

2 Corinthians 9

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As we hear Paul speaking about Christian giving in these two chapters we realize that he does not wish to isolate Christian giving from the rest of the Christian's life. Rather he regards Christian giving as a visible fruit of repentance and faith.

We note in chapter nine that Paul is particularly concerned about the Corinthians joyfully responding to God's mercy. He is not merely concerned about raising money. That is no substitute for developing "cheerful" giving.

The Corinthians had properly regarded Paul and his representative, Titus, who had brought this second epistle to them. They had had good intentions. But they had been talking about this offering for about a year, and the whole matter was at a standstill. It was high time for action. The report of the Corinthians' zeal had stimulated the Macedonians in their generous offering, and now if the Corinthians failed to gather their offering the other Christians might wonder about the effectiveness of God's grace in their hearts. Failure would cause not only disappointment but harm in the entire church.

In chapter nine Paul wants to emphasize that no offering can be pleasing to God unless the giver has an attitude of grateful adoration to God. That attitude must also be evidenced in the method by which the offering is gathered. Unless gratitude produces the giving God will not be pleased no matter how much money is gathered. Combined with this gratitude there needs to be a confidence in God's ability to provide. The Corinthians can afford to be generous because they know that their lives are in the hands of a loving God who has promised to provide.

In I Corinthians 16:2 Paul had outlined a system for giving which was to be regular, planned and proportionate. He does not emphasize that here. Instead he speaks of repentance, faith and a loving heart and takes for granted that that will express itself in generous gifts.

Paul does not pressure the Corinthians into giving. He is convinced that if he cultivates their faith, God will produce the fruit in the form and quantity that He intends. Paul is confident that there will be both short-range and long-range benefits and by-products of the fund-gathering in Corinth. The long-range benefit will be that the Corinthians will experience the satisfaction of participating in the work of God for eternity, that they will understand that they are channels of God's love to others.

Verse 1

Περὶ μὲν γὰρ τῆς διακονίας τῆς εἰς τοὺς ἁγίους περισσὸν μοι ἐστὶ τὸ γράφειν ὑμῖν

"For concerning the ministrations to the saints it is superfluous for me to write to you."

There were many poor members in the Jerusalem congregation. It had been that way from the beginning. Some of the wealthier members had sold their possessions and given the money to the apostles to take care of the needy. When this work had begun to interfere with the main task of the apostles, the congregation responded by electing seven deacons. But the poverty continued. When Paul and Barnabas after their first missionary journey went to Jerusalem to discuss the question of circumcision, etc. the Jerusalem apostles reminded the missionaries that they should not forget the poor and needy in the mother church. So things continued. The year after Paul wrote this present epistle he delivered the offering to Jerusalem and he found four men who had made a vow but were unable to pay for the purification sacrifices. Paul paid for this himself. There were many poor people in Jerusalem. The obvious purpose of the collection was to help them. But this was really only a minor matter as we shall see.

διακονίας, the word found also in verses 12 and 13, comes from the word which means an attendant, a waiter at table or in other menial duties, and in the New Testament often refers to a Christian teacher or pastor who is to serve as a minister. It has in it the idea of aid, relief, service.

The αγίους are the "blameless ones, the holy ones, the saints." The word is related to the word meaning "clean, innocent, modest, perfect" and refers to people who are that because they are declared righteous for the sake of Christ's holiness.

"It is superfluous for me to write to you," Paul says. The Corinthians do not need to be reminded about the need in Jerusalem. Paul has already attended to that. What they need now is stimulation to speed up the collection. The collection had suffered because of the difficulties between Paul and the Corinthians. Now these difficulties have been removed and energy is to be put forth to gather the collection. Paul does not want all the good things he has said about the Corinthians to others to be put to shame.

Verse 2

οἶδα γὰρ τὴν προθυμίαν ὑμῶν καυχῶμαι Μακεδόσιν ὅτι Ἀχαΐα παρεσκευάσται ἀπο πέρυσι, καὶ τὸ ὑμῶν ζῆλος ἠρέθισεν τοὺς πλείονας

"For I know your readiness of mind of which I am boasting concerning you to the Macedonians that Achaia has been prepared a year ago, and your zeal has stimulated many."

προθυμίαν literally means "forward in spirit, forwardness of mind, readiness of mind" and consequently "ready and willing."

παρασκευάσται means to "furnish aside" and refers to an implement or vessel set aside for a certain purpose. In that connection it means "to get ready."

The etymology of ζῆλος is to boil (of liquids) or to glow (of solids) and consequently means to "be fervent or earnest."

ἠρέθισεν means to "stimulate" and then to "provoke." Its root meaning is "quarrel or wrangling, contention," but here it is not in that negative sense.

It would not be necessary and perhaps it would not even be in good taste for Paul to now give an elaborate explanation of the collection. "I know your eagerness to help," Paul says. Paul emphasizes the objective certainty of the matter. Their zeal was indisputably established. They were ready to participate in this offering for the poor saints in Jerusalem. In fact Paul used their readiness to inspire the Macedonians. He says, "I have been boasting about it to the Macedonians." He even quotes what he has been saying to them that "Achaia has been prepared a year ago." Note the perfect tense here and the passive voice. Not everything about the offering has been completed. The Achaians had simply been prepared for the offering. A beginning had been made, but Paul is saying nothing about the outcome. Paul was not trying to stir up zeal among the Macedonians by falsely claiming that the Corinthians were ready to go with their part of the offering. The Macedonians could realize from Paul's words that even though a fine preparation had been made a year ago a serious slackening of effort had intervened. The zeal of the Macedonians had been stirred up simply by what Paul had told them about the preparation for the offering in Achaia. Notice also that Paul mentions Achaia and not merely Corinth. Other congregations in the province (Athens, Cenchrea) had also been prepared for the offering. Paul's point is that their initial zeal had incited the greater number of the Macedonians.

Verse 3

ἔπεμψα δὲ τοὺς ἀδελφοὺς, ἵνα μὴ τὸ καύχημα ἡμῶν τὸ ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν κενωθῆ ἐν τῷ μέρει τούτῳ, ἵνα καθὼς ἔλεγον παρεσκευασμένοι ἦτε,

"But I sent the brothers lest our boasting concerning you be made empty in this very part that as I was just saying you have been prepared."

Κενωθῆ comes from the word which means "empty," and this verb then means to "make empty, to abase, to neutralize, to make of none affect."

ἔπεμψα is an epistolary aorist. The writer courteously projects himself in imagination to the position of

the reader for whom actions contemporaneous with the time of writing are in the past. We see this also in verse 5 with the word ἡγησάμην.

Paul indicates the purpose for which he had sent Titus and the two other brethren. The Macedonians might feel that Paul had not properly prepared the Corinthians in the first place as he had said he had. Paul had boasted about them to the Macedonians, and he doesn't want this boast to be made empty. He wants them to use their time well to make the preparations for the offering. They had been prepared as Paul had just been saying in verse 2. Paul of course is speaking about the preparations that he had made, not about the preparations which the Corinthians had recently made. The perfect passive insists upon this understanding. Paul's preparation had been complete. Verse one indicates that there was no need to make it anew. Verse two indicates it had produced a readiness in them. The finest results should have followed, but there had been disturbances during that year which had caused Paul to write the first letter to the Corinthians, and there were other problems concerning which Paul had sent Titus. This was why there had not been the preparations that there should have been. Something had been done, but it wasn't enough.

Verse 4

μή πως ἐὰν ἔλθωσιν σὺν ἐμοὶ Μακεδόνες καὶ εὗρωσιν ὑμᾶς ἀπαρασκευάστους καταισχνθῶμεν ἡμεῖς, ἵνα μὴ λέγω ὑμεῖς, ἐν τῇ ὑποστάσει ταύτῃ.

"Lest perhaps if Macedonians come with me and find you unprepared, we, that is, not to say anything about you, should be put to shame in this."

καταισχνθῶμεν means "disfigurement, disgrace and to blush on that account," and then to "confound, to dishonor, to make ashamed."

ὑποστάσει means a "setting under, a support" and then in a figurative sense, abstractly an "assurance or confidence."

μή πως is rare and occurs with the subjunctive as also in 1 Corinthians 9:27. Normally we would expect to find μή.

The Corinthians needed to hurry with their offering lest the Macedonians find them unprepared and Paul and his assistants be put to shame. The Macedonians might conclude that the Corinthians had never been properly prepared by Paul. In chapter eight Paul mentioned that his preparation in Macedonia had produced some wonderful results. The same thing should have been true in Corinth. Would the Corinthians want Paul to scold them in the presence of these Macedonians?

"Not to say you," Paul says. Paul would take the blame on himself, but he implies that the Corinthians are really to be blamed. Paul had had confidence in the Corinthians. He had felt some assurance concerning their preparations for the offering. Would his confidence now be put to shame because it had not been rightly placed?

Verse 5

ἀναγκαῖον οὖν ἡγησάμην παρακαλέσαι τοὺς ἀδελφούς, ἵνα προέλθωσιν εἰς ὑμᾶς καὶ προκαταρτίσωσιν τὴν προεπηγγελμένην εὐλογίαν ὑμῶν, ταύτην ἐτοίμην εἶναι οὕτως ὡς εὐλογίαν καὶ μὴ ὡς πλεονεξίαν.

"Therefore I considered it necessary to urge the brothers to go beforehand to you and to complete in advance your blessing promised in advance this to be ready as a blessing and not as covetousness."

παρακαλέσαι means to "call to" and then to "invite, invoke, beseech, entreat."

προκαταρτίσωσιν means "to make up beforehand, to prepare in advance."

προεπηγγελμένην means "to announce beforehand, i.e. to predict, promise."

εὐλογίαν means "fine speaking, elegance of language, commendation." Our English word "eulogy" is a transliteration. By extension this word means "benefit or blessing in the sense of bounty."

πλεονεξίαν in its root sense means "holding or desiring more, eager for gain" and then means

"covetousness, avarice, greediness."

There wasn't much time left, but they could still get the offering ready. So Paul urged the brothers to visit the Corinthians in advance to finish the arrangements. Note the three compounds with προ- "in advance." The Corinthians had made promises a year ago, but they still were not fulfilled. Paul calls the contributions to be made "blessing." The Corinthians were to think of their offerings as a "blessing" to the saints. They were to have that kind of spirit as they gathered their offerings. Paul was looking for generosity from a deep desire to help. Paul did not want the offering to be grudgingly given. The word *πλεονεξία* literally means "the desire to have more and more for oneself, covetousness, reflecting a mean spirit which thinks only of self and does not care about the needs of others."

Verse 6

Τοῦτο δέ, ὁ σπείρων φειδομένως φειδομένως καὶ θερίσει, καὶ ὁ σπείρων ἐπ' εὐλογίαις ἐπ' εὐλογίαις καὶ θερίσει.

"Now this, he who keeps sowing sparingly, sparingly shall he also reap. And he who keeps sowing on the basis of blessings, on the basis of blessings shall he also reap."

φειδομένως comes from the verb which means to "treat leniently" and then means to "forbear, spare." In our verse it means "stingily, sparingly."

θερίσει comes from the word which means "heat or summer" and then literally means "to heat the crop or harvest or reap."

Paul here shows what Christian giving in any age ought to be, how it is to be a blessing for all concerned. Others are blessed, God is blessed, and we ourselves are blessed. In chapter eight verse four the Macedonians are spoken of as urgently pleading with them for the privilege of giving. If every Christian giver remembered what a shower of blessings his offerings started he would always join the Macedonians in begging to give.

Paul shows us two kinds of sowers and we need to ask to which group we want to belong. We are reminded of Jesus' parable of the sower in Matthew 13. It is the business of the sower to sow, and so it is the business of the Christian to give. Christians are all farmers whose business is sowing. It looks like throwing grain away when a farmer scatters it. It looks like throwing money away when we give, but the very word "sowing" implies that a harvest is coming. God designs grain to be sown and to produce a harvest, and so He wants us to have the blessing of a harvest when we give. God gives us the grain in the first place, and He gives us the harvest from that grain. But when it is sown, oh how it multiplies! God showers us with harvest riches, and so God showers us with all the blessings of a Christian life. In everything God wants to fill us with riches. How foolish it is then to sow sparingly. That is the kind of harvest one will consequently have. The proper way to sow is "on the basis of blessings," and on this idea alone—blessings, praises to God, blessings to the people who receive the offering, and return blessings to ourselves. This is the way the Christian giver is to operate. Paul writes these words by way of encouragement. There is no work-righteousness here. The harvest is not ours by merit. God makes the seed, the soil, the sunshine, the growth, the ripening.

People have often used these words to defend the idea of work-righteousness, but as the *Apology of the Augsburg Confession* says "...the Gospel offers justification freely because of Christ's merits, not ours, and Christ's merits are communicated to us by faith. Works and afflictions merit not justification but other rewards..."¹

The Lutheran theologians use this verse to show that there are degrees of glory in heaven corresponding to differences of work and fidelity here on earth. For example Calov says of the promise and reward mentioned in this verse, "It is to be referred not to eternal life as such, but to the rewards in eternal life, not to the essence of blessing and glory, but to the degrees of glory."²

¹ *The Book of Concord*, translated by Theodore Tappert (Philadelphia: 1959), p.163. From here on "Tappert."

² Abraham Calov, *Biblia Illustrata Novi Testamenti* volume 2 (1676), "Annotata ad II Corinth." caput IX, pars II

Verse 7

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

"Each one as he has chosen in his heart, not grudgingly or from constraint, for a cheerful giver God loves."

προήρηται means to "choose for oneself before another thing," i.e. to "prefer" and then by implication to "propose or intend or purpose."

λύπης in its root sense means "sadness, grief," and thus "grudgingly, with heaviness, sorrow."

ἀνάγκης comes from a word that means "bend or ache," and then by implication means "distress, constraint, necessity."

ἰλαρὸν is our English word, "hilarious," but here the word means "cheerful" in the sense of "prompt or willing."

ἀγαπᾷ is a gnomic present used in a maxim or generalization such as "a good tree always bears good fruit." See also James 1:13-15.

Paul continues without a verb. Note Paul's emphasis on the individual. Giving is an exercise in Christian faith and love which belongs to each Christian. It is a very individual, personal matter. Others may advise, they may admonish, they may urge and encourage, but finally even the size of a contribution is something that is to be settled between the believer and his Lord. The perfect middle brings out the idea that a person chooses freely what he wants for himself—whether a meager return or a generous harvest. The preposition προ- fits the idea of sowing in advance of the harvest. In Christian giving nothing is ever to be given reluctantly, i.e. feeling sorry about letting this money pass from his hands. The implication is that a person will want to feel glad that he gave and wish that he could have given more. Nothing is to be given from compulsion—the feeling that one is forced to give, that he was taken advantage of. A person is not to be forced to give by some quota system, or by fear of the wrath of God, or by an urge to "keep up with the Joneses." But rather a person is to feel happy that he gave. Paul only wants voluntary gifts for his collection. That is the only true motive and principle of Christian giving. There is nothing God-pleasing about systems and methods that force people to give or that stimulate giving by means other than the Gospel. Pressuring people to give and stooping to worldly methods makes the gifts so obtained displeasing to God. The harvest of blessings is lost.

Notice that Paul says nothing about tithing. If tithing could have been Christianized there would have been no better opportunity than this one. But Paul never mentions tithing. Our Savior never mentions tithing. Concerning tithing Luther says, "In the Old Testament it was prescribed that in addition to the annual tithe due the Levites, the people had to contribute a special tithe every third year for the poor, the widows and orphans, etc. Now such amounts are not expressly fixed by specific laws of the New Testament, for it is an era of grace in which everyone is admonished to do this willingly."³ Pieper says, "We...deplore and reprove as sin the undeniable fact that New Testament Christians may make use of their deliverance from the Old Testament tithe to excuse their indolence in contributing for the purposes of the church, particularly for missions...but we also know that the Christian church never commands where Scripture does not command. The obligation to pay the tithe has been abolished in the New Testament. While the New Testament Scripture inculcates the obligation of generous and untiring giving it leaves the exact amount and the details of the contributions to Christian insight and freedom."⁴

"For a cheerful giver God loves." The Greek reverses the subject and the predicate and thereby emphasizes both. God loves the light-hearted, joyous, happy giver—one who is motivated by God's agape to him, one whose faith is all smiles as he responds to God's grace in Christ Jesus.

Concerning this verse the Formula of Concord says "...works of pretense God does not want. On the contrary, the people of the New Testament are to be a people who offer themselves freely, who bring freewill

³ Martin Luther quoted in Francis Pieper *Christian Dogmatics* vol. 3 (St. Louis: 1953), p. 51

⁴ Pieper, *ibid.* p.50.

offerings, not reluctantly or under compulsion, but with obedience from the heart because God loves a cheerful giver. With this meaning and in this sense it is right to say and teach that truly good works are to be done willingly or from a spontaneous spirit by those whom the Son of God has set free."⁵

Miserliness and stinginess in giving is not a unique characteristic of the latter part of the Twentieth Century. Describing the church in his own day Luther said, "This sin (refusal to contribute toward the support of the Gospel) entails the most severe punishments, and I verily believe that for no other reason were the churches in Corinth, Galatia, etc. ruined by false prophets than this that they did not provide for their faithful teachers... Formerly when people served the devil and put the blood of Christ to shame all the purses were wide open...but now when real schools and real churches are to be founded...all the purses are locked with iron chains. I pray that God would graciously let me die and take me hence that I may not see the misery that must come over Germany."⁶

Verse 8

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

"Moreover God is able to make every grace abound for you that you who have in all things at all times all sufficiency may increase in every good work."

αὐτάρκειαν has the root meaning of "self-satisfaction" an abstract meaning of "contentedness" and in its concrete meaning "contentment or sufficiency."

By nature all people are unwilling givers, and so Paul wants to transform the Corinthians into cheerful givers. He does not do this by command, nor by promise of a reward to be earned, nor by threats of punishment. Paul does not rely on his own ability to motivate the Corinthians but solely on God to do that. God's abounding grace is to bring abounding good works.

God's grace is a unit, but when Paul says "every grace" he means that not a single gift of grace we may need will be withheld from us. "Every good work" goes far beyond giving and implies that no good work can be done without the previous reception of God's grace. Note the heaping up of "every," "all." God's grace knows no limits. Whatever we need God will supply. God will supply the grace to do the good works which come from the heart such as faith, love, tenderness, etc. God will provide the grace to do the good works which come from the hands such as earthly means for giving, and the strength for helping. God will provide the grace for speaking to others about the Savior. We have a complete supply of God's grace for every situation, and so we never need to hesitate about dispensing God's grace whether it be in giving or doing some other good work.

Pieper says, "Christians should not be satisfied with having performed this or that good work, but they should become rich in good works. They should not sit at home and wait to be importuned to do good works, but they should go out and seek opportunities to do good works. Serving God should not be their avocation, but their vocation; they should make the very most of their time on earth in doing good works."⁷

Verse 9

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

"As it has been written, 'He scattered, he gave to the poor laborers. His righteousness endures forever.'"

αὐτάρκειαν is our English word "scorpion" and the Greek word literally means to "pierce" as scorpion stings, and then in the sense of penetrating it means to "dissipate," i.e. to "put to flight," and then consequently to "disperse abroad or scatter."

Paul quotes from Psalm 112:9. This Psalm describes in detail the blessedness of the person who fears the

⁵ Tappert, p. 554.

⁶ Luther quoted in Pieper, *ibid.* p. 50 footnote 78.

⁷ *Ibid.* p.47-48.

Lord and obeys His commandments. Paul's quotation emphasizes his great generosity to the poor.

"His righteousness endures forever," Paul says. "His righteousness" is that which is his because God has declared him righteous for the sake of Christ's perfect life and death for him. God pronounces this man righteous in regard to his works as evidence of his faith, and Christ Himself will publish this man's righteousness on the Last Day.

Paul's quotation of this Psalm is particularly effective, because it brings out the meaning of the words "all grace" in verse 8. It is by grace that God justifies us, by grace that He enables us to do good works, and finally by grace that He renders the public verdict.

Verse 10

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

"Now he who furnishes seed to the one sowing and bread for eating will provide and multiply your crop and will increase the fruits of your righteousness."

χορηγήσει is seen in our English word "choreography" or "chorus." Literally it means to "stand the expense of furnishing a chorus at some public festival," and in that sense means to "give, furnish, or minister." It refers to great generosity.

πληθυνεῖ comes from a Greek word meaning "company or multitude" and then means to "increase, abound, multiply."

αὐξήσει means to "grow, enlarge, give increase."

γενήματα is our English word "generate," and means "offspring" and then by analogy to "produce" or in a figurative sense "fruit."

What God is able to do He will do. What He does in nature He will do in a higher way in the domain of grace. God provides the seed and through it He provides bread for eating.

God does not drop bread from heaven, but He provides seed for him who sows. In the same way God operates in the domain of grace. We must do the sowing and thereby obtain a crop. Paul implies that he who furnishes everything we need for our bodies will certainly furnish everything we need in our spiritual lives. Not only will God furnish, but He will increase our store of seed and will even augment the harvest. God's will is always to provide an increase of the fruits of righteousness, and if this increase is not there it is due to our unwillingness. A farmer is delighted to have many fields planted and growing. So God's will for us is to multiply our sowings and consequently our harvests.

Verse 11

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

"Enriched in every respect, in complete singleness of purpose which keeps working out through us thanksgiving to God."

πλουτιζόμενοι comes from the word meaning to "fill" and so means "wealth" in the sense of "fulness" and then to "make wealthy."

ἀπλότητα comes from the word meaning "single," and then means "sincerity, without self-seeking," or objectively as here "generous, liberal, bountiful."

κατεργάζεται means to "work fully, accomplish" and by implication to "finish, fashion, work out." The use of the participles (as also in verse 13) is a semiticism. In normal Greek one would expect to see a finite verb or an imperative.

As they give their offerings the Corinthians might feel that they are thereby being impoverished in proportion to the amount of their contribution. But Paul says, "No," they are being enriched in every respect. In

all that God will do for the Corinthians they will be made rich. They will not have to wait for the harvest, for their enrichment begins when God supplies the seed and multiplies the crop. The riches consist in God's provision of everything the Corinthians need so that they can focus their attention and devote all their energy toward producing thanksgiving to God. Their purpose is to get as many people praising and thanking God as possible. They are not to worry about themselves. They are not to be greedy, striving after earthly riches, but in singleness of heart they are to be concerned for God's glory and for thanksgiving to God. Paul says "through us" this will happen. God furnishes even the ministers to aid the Corinthians in bringing about this rich harvest of thanksgiving. So also this is to be the highest aim for all of us—to multiply thanksgivings to God, that all of our time, energy and work be devoted to this one high purpose.

Verse 12

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

"Because the ministry of this public service is not only helping to supply the things lacking of the saints but is also overflowing by means of many thanksgivings to God."

διακονία implies service that is done solely for the purpose of helping others.

λειτουργίας means a "public function as priest," and thus means "ministration, ministry, service." By using this word in connection with the physical aid being sent to Jerusalem, Paul elevates the collection to the level of a spiritual, religious service. It is worth noting that the contributions which we solicit for congregational or synodical work pertain even more directly to the kingdom of God than did the collection which Paul was raising for the needy saints in Jerusalem. That work today needs to be done with reverential awe.

προσαναπληροῦσα means to "fill up further," i.e. to "furnish fully, supply."

ὑστερήματα means to "fall short, come behind" and then "deficit, poverty, that which is lacking."

εὐχαριστιῶν means "well-favored, grateful" and then "thankfulness, thanksgiving."

The participle προσαναπληροῦσα is a rare instance of a periphrasis in the present tense—a periphrasis being a participle together with an auxiliary verb such as "to be" expressing linear action.

Paul now elaborates on the idea of producing thanksgiving. The Corinthians are not to think that their offering is only to help the poor saints. They are doing much more than that. They are causing an overflow of many thanksgivings to God, and this is what should really make them happy. This is what Christian charity is all about. People of the world give simply to help others in their need. Pharisees give to acquire merit with God. But Christians are to give so that thanksgivings to God will be multiplied. Those who are helped will be thankful to God.

περισσεύουσα means to "make overflow," and this is exactly what happens as the hearts of the needy overflow with thanks to God.

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,

"By the test of this service people will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the Gospel of Christ and for your (generosity) in distributing to them and to all others."

δοκιμῆς means "acceptable after a sale" i.e. "approved" and then means "test, proof, trial."

δοξάζοντες comes from the word meaning "dignity, glory" and then means to "make glorious, honor, magnify."

ὁμολογίας means "a confession in words," but in this case it includes an expression of the new life within the heart by a new mode of living in the world. The Gospel is living in and ruling the hearts of the Corinthians and produces brotherly love.

κοινωνίας comes from the word meaning "common" and then means to "have in common, partnership." In the sense of benefaction it means to "communicate, distribute, fellowship."

Paul doesn't mention that the poor saints in Jerusalem will thank the Corinthians for their offering, nor does he mention that the saints in Jerusalem will thank God for these gifts. For Paul this is self-evident. Paul says their reaction will be something else. They will glorify God in a much higher way. They will praise God for the spiritual results God has produced in the Corinthians. Note that Paul speaks with great assurance about this. We might wonder how he can be so sure. It is because his confidence is not in the Corinthians themselves but in God who motivates them. He is sure that God will bless the efforts he is making, because he is using God's means—means that will not fail. Offerings fail when people resort to means other than God's means and do not trust God enough to bless the means He gives.

Paul sees the saints glorifying God for two things in regard to the Corinthians—first for the obedience that accompanies their confession. The gathering of the offering indicates that they have submitted to the Gospel message. Secondly, Paul sees the saints glorifying God for the single-mindedness of the Corinthians' fellowship with them and with all other saints. ἀπλότητι does not mean "liberality" but "single-mindedness" and κοινωνίας means "fellowship." Paul is speaking about something much greater than merely the generosity of their offerings. He is speaking about their spiritual fellowship and communion which extends not only to these poor saints in Jerusalem but to God's saints everywhere. Note that confession of the Gospel is accompanied by fellowship with the saints. Confession means fellowship and fellowship means confession. Note, too, that Paul says "confession" not "faith." We recognize like-minded believers by their confession. We cannot see their faith. Single-minded fellowship wants fellowship only with those who are true confessors of the Gospel of Christ.

Verse 14

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

"And they with prayers for you, longing for you because of the superabundant grace of God to you."

δεήσει comes from a word meaning to "beg, beseech" and then means "petition" in the sense of "prayer, request, or supplication."

ἐπιποθούντων means literally to "yearn or dote upon, earnestly desire, greatly long after." It is a process going on in the heart. As such it cannot be seen nor measured, but it is a powerful force driving the Christians to fervent prayer.

Verses 12 to 14 are really describing the διακονία of the Corinthians and the effects that it has. Verse 14 now reveals the secondary effect of their διακονία. The saints at Jerusalem will feel a certain way toward the Corinthians because of their gift. "In their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you." They will plead to God for the Corinthians, intercede for them, and this will be accompanied by their longing to see their benefactors to thank them in person. The poor saints in Jerusalem long to meet the Corinthians who live in the same grace of God they do.

Throughout this section Paul has a much higher object in view than simply the physical sufferings of the saints in Jerusalem. His purpose is to establish and strengthen the fellowship between the Jerusalem saints who were Jewish Christians and the members of Paul's churches who were Gentile Christians. Paul is not simply being a church politician. His is a concern for the spiritual welfare of all the Christians.

Paul mentions the grace of God because the Corinthians must realize that their participation in the collection was entirely an act of God's grace. If it had not been for God's grace they would never have thought of joining in the collection.

Verse 15

χάρις τῷ θεῷ ἐπὶ τῇ ἀνεκδιηγήτῳ αὐτοῦ δωρεᾷ

"Thanks to God for His indescribable gift."

ἀνεκδιγήτω means "not expounded or narrated in full," i.e. "indescribable or unspeakable."

It is interesting to note how many times Paul mentions God in verses 6-15. Paul directs the thoughts of the Corinthians upwards to God. He describes the feelings of the saints at Jerusalem as also being turned to God. Of course Paul's own thoughts are turned upward. This is how it should be.

What is the "indescribable gift" of which Paul speaks? It is of course God's grace to us, the grace about which Paul has been speaking throughout these two chapters. He has spoken of our giving, our good works, our motives, our aims, our purposes, and the results produced by them as being all a part of God's grace to us. Everything is grace. We can claim no merit for ourselves. Luther said, "to appreciate grace is the supreme and most difficult art one can find on earth. We have nothing to give in return except praise, glory and gratitude."