιῆσαι ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ θέλειν προενήρξασθε ἀπὸ πέρυσι· 11 νυνὶ δὲ καὶ τὸ ποιῆσαι ἐπιτελέσατε, ὅπως καθάπερ ἡ προθυμία τοῦ θέλειν, οὕτως καὶ τὸ ἐπιτελέσαι ἐκ τοῦ ἔχειν. 12 εἰ γὰρ ἡ προθυμία πρόκειται, καθὸ ἔαν ἔχη εὐπρόσδεκτος, οὐ καθὸ οὐκ ἔχει.

¹⁰ And here is my advice about what is best for you in this matter: Last year you were the first not only to give but also to have the desire to do so. ¹¹ Now finish the work, so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it, according to your means. ¹² For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what he does not have.

Note the various encouragements Paul has given to the Corinthians. He has pointed them to the example of the Macedonians (vv. 1-6, 8). He has reminded them of the genuineness of their own grace-generated faith and love (v. 7). He has set before their eyes the saving grace of Christ (v. 9). Now comes a fourth encouragement: it's just a matter of finishing what you have already begun.

Paul calls what he is about to tell the Corinthians “advice” (γνώμη, an opinion). It wasn't a command. Once again, you don't legislate sanctification. Nevertheless, the Corinthians will not want to take Paul's words lightly. Nor should God's people today ignore the guidance of their spiritual leaders, guidance which spiritual leaders will not hesitate to offer, also in the area of godly giving.

Paul is convinced that the advice he is about to give is “best” (συμφέρει, advantageous) for the Corinthians. It will benefit them in two ways. If they complete the offering, they won't be embarrassed when Titus and his companions arrive. And they will be moving forward in their life of sanctification.

Already a year ago, the Corinthians had begun the doing (τὸ ποιῆσαι, articularized infinitive), i.e., the gathering of the offering, or at least organizing themselves for that work. And even more important, also present a year ago was the willing (τὸ θέλειν), the desire to do this work. Now, says Paul, assuming that the desire is still present, it is simply a matter of bringing the doing to completion, “so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it.” Again, Paul uses articularized infinitives, more literally, “in order that, just as the ready resolve of willingness [is present], in the same way also the completing [of the offering].”

Notice Paul's emphasis. He doesn't dwell on what the Corinthians *haven't* done, but on what, by the grace of God, they have already done. He proclaims the grace of God (v. 9), gratefully acknowledges their response to God's grace, and then encourages them to finish the work. Such a positive approach to our people's lives of sanctification is worth emulating. It's not that we shouldn't use the law to reveal sin, the sin of greed, the sin of withholding from God what is rightfully his, the sin of selfishness; but at the same time we will not want to be remiss in pointing out with gratitude fruits of faith that we do see. We will want to use them as encouragement for continued growth in sanctified living. Complaining about what isn't getting done won't get things done.

Paul's encouragement to the Corinthians is that they finish the work. To that he adds three words: ἐκ τοῦ ἔχειν, literally, from the having, or from what you have. We give from what God has given to us. A Christian does not start his thinking about giving with the question, “What, or how much, should I give?”, but with the question, “What, how much, has God given to me?” That will help to determine what we will be able to give to others.

If the proper motivation, the “willingness,” the ready resolve (προθυμία), is present, and Paul, by using a simple condition assumes that it is present on the part of the Corinthians, then the gift will be “acceptable (εὐπρόσδεκτος) according to what one has, not according to what he does not have.” It

doesn't matter if the gift is small or large when it comes from a willing heart that gives from what God has given.

Christians give in proportion to what God has given to them. What portion do we give back to the Lord for his work? The answer to that question is noticeably absent from what Paul says here. In fact, as you know, it's nowhere to be found in any New Testament discussion of giving. In Christ, Christians live in marvelous freedom—in our giving also. We are not bound by the law of the tithe or by any other law that determines an amount. The Old Adam in us, of course, seizes on that fact: “Nobody can tell me what to give!” The New Man, on the other hand, rejoices to be set free from any restriction that limits what I might give for the work of the Lord. Our call, again through faithful law and gospel preaching, is to put down the Old Adam and to give wings to the New Man who has been set free to serve—with his offerings also.

13 οὐ γὰρ ἵνα ἄλλοις ἄνεσις, ὑμῖν θλίψις, ἀλλ' ἐξ ἰσότητος 14 ἐν τῷ νῦν καιρῷ τὸ ὑμῶν περίσσευμα εἰς τὸ ἐκείνων ὑστέρημα, ἵνα καὶ τὸ ἐκείνων περίσσευμα γένηται εἰς τὸ ὑμῶν ὑστέρημα, ὅπως γένηται ἰσότης, 15 καθὼς γέγραπται, Ὁ τὸ πολὺ οὐκ ἐπλεόνασεν, καὶ ὁ τὸ ὀλίγον οὐκ ἠλαττόνησεν.

¹³ *Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality.* ¹⁴ *At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. Then there will be equality,* ¹⁵ *as it is written: “He who gathered much did not have too much, and he who gathered little did not have too little.”*

In describing the giving of the Macedonians, Paul had said that they gave “beyond their ability” (v. 3). That was their grace-driven response to the plight of the poor believers in Jerusalem. Was that what the Corinthians should be doing also? Not necessarily. Paul says, “Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality.” J. P. Meyer writes in his 2 Corinthians commentary, “He [Paul] does not want the Corinthians to get the impression that similar superhuman efforts were expected from them. The attitude of the Macedonians is praiseworthy; it shows their great devotion to the cause of the gospel. However, their manner is not to be regarded as legalistic, as an absolute standard.” Giving until it hurts (Paul uses the word θλίψις, pressure, affliction, hardship, which the NIV translates “hard-pressed”) is not a biblical maxim.

In fact, says Paul, it should be a matter of “equality” (ἐξ ἰσότητος). There is a blessed reciprocity in Christian giving, with blessings flowing both ways, from giver to receiver and from receiver to giver: “At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. Then there will be equality.” “At the present time” is the NIV’s translation of καιρός, which speaks of a specific point in time. “In this particular situation,” says Paul, “your abundance (περίσσευμα) will be used for their lack (ὑστέρημα).” That part is easy to understand. “So that in turn their plenty [Paul again uses περίσσευμα] will supply what you need [ὑστέρημα, your lack].” What is the “plenty” that the Jerusalem believers possess that will supply what the Corinthians lack? J. P. Meyer writes, “The Corinthians... would be greatly benefited by the exercise of the Christian fellowship with the people in Jerusalem, and by the prayers of thanksgiving and intercession which it would evoke from them.” Certainly that would happen. In fact, Paul will be talking about this in the next chapter; but it would appear to be stretching the word ὑστέρημα a bit to say that this was something the Corinthians lacked.

Others see this as a *quid pro quo*. At some point the tables might be turned, and the Jerusalem congregation would be in a position to help the Corinthians in a time of need.

But probably the best interpretation is to see it as somewhat of a parallel to what Paul wrote to the Romans a short time after this: “If the Gentiles have shared in the Jews’ spiritual blessings, they owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings” (Ro 15:27). As money in the form of this special offering flowed to Jerusalem from Achaia, Macedonia, Asia, and Galatia, the gospel would be flowing freely in the other direction.

Paul backs up what he says with a quotation from Exodus 16:18: “He who gathered much did not have too much, and he who gathered little did not have too little.” When the Israelites gathered manna for their families, each family, regardless of size, found exactly what they needed. The point: you can be sure that God will provide. When you give to alleviate the needs of others, you don’t have to worry about yourself. God will make sure that your needs, whatever they might be, will be provided for also.

2 Corinthians 8:16-9:5 – Assistance in Completing the Offering

8:16-24 The Plan to Send Titus and Two Companions

16 Χάρις δὲ τῷ θεῷ τῷ δόντι τὴν αὐτὴν σπουδὴν ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ Τίτου, 17 ὅτι τὴν μὲν παράκλησιν ἐδέξατο, σπουδαιότερος δὲ ὑπάρχων ἀυθαίρετος ἐξῆλθεν πρὸς ὑμᾶς.

¹⁶ I thank God, who put into the heart of Titus the same concern I have for you. ¹⁷ For Titus not only welcomed our appeal, but he is coming to you with much enthusiasm and on his own initiative.

The δέ, not translated in the NIV, is transitional, not adversative. Paul is moving on to talk in a bit more detail about Titus, and also about the two other brothers he is sending to Corinth to help with the gathering of the offering. It is instructive to note the way Paul describes these three men. He begins with Titus, who seems to have been ideally suited to work with the Corinthians. A Gentile by birth, he is first mentioned in the Scriptures as accompanying Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem, where there was pressure, successfully resisted, to have him circumcised (Ga 2:1-3). As mentioned above, it was probably Titus who had carried 1 Corinthians to Corinth and had worked through with the Corinthians the various issues brought up in Paul’s letter. By sending Titus to Corinth, then, Paul was utilizing a Gentile to work with a largely Gentile congregation and a man whom the Corinthians knew well, respected, and loved.

God had put the same “concern” for the Corinthians into the heart of Titus that Paul had for them. Paul again uses the word σπουδή, zeal, earnestness, diligence. Titus was even more zealous (σπουδαιότερος) to work with the Corinthians than Paul had thought that he would be; for not only did he welcome Paul’s invitation to assist the Corinthians, but of his own accord (αὐθαίρετος) he was planning to return to Corinth and do just that.

18 συνεπέμψαμεν δὲ μετ’ αὐτοῦ τὸν ἀδελφὸν οὗ ὁ ἔπαινος ἐν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ διὰ πασῶν τῶν ἐκκλησιῶν, 19 οὐ μόνον δέ, ἀλλὰ καὶ χειροτονηθεὶς ὑπὸ τῶν ἐκκλησιῶν συνέκδημος ἡμῶν σὺν τῇ χάριτι ταύτῃ τῇ διακονουμένη ὑφ’ ἡμῶν πρὸς τὴν [αὐτοῦ] τοῦ κυρίου δόξαν καὶ προθυμίαν ἡμῶν.

¹⁸ And we are sending along with him the brother who is praised by all the churches for his service to the gospel. ¹⁹ What is more, he was chosen by the churches to accompany us as we carry the offering, which we administer in order to honor the Lord himself and to show our eagerness to help.

We can’t positively identify this “brother” who will accompany Titus; but it appears that the Corinthians were acquainted with him, at least with his reputation (ἔπαινος) ἐν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ, in the sphere of the gospel. This doesn’t necessarily mean that he was a preacher of the gospel, but that his work involved the use of the gospel in some way. Since the raising of this offering was spiritual work, the men who would provide leadership should be faith-filled, Spirit-filled men (cf. Ac 6:5). We need to take the same care today in choosing people to lead stewardship endeavors, whether on the congregational or synodical level.

Another significant letter of recommendation for this brother is that he had been chosen (χειροτονηθεὶς, to elect by raising hands; then: to choose) by the churches to accompany Paul to

Jerusalem with the offering. Acts 20 mentions three men from Macedonia who accompanied Paul: Sopater, who was from Berea, and Aristarchus and Secundus from Thessalonica. One of these three might have been this otherwise unidentified brother. Some suggest that it may have been Luke, who appears to have been from Philippi.

Again, note the care with which the leaders for gathering in this offering are chosen. There was a reason for that; for, says Paul, the purpose of the offering is “to honor the Lord himself and to show our eagerness to help.” Paul uses the preposition *πρός*, with a view toward. He and his co-workers were administering this offering (he calls it a *χάρις*, a gracious gift) “with a view toward the glory of God and [to demonstrate] our willingness (*προθυμία*) [to help].” The offering would have a horizontal aspect to it: it would be a vivid demonstration to the Jerusalem saints of the fellowship and love of their brothers and sisters in the Gentile world. But the offering would also have a vertical aspect: it would be a hymn of glory to the Lord as, moved by the grace of God, the Christians in Macedonia, Achaia, Asia, and Galatia gave from what the Lord had given them to serve their Jerusalem brothers and sisters.

We might note here that Paul uses the same word, *προθυμία*, willingness, to describe the attitude he looked for in those administering the offering as he had used to describe those who were giving the offering (cf. vv. 11-12). God loves cheerful givers (9:7); he also loves cheerful, willing workers.

20 στελλόμενοι τοῦτο, μή τις ἡμᾶς μωμήσῃται ἐν τῇ ἀδρότητι ταύτῃ τῇ διακονουμένη ὑφ' ἡμῶν·
21 προνοοῦμεν γὰρ καλὰ οὐ μόνον ἐνώπιον κυρίου ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐνώπιον ἀνθρώπων.

²⁰ We want to avoid any criticism of the way we administer this liberal gift. ²¹ For we are taking pains to do what is right, not only in the eyes of the Lord but also in the eyes of men.

This verse begins with a participle, *στελλόμενοι τοῦτο*, “Trying to avoid this, namely, that no one find fault with us in connection with this lavish gift which is being administered by us.” The closest antecedent of *στελλόμενοι* is *συνεπέμψαμεν* in verse 18, “We are sending...the brother..., attempting to avoid any criticism.” Paul was well aware of the fact that his detractors were always on the lookout for slip-ups on his part. If he had carried the offering to Jerusalem all by himself, his critics may have accused him of grand-standing, of trying to take all the credit for himself. And there was always the possibility that he could be accused of mis-appropriating some of the money. If no one had accompanied Paul to Jerusalem with the offering, it would have been Paul’s word against that of his enemies. That the gift was quite sizable is seen in the word *ἀδρότης*, which the NIV translates “liberal gift.” The word comes from a root that means “thick.” Picture to yourself big stacks of coins. Paul made sure to give careful thought in advance (*προνοοῦμεν*) to the way that every aspect of this offering was handled.

It probably should go without saying that spiritual leaders today also need to be *ἀνεπίλημτος*, blameless (1 Tm 3:2), in the way they handle other people’s money so that they do not give any grounds for suspicion. But since the devil still tempts spiritual leaders to be less than honest in such matters—at times with dire consequences—the warning is still in place against even a hint of impropriety.

22 συνεπέμψαμεν δὲ αὐτοῖς τὸν ἀδελφὸν ἡμῶν ὃν ἐδοκιμάσαμεν ἐν πολλοῖς πολλαῖς σπουδαῖον ὄντα, νυνὶ δὲ πολὺ σπουδαιότερον πεποιθήσει πολλῇ τῇ εἰς ὑμᾶς.

²² In addition, we are sending with them our brother who has often proved to us in many ways that he is zealous, and now even more so because of his great confidence in you.

With the verb *συνεπέμψαμεν*, Paul is using an epistolary aorist for the third time in this paragraph (*ἐξῆλθεν* in v. 17 and *συνεπέμψαμεν* in v. 18). The third brother Paul is sending to Corinth is also unidentified. But it is clear that he is not a neophyte. We have tested this brother (*ἐδοκιμάσαμεν*, implying a successful testing), says Paul, often and in many ways. And, like Titus, he was zealous

(σπουδαῖον ὄντα) for this work, and now, evidently having heard the good report from Titus about the improved situation in Corinth, even more zealous (πολὺ σπουδαιότερον).

He has “great confidence” (πεποίθησις πολλή) in the Corinthians, a good attitude with which to come to Corinth. He assumes he will be working with believers who desire to please God. Expecting the worst is often a self-fulfilling prophecy. If you have confidence in the power of the gospel, you will also have confidence in people whose lives are motivated and empowered by the gospel.

Paul closes this section with a final commendation of Titus and the two brothers:

23 εἴτε ὑπὲρ Τίτου, κοινωνός ἐμός καὶ εἰς ὑμᾶς συνεργός· εἴτε ἀδελφοὶ ἡμῶν, ἀπόστολοι ἐκκλησιῶν, δόξα Χριστοῦ. 24 τὴν οὖν ἔνδειξιν τῆς ἀγάπης ὑμῶν καὶ ἡμῶν καυχῆσεως ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν εἰς αὐτοὺς ἐνδεικνύμενοι εἰς πρόσωπον τῶν ἐκκλησιῶν.

²³ As for Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker among you; as for our brothers, they are representatives of the churches and an honor to Christ. ²⁴ Therefore show these men the proof of your love and the reason for our pride in you, so that the churches can see it.

Paul calls Titus his “partner” (κοινωνός) and “co-worker” (συνεργός) and the two brothers ἀπόστολοι ἐκκλησιῶν (obviously in the broad sense of the word, as Epaphroditus in Php 2:25) and δόξα Χριστοῦ, the glory of Christ, i.e., they reflect the glory of Christ. It might be mentioned in passing that Paul was not a “Lone Ranger” in his ministry. He valued the contribution of his co-workers and held them in high esteem. Pastors today can learn this from Pastor Paul also.

The participle ἐνδεικνύμενοι in the final verse of this chapter has a soft imperatival force: “Demonstrate the demonstration (ἐνδειξιν) of your love,” Paul tells the Corinthians. He prays that they will warmly welcome these men, just as he has boasted that they will do.

It is interesting to see how, already in the early days of the church, congregations voluntarily joined together to carry out the Lord’s work. None of the three men who would be traveling from Macedonia to Corinth were a part of the Corinthian congregation. But Paul is sure they won’t be looked upon as intruders; for they were a part of the larger family of God and thus brothers. The Corinthians would welcome their assistance. Isolationism is not a virtue. That is true today also.

9:1-5 The Urgency of Completing the Offering

1 Περὶ μὲν γὰρ τῆς διακονίας τῆς εἰς τοὺς ἀγίους περισσόν μοί ἐστιν τὸ γράφειν ὑμῖν· 2 οἶδα γὰρ τὴν προθυμίαν ὑμῶν ἢ ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν καυχῶμαι Μακεδόσιν, ὅτι Ἀχαΐα παρεσκευάσται ἀπὸ πέρυσι, καὶ τὸ ὑμῶν ζῆλος ἠρέθισεν τοὺς πλείονας. 3 ἔπεμψα δὲ τοὺς ἀδελφούς, ἵνα μὴ τὸ καύχημα ἡμῶν τὸ ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν κενωθῆ ἐν τῷ μέρει τουτῶ, ἵνα καθὼς ἔλεγον παρεσκευασμένοι ἦτε, 4 μὴ πως ἐὰν ἔλθωσιν σὺν ἐμοὶ Μακεδόνες καὶ εὕρωσιν ὑμᾶς ἀπαρασκευάστους καταισχυθῶμεν ἡμεῖς, ἵνα μὴ λέγω ὑμεῖς, ἐν τῇ ὑποστάσει ταύτῃ. 5 ἀναγκαῖον οὖν ἠγησάμην παρακαλέσαι τοὺς ἀδελφούς, ἵνα προέλθωσιν εἰς ὑμᾶς καὶ προκαταρτίσωσιν τὴν προεπηγγελμένην εὐλογίαν ὑμῶν, ταύτην ἐτοιμὴν εἶναι οὕτως ὡς εὐλογίαν καὶ μὴ ὡς πλεονεξίαν.

There is no need for me to write to you about this service to the saints. ² For I know your eagerness to help, and I have been boasting about it to the Macedonians, telling them that since last year you in Achaia were ready to give; and your enthusiasm has stirred most of them to action. ³ But I am sending the brothers in order that our boasting about you in this matter should not prove hollow, but that you may be ready, as I said you would be. ⁴ For if any Macedonians come with me and find you unprepared, we—not to say anything about you—would be ashamed of having been so confident. ⁵ So I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to visit you in advance and finish the arrangements for the generous gift you had promised. Then it will be ready as a generous gift, not as one grudgingly given.

With the γάρ at the beginning of this paragraph Paul is going to explain further the reason why he has encouraged the Corinthians to welcome the three brothers. Note the μέν...δέ construction: “On the one hand, writing (τὸ γράφειν) to you about this service to the saints is superfluous...but on the other hand I am sending the brothers.” Once again (cf. 8:4) Paul uses the noun διακονία, with the definite article serving as a demonstrative, “this service,” “this ministry,” to describe the offering he has been talking about.

Why doesn't Paul have to write to them about the offering? For one thing, they already knew about it. In 1 Corinthians he had given them guidelines for gathering the offering (cf. 16:1-4). In addition, Paul recognizes the “eagerness” (προθυμία) of the Corinthians to participate in the offering. He says, “I have been boasting about you (not “it” as the NIV) to the Macedonians that you have been ready for a year.” Evidently, the only things that had held them up were the spiritual problems which Paul dealt with in 1 Corinthians.

The Corinthians' eagerness to participate in the offering, their zeal (ζήλος), had “stirred to action” τοὺς πλείονας, the majority of the Macedonians. The word the NIV translates as “stirred to action” is a form of ἐρεθίζω, a word that means to arouse or provoke. Whether it's in a good sense or bad will be determined by the context. It is used only one other time in the New Testament, in Colossians 3:21, where fathers are counseled not to “embitter” (KJV, “provoke to anger”) their children. Here, of course, it is used in a good sense. The example of the believers in Achaia had encouraged, even stimulated, the Macedonians. Again we see how Christians can stir one another up to love and good deeds (cf. He 10:24).

Nevertheless (δέ), Paul is going to be sending this three-man delegation to Corinth. Note Paul's pastoral tact. He gratefully acknowledges what the Corinthians have done up to this point. He has even held them up as examples. But he also understands their weaknesses, their struggles. By the power of the Holy Spirit there has been a turn-around in the congregation. But Satan was still there, hoping to stir up more trouble. So, Paul is sending the brothers to help them along a bit, to assist them to do what he knew they wanted to do.

Paul doesn't want them to be embarrassed when he arrives with the delegation that is going to bring the offering to Jerusalem, which would be the case if they still weren't finished gathering it in. Once again, see how tactfully Paul speaks: “If any Macedonians come with me and find you unprepared, we—not to say anything about you (ἵνα μὴ λέγω ὑμεῖς)—would be ashamed of having been so confident.” Paul is not afraid to talk about money matters. He is not afraid to give specific guidance and instruction. He does not hesitate to bring in help from outside the congregation. But he does all of this in a very sensitive, loving, tactful manner. Though he considered it necessary to remind the Corinthians that they will be ashamed if they aren't ready with the offering, he frames his words in the kindest possible way.

“So” (οὖν, an inferential particle) Paul considered it “necessary” (ἀναγκαῖον) to send the three-man delegation. It may not have been what he desired to do; but, given the circumstances, it was what he felt he needed to do. The ἵνα clause in verse five tells what Paul urged these three men to do: “to visit you [the Corinthians] in advance and finish the arrangements for the generous gift you had promised.” Each of the three verbs in this ἵνα clause has a πρό prefix: these men should go in advance of Paul (προέλθωσιν) to help the Corinthians get ready in advance (προκαταρτίσωσιν) the generous gift they had promised in advance (προεπηγγελέμενην). In so doing, the Corinthians would be following the plan Paul had already proposed. He didn't want the actual gathering of the offering to wait until he arrived (cf. 1 Cor 16:2). It is good when everything in the household of God is done in an orderly fashion, including the gathering of offerings.

Paul calls the offering an εὐλογία, which the NIV translates as “generous gift.” Literally, it means a blessing. Richard Balge catches Paul's thought well by calling the offering a “tangible expression of blessing.” He writes: “The Corinthians' gift was to be a tangible way of saying to the Jerusalem church what they could not say in person: ‘God bless you. God bless you for your role in sharing the good news about Jesus with us Gentiles.’”

Paul's desire was that the offering would be a blessing to the Jerusalem believers and that it not be "as one grudgingly given (μη ὡς πλεονεξίαν)." Πλεονεξία means a desire to have more, or greed. The question is: on whose part? Some say: on the part of Paul and his co-workers. They should not avariciously pressure the Corinthians to respond, almost an extortion. Others, such as the NIV translation, see it as covetousness on the part of the Corinthians, who would give the gift only grudgingly because they don't want to part with their money. In view of what follows, the latter interpretation appears to be correct.

An offering that will truly be a blessing from God to others is an offering that comes from a willing, non-covetous heart, a heart that is ἀπλούς, single-minded in its devotion to God and its desire to serve God's people. Paul will have more to say about that in what follows.

2 Corinthians 9:6-15 – Blessed Results of Completing the Offering

9:6-11 The Giver Is Blessed

6 Τοῦτο δέ, ὁ σπείρων φειδομένως φειδομένως καὶ θερίσει, καὶ ὁ σπείρων ἐπ' εὐλογίας ἐπ' εὐλογίας καὶ θερίσει.

⁶ *Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously.*

The Greek at the beginning of this verse is simply Τοῦτο δέ, "Now this." One has to add something like, "Take note of" or, as the NIV does, "Remember." In a chiasmic construction (abbcabbc) not preserved in the English translation, Paul uses an illustration from agriculture. The words are reminiscent of several passages from Proverbs: "One man gives freely, yet gains even more, another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty" (11:24); "A generous man will himself be blessed" (22:9); and "Honor the Lord with your wealth, with the first-fruits of all your crops; then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine" (3:9); cf. also Malachi 3:10-12 and Luke 6:38.

The farmer who sows sparingly (φειδομένως) will reap sparingly. If he hesitates to sow the amount of seed that should be sown because he doesn't want to lose it, he will be the loser. Paul contrasts that with the farmer who sows ἐπ' εὐλογίας. The NIV translates this phrase "generously," which is the way BAGD takes it also. But it would appear to be better to stay with the thought of "blessing" that Paul has just used. The farmer sows "on the basis of blessing," that is, in anticipation of being blessed. What he sows won't be wasted but, in fact, will produce a harvest. The farmer reaps what he sows. If he sows unsparingly, anticipating that he will be blessed, he will receive the blessing that he anticipated.

It would not have been difficult for the Corinthians, and it is not difficult for us either, to apply this picture from agriculture to the matter of giving. When an offering is given as a blessing to others, Christians can anticipate a blessing in return. The Apology, Article III, "Of Love and the Fulfilling of the Law," quoting this verse, states, "Here clearly the measure of the reward is connected with the measure of the work" (*Triglotta*, p. 221). What the reward will be Paul doesn't state here, although he will come back to this subject at the close of the chapter. Obviously, this is not a crass "give so that you can get" approach to giving. Godly giving is grace-of-Christ-driven. Nevertheless, we do well to take note and to remind our people that God does promise to reward a Christian's good works, as, again, Article III of the Apology brings out, "Although justification and eternal life pertain to faith, nevertheless good works merit other bodily and spiritual rewards" (p. 219).

7 ἕκαστος καθὼς προήρηται τῇ καρδίᾳ, μὴ ἐκ λύπης ἢ ἐξ ἀνάγκης· ἱλαρὸν γὰρ δότην ἀγαπᾷ ὁ θεός.

⁷ *Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.*

The Greek at the beginning of this verse is concise: “Each one, according to what he has chosen beforehand in his heart.” You have to add, as does the NIV, a word such as δότω, “Let each one give.” The verb προήρηται, which I have translated “chosen beforehand,” is a middle perfect, which brings with it the idea of choosing something for oneself. The prefix πρό is perhaps simply perfective; but in this context it’s more likely that it has the sense of beforehand. This is the opposite of unplanned, haphazard giving. Paul is encouraging the Corinthians, each one of them, to choose beforehand what they will give and to make this choice τῇ καρδίᾳ, in the heart. Planning for godly giving is properly done in the heart, not just the mind, i.e., it’s not just a mechanical thing. It is done in a heart that has come to know (γινώσκειν) the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ (8:9)

What the Corinthians gave should not be given “reluctantly,” literally, “out of grief” (ἐκ λύπης). The Corinthians would be giving “out of grief,” “sorrowfully,” if their thoughts centered on how much they were going to lose, like the farmer who sows seed sparingly (v. 6). In Deuteronomy the Lord says, “Do not be hardhearted or tightfisted toward your poor brother.... Give generously to him and do so without a grudging heart; then because of this the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in everything you put your hand to” (Dt 15:7, 10).

Nor should the Corinthians’ giving be “under compulsion,” (ἐξ ἀνάγκης, out of necessity). The Formula of Concord, in a discussion of the necessity of good works, distinguishes between “a necessity of Christ’s ordinance, command, and will” and “a necessity of coercion.” It comments on this passage: “That is termed *of necessity* which is wrung from one against his will, by force or otherwise, so that he acts externally for appearance, but nevertheless without and against his will” (FC, Article IV, *Triglotta*, p. 943)

The γὰρ in the last clause of this verse gives the reason why the Corinthians should give neither out of grief nor necessity, but rather as they themselves have decided beforehand in their hearts to give: “God loves a cheerful giver.” Not that God doesn’t love us when we fall short, but that he loves to see such an attitude in his children. Note that in the Greek the adjective ἱλαρόν, “cheerful,” is in the emphatic position: *A cheerful giver God loves.* With such an attitude God is well pleased.

The only compulsion that can properly propel godly giving is the compulsion of the love of Christ, as Paul puts it earlier in 2 Corinthians: “Christ’s love compels (συνέχει, controls) us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again” (2 Cor 5:14-15). How do pastors instill such an attitude in their members? Is it overly simplistic to say, “By painstakingly, persistently, and passionately preaching specific law and specific gospel”? I think not.

8 δυνατεῖ δὲ ὁ θεὸς πᾶσαν χάριν περισσεῦσαι εἰς ὑμᾶς, ἵνα ἐν παντὶ πάντοτε πᾶσαν ἀπάρκειαν ἔχοντες περισσεύητε εἰς πᾶν ἔργον ἀγαθόν.

⁸ *And 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.*

With this verse Paul goes back to the thought of verse 6. The one who sows “generously” won’t be the poorer for it. But he takes it a step farther here. He doesn’t simply say, “God is able to make all grace abound (περισσεῦσαι, overflow) to you so that you will have all that you need.” He says, “God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that [take the ἵνα clause as a result clause, “with the result that]... you will abound in every good work.” Note the pile-up of forms of πᾶς: “all grace,” “all things,” “at all

times,” “all that you need,” “every good work.” Thanks to the abundant, overflowing grace of God, which was most dramatically demonstrated at Calvary (8:8-9), the Corinthians would be able to overflow in every good work, including the good work of godly giving, as they shared their material goods with the saints in Jerusalem.

Once again, we see how the major impetus and the power for godly giving comes, not from within, but from without, and not from external circumstances but from the overflowing grace of God.

Paul will come back to this thought in verse 11. But first, somewhat parenthetically, he supports what he has just said with a quotation from the Septuagint translation of Psalm 112:

9 καθὼς γέγραπται, Ἐσκόρπισεν, ἔδωκεν τοῖς πένησιν, ἡ δικαιοσύνη αὐτοῦ μένει εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα.

⁹ *As it is written:*

*“He has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor;
his righteousness endures forever.”*

Psalm 111 and 112 are a pair. Both are acrostics and are identical in form. Psalm 111 focuses on God’s generosity, parallel to God’s ability to “make all grace abound.” Psalm 112 provides the grateful believer’s response, parallel to “you will abound in every good work.”

The subject in the quotation is not God, but the grateful believer. The LXX uses two aorist verbs, ἐσκόρπισεν and ἔδωκεν. It is best to take each of the verbs as gnomic aorists and thus to translate them as present tense: “He [the grateful believer] scatters.” The picture of seed-sowing is continued. But it is not an aimless, random scattering: “He gives to the poor.”

The result? “His [the believer’s] righteousness (δικαιοσύνη) endures forever.” The life of the believer, who in Christ has been declared righteous, will have far-reaching effects. J. P. Meyer comments: “It [the believer’s “righteousness”] will outlast this present life; it will outlast death and the grave, it will outlast the final judgment, and will follow into heaven, as the Book of Revelation says: “Their works do follow them” (14:13). It is as Jesus said: “If anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward” (Mt 10:42). Obviously, Jesus is speaking of a reward of grace, as are all rewards attached to our life of sanctification, but a reward nevertheless.

Should we employ promises of reward to encourage godly giving? Such promises of God can certainly be used properly to encourage believers in their lives of sanctification (cf. Eph 6:1-3). Pastors need not hesitate to use them. We need to remember, however, that the devil can turn God’s promises of reward to suit his own purposes, e.g., give so that you can get. We don’t want our members ever to forget that Christians give primarily because of what they have received, not because of what they can get. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ as revealed above all at Calvary remains *the* motivation for godly giving.

10 ὁ δὲ ἐπιχορηγῶν σπόρον τῷ σπείροντι καὶ ἄρτον εἰς βρῶσιν χορηγήσει καὶ πληθυνεῖ τὸν σπόρον ὑμῶν καὶ αὐξήσει τὰ γενήματα τῆς δικαιοσύνης ὑμῶν.

¹⁰ *Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness.*

Continuing to employ a seed-sowing analogy, Paul adds one more point: the very seed that we sow is a gift of God. God is the one who “supplies seed to the sower.” Paul uses a participial form of the verb ἐπιχορηγέω. The ἐπί intensifies the verb. God is the one who fully supplies the seed. And not only that, God will multiply (πληθυνεῖ) the seed and, Paul says, “He will multiply (αὐξήσει) the harvest (γενήματα) of your righteousness.” Christ’s imputed righteousness will produce a bountiful harvest of righteous living, which includes godly giving.

The Lord will continue to provide both the material goods Christians need for giving and also, even especially, the growth in sanctification Christians need if they are to be godly givers. There is a

difference between the two, however. As Luther reminds us, God gives daily bread even without our asking, even to the wicked, while a “harvest of righteousness” comes only from the Holy Spirit through the Means of Grace. This underscores once again the calling of pastors to shepherd their flocks by leading them to the quiet waters and green pastures of Word and Sacrament through which God will produce an ever-growing “harvest of righteousness.”

Paul returns now to the thought of verse 8:

11 ἐν παντὶ πλουτιζόμενοι εἰς πᾶσαν ἀπλότητα, ἥτις κατεργάζεται δι' ἡμῶν εὐχαριστίαν τῷ θεῷ.

¹¹ *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.*

“You will be made rich in every way” is a translation of ἐν παντὶ πλουτιζόμενοι. The antecedent of this present passive participle apparently is the subject of περισσεύτηε in verse 8. Paul tells the Corinthians, “You will abound in every good work as you are continually being enriched εἰς πᾶσαν ἀπλότητα.” The NIV translates this phrase, “so that you can be generous on every occasion.” We have already come upon the noun ἀπλότης (recall our comments on 8:2) and will encounter it again in 9:13. In each of the three times this noun is used, it seems best to stick with its basic meaning of “single.” There were no ulterior motives. The Corinthians were being enriched in every way for total single-minded giving, giving that was solely a response to the grace of God.

This single-minded giving was producing (κατεργάζεται, effectively working) thanksgiving to God. The question is: thanksgiving on whose part? On the part of the Corinthians in the form of this offering? Or on the part of the Jerusalem believers who will be receiving this gift? In view of the verses that follow, it seems best to take it as thanksgiving that emanates from the believers in Jerusalem.

We shouldn't pass by the prepositional phrase δι' ἡμῶν too quickly. It was through the gospel-centered ministry of Pastor Paul and his co-workers that the Holy Spirit had engendered the Corinthians' single-minded, grace-motivated giving. Paul had done much more than give the Corinthians some instructions on the mechanics of the offering. The gospel he had brought to the Corinthians had made new people of them. We can hardly overestimate the place of solid law/gospel preaching and teaching in producing and cultivating our members' lives of sanctification.

9:12-13 God Is Glorified

12 ὅτι ἡ διακονία τῆς λειτουργίας ταύτης οὐ μόνον ἐστὶν προσαναπληροῦσα τὰ ὑστερήματα τῶν ἀγίων, ἀλλὰ καὶ περισσεύουσα διὰ πολλῶν εὐχαριστιῶν τῷ θεῷ.

¹² *This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of God's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God.*

This verse is somewhat parenthetical. It serves as a transition to the thoughts of verse 13. It begins with ὅτι, “since,” picking up the thought at the end of verse 11. But this time, instead of talking about the ἀπλότης, the single-mindedness of the Corinthians that would result in thanksgiving to God on the part of the Jerusalem saints, Paul describes the offering as “this service that you perform.” The Greek is ἡ διακονία τῆς λειτουργίας ταύτης, which might be translated, “the administration of this service.” Λειτουργία was used in secular Greek literature as a term for public service performed by an individual for the state, often free of charge. Here it is used in the sense of the spiritual service willingly and freely given by the Corinthians. The same word is used in Romans: “If the Gentiles have shared

(ἐκοινωνήσαν) in the Jews' spiritual blessings, they owe it to the Jews to share (λειτουργῆσαι) with them their material blessings" (Ro 15:27).

The service the Corinthian church was performing had two results. It was "supplying the needs of God's people" in Jerusalem. It was filling up what they lacked, the periphrastic construction, ἐστὶν προσαναπληροῦσα, emphasizing the action of the verb. But "not only" (οὐ μόνον) was their service in the form of this offering doing that, "but" (ἀλλά) it was also "overflowing" (περισεύουσα) with many thanksgivings to God on the part of the saints in Jerusalem.

Note the direction of the thanksgiving: τῷ θεῷ, to God. Would not the Jerusalem saints be grateful to their brothers and sisters in the Gentile world for the love they were demonstrating in this offering? Obviously. And it would have been appropriate for them to express their gratitude to them; just as it is appropriate for Christians today to say thank you to a brother or sister in Christ for a job well done. But the deepest gratitude of the believers in Jerusalem, as should be ours also, is to the God of grace who had worked mightily in the hearts of the Corinthians with the result that they had responded with an outpouring of love to their brothers and sisters in Jerusalem. As they express their gratitude to God, not just to the Corinthians, the Jerusalem believers would be acknowledging that the gift from their brothers and sisters was not just money, but a Spirit-created fruit of faith, as Paul brings out in the next verse:

13 διὰ τῆς δοκιμῆς τῆς διακονίας ταύτης δοξάζοντες τὸν θεὸν ἐπὶ τῇ ὑποταγῇ τῆς ὁμολογίας ὑμῶν εἰς τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ ἀπλότῃ τῆς κοινωνίας εἰς αὐτοὺς καὶ εἰς πάντας.

¹³ *Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, men will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else.*

The NIV translates the διὰ with "because." BAGD suggests the same; but the normal translation of διὰ with the genitive, "through," would also seem to work here. Woodenly translated, it goes like this: "Through the verification that this service [provides], [they are] praising God for the conformity of your confession to the gospel of Christ and for the single-mindedness of your fellowship with them and with all." This offering was a tangible demonstration of the genuineness of the faith of the Corinthians.

While there is no clear antecedent of δοξάζοντες, quite clearly the ones who are praising God for the outpouring of love on the part of the Corinthians are the Jerusalem believers. They are praising God for the way that the Corinthians' confession conformed to the gospel. As Armin Panning put it, "They put their money where their heart was." And they are praising God for the single-mindedness, or unity, of fellowship that they enjoy with the Corinthian believers, of which this offering is a concrete demonstration.

Today also, as Christians join together to serve the Lord with their offerings, they are expressing the fellowship the Holy Spirit has created among them. Writes Panning: "Responsible stewardship of material things which allows us to be generous toward others is one way in which we can actively participate in the fellowship—even with people whom we may not know."

St. Paul continues that thought in the next verse:

9:14-15 Bonds of Christian Fellowship Are Strengthened

14 καὶ αὐτῶν δεήσει ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν ἐπιποθούντων ὑμᾶς διὰ τὴν ὑπερβάλλουσαν χάριν τοῦ θεοῦ ἐφ' ὑμῖν.

¹⁴ *And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you.*

Paul assumes that the believers in Jerusalem would be praying for their brothers and sisters in Corinth. It's what Christians do. They pray for one another. But the loving action of the Corinthians and the others who were participating in this offering added another dimension to the prayers of the Jerusalem saints: their hearts were going out to their loving benefactors. Ἐπιποθούντων is a genitive absolute. It clearly refers to the saints in Jerusalem. The verb means to long for, to desire. The Jerusalem believers longed to see these Gentile brothers and sisters face-to-face.

Why? We might expect that the answer would be: in order to thank them personally. Certainly, as mentioned above, they would do just that. It's not difficult to imagine the expressions of gratitude the Jerusalem believers would have extended to Paul and the rest of the delegation who brought the offering to Jerusalem.

But once again Paul is thinking vertically, not horizontally. Above all, this gift from their Gentile brothers and sisters would move the Jerusalem believers to thank God διὰ τὴν ὑπερβάλλουσαν χάριν τοῦ θεοῦ, because of the super-abundant grace that God had showered on the Corinthians, grace that had moved them to respond in the way they did.

Hence, the concluding words of these two chapters:

15 χάρις τῷ θεῷ ἐπὶ τῇ ἀνεκδιηγήτῳ αὐτοῦ δωρεᾷ.

¹⁵ *Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!*

Paul began these chapters with χάρις (8:1) and he ends with the same. There may be words to describe gifts that people give to one another, such as the gift from the Corinthians to their brothers and sisters in Jerusalem. But God's δωρεά, his marvelous grace in Christ that had brought about this gift of the Corinthians and before that had made new people of them, can only be described as "indescribable."

* * * * *

SUMMARY

From this study of 2 Corinthians 8 and 9, what might pastors take to heart themselves and teach their members about godly giving? Here are some guidelines for godly giving from Pastor Paul as gleaned from the message of these chapters:

1. Godly giving is a response to the grace of God in Christ. This underscores the need for preaching specific law (about greed, selfishness, covetousness, materialism) and specific gospel through which the guilty sinner is set free from guilt and is moved to respond with thanksgiving.
2. Trusting in the power of the gospel, pastors will want to expect the best from God's people, as they appeal to the New Man in them.
3. We not only alleviate people's spiritual and physical needs, but we worship God with our offerings. Our offerings have a vertical, not just a horizontal, dimension to them.
4. God is pleased with single-minded giving. Pastors, therefore, will take care not to put obstacles to that kind of giving before their members, e.g., appeals to pride, emphasis on rewards, motivating by guilt or coercion.
5. It is better to talk about our giving as an offering than a collection. The latter has to do with what is taken from you; the former stresses the act of giving.

6. God is more concerned about the attitude with which we give than with the amount we give. We will want to avoid any practices which make it appear as though the opposite were true.
7. Since giving is a part of a Christian's life of sanctification, pastors will not hesitate to talk about this subject on a regular basis.
8. Since giving is only a *part* of a Christian's life of sanctification, pastors will not harp on the subject. Other areas need to be addressed also.
9. God loves a cheerful giver, a giver who gives from a heart made cheerful by God's grace. Therefore, *preach the gospel!*
10. Stewardship counsel from those of the wider fellowship beyond the congregation can benefit a congregation and therefore should be welcomed and encouraged.
11. Our joint giving endeavors (congregational and synodical) are tangible expressions of our fellowship in Christ and thus should be encouraged and treasured.
12. In giving, both the giver and the receiver are blessed. It's always a two-way street.
13. God, who supplies seed for the sower, will always give us what we need.
14. Christians give from what God has given them (proportionate giving). In planning their giving, it is helpful for Christians to determine first what *percentage* of their income they will give to the Lord and then to translate that percentage into an amount.
15. Planning our giving can help to combat haphazard, left-over giving.
16. The example that others set can assist Christians in their giving. Pastors themselves may well be a prime example for their members.
17. Those who lead stewardship endeavors need to be mature Christians, well respected by their brothers and sisters in faith.
18. God promises to reward faithful giving. Pastors need not hesitate to point to such promises. But at the same time they will want to continue to focus their members' eyes of faith on the cross and empty tomb as *the* motivation for godly giving.
19. "Need giving" can be properly understood as Christians exercising careful stewardship of their resources. It is imperative that congregations and church bodies be wise stewards of the gifts of God's people and that they communicate clearly how people's offerings will be used.
20. The careful way by which Pastor Paul organized the offering for the saints in Jerusalem demonstrates the value of carrying out congregational and synodical stewardship endeavors in an orderly and organized way. Annual stewardship "programs," together with ongoing stewardship training, can help a congregation do just that.

Laying the Foundation: The Scriptural Basis for Godly Giving by David J. Valleskey

A Reaction

My first reaction to David Valleskey's paper is to be a little more excited for some of you than for others. All of us have benefited from the scriptural foundation he has laid for our study of godly giving at this symposium. Yet, there are some in this auditorium who have never been a member of one of Pastor Valleskey's congregations, never sat in one of Professor Valleskey's classrooms, never served on the faculty with him, or never served under President Valleskey's administration. I am excited for you especially today, for this paper gives you a taste of the solidly exegetical and eminently practical style of teaching the Bible the rest of us have enjoyed from Brother Valleskey over the years. With this paper we are off on the right foot to consider a Christian's stewardship of money, the foot that pushes off the firm ground of doctrine drawn from what God says in his Word, not from what we say God says in his Word. Truly this is an exegetical essay.

Biblical exegesis must concern itself with historical setting. These two chapters of 2 Corinthians form their own wonderful unit on Christian stewardship, but they cannot be understood apart from Paul's history with the Corinthian congregation. In his opening pages Valleskey reviews this history and helps us understand that the Corinthians would have been understood by many of us as a "problem congregation," and yet about them Paul amazingly writes $\thetaαρρ\omega\ \acute{\epsilon}\nu\ \upsilon\mu\acute{\iota}\nu$, "I have confidence in you" (2 Cor 7:16). Given the doctrinal and moral mishaps mentioned in 1 Corinthians, we might find Paul's confidence unfounded. How could he address their stewardship of money with any kind of confidence?

Law and gospel, that's how. Law and gospel in Paul's preaching and inspired writing. Law and gospel in the ministry Timothy and Titus rendered to the congregation. God changes people by his Word. Pastors have every reason to be confident in God's power to change people by his Word. This is why Paul's language is so positive, so expectant as he addresses the Corinthians concerning their part in the church-wide offering for Jerusalem. This is also why Valleskey encourages pastors today to have the same attitude: "Pastors...will want to expect nothing but the best from God's children...And it is not unrealistic to anticipate that they will rejoice to serve God – also in their giving" (p 6). $\thetaαρρ\omega\ \acute{\epsilon}\nu\ \upsilon\mu\acute{\iota}\nu$. When preaching the heart-changing gospel in his stewardship sermon, let the preacher be bold. Paul's way is to expect fruits of faith produced in your hearers rather than rotten tomatoes thrown by your hearers.

Valleskey's summary theses (p 18,19) are a real blessing since they accurately communicate the basic principles drawn from God's Word in these two chapters. While each one is worthy of comment and discussion, not just here but also in pastoral circuit meetings and conferences, please allow me to focus on a few as the framework for the rest of my reaction.

1. Godly giving is a response to the grace of God in Christ. Whenever I travel through these two chapters in isagogics with first year seminarians, I am struck by the many times and many ways Paul uses the word $\chi\acute{\alpha}\rho\iota\varsigma$ (8:1,4,6,7,9,16,19; 9:8,14,15). While different shadings of meaning come through in the way we render $\chi\acute{\alpha}\rho\iota\varsigma$ in these chapters ("grace, favor, privilege, gift, thanks, thanksgiving"), the term should never be separated too far from that basic sense of God's undeserved kindness shown to sinners, an undeserved kindness that produces joy. Paul's heavy use of $\chi\acute{\alpha}\rho\iota\varsigma$ in these chapters reminds us that our offerings properly flow from the gift of God's Son, and our offerings are not so much gifts to God as gracious gifts from God.

7. and 8. *Since giving is (only) a part of a Christian's life of sanctification, pastors will not hesitate to talk about this subject on a regular basis without harping on it.* No, not every sermon. Not every Bible class. Yet, Paul's description of Christian giving in 8:8 stands out. He calls it a "testing of the genuineness of your love" (τὸ τῆς ὑμετέρας ἀγάπης γνήσιον δοκιμάζων). Empowered by God's love for them, Christians will want to examine their love for him. It is probably fair to say that monetary giving is an opportunity for spiritual self-examination that could be offered more often.

11. *Our joint giving endeavors are tangible expressions of our fellowship in Christ.* Paul's use of *κοινωνία* near the beginning (8:4) and end (9:13) of these two chapters is stunning. Our synodical offerings not only build church buildings and keep schools open. They speak of fellowship. They say, "We are one in faith and mission; we walk side by side with you," to the African brother, to the South Carolina sister, to the young lady studying to be a teacher, all of whom we may never meet in person this side of glory. Imagine the scene Paul describes at the end of chapter 9: Jews were actually praising God for Gentiles, and Gentiles they had never met at that! Such is the fellowship power of the grace of giving, helping to bring us together as one family of God. Perhaps it could be emphasized more in our circles.

14. and 15. *Christian giving is planned and proportionate.* Paul's words for proportion (*καθὸ ἐὰν ἔχη*, 8:12) and planning (*προαιρέομαι*, 9:7) guide the Christian in God-pleasing giving. While pastors should not use numerical figures to encourage, at the same time they certainly will not hesitate to encourage Christians (especially couples!) to sit down and plan their offerings by using percentages.

17. *Those who lead stewardship endeavors need to be mature Christians, well respected by their brothers and sisters in faith.* Paul's many references to Titus and the two brothers come to mind. Valleskey aptly points out "none of the three men who would be traveling from Macedonia to Corinth were a part of the Corinthian congregation" (p 11). Congregations should be confident that "outsiders" who come to assist in the grace of giving have the same faith on the inside. They are consecrated brothers who have a ministry to carry out. By the same token these ministers should be confident that their service will be welcomed, not disparaged. This is Paul's pattern.

18. *God promises to reward faithful giving.* Yes, indeed. What glorious promises we have in chapter 9! And let's remember that the ultimate reward we receive is to glorify God through the spread of the gospel. If one soul apart from Christ hears the gospel in part through my mission offering, what greater reward could God give me than that?

The grace of giving. Thank you, Brother Valleskey, for showing us from the Scripture where it comes from and what it looks like. You laid the foundation. We enjoyed your work.

Daniel P. Leyrer
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