



2 Corinthians 8:1-15, 9:6-15

“Pushing All The Stewardship Button”

(Sermon Plus Study And Application Questions)

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“Following Christ at City Center!”

II CORINTHIANS 8:1-15, 9:6-15 "PUSHING ALL THE STEWARDSHIP BUTTONS"

A. 8:1-15 WHY THE CORINTHIANS NEEDS TO COMPLETE THEIR COLLECTION.

1) vv.1-7 The Grace Of Generosity In Hard Times By A Model Church (Comparison!).

1	a	We want you to know, brothers (and sisters) about the GRACE which God has given the Macedonian churches. <i>N. Greece</i>	
2	b	<u>for</u> in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of liberality on their part.	Philippi, Berea, Thessalonika
3	b'	<u>For</u> they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own free will,	
4		begging us earnestly for the favor (grace) of taking part in the RELIEF OF THE SAINTS .	Can We Help?
5		and this, not as we expected, but first they gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God.	Their Giving Was Personal
6	a'	Accordingly we have urged Titus that as he had already made a beginning,	
		he should complete among you this gracious work (lit. "this gift").	
7		Now as you excel in everything- in faith, in utterance, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in your love- see that you also excel in this gracious work also.	Spiritual Gifts Spiritual Fruits

2) vv.8-15 Paul's Pastoral Advice And Practical Counsel In Three Parts.

8		<u>I say this not as a command</u> , but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love is also genuine.	No Command
9		<i>For</i> you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich.	Reason: Christ: Summary, Incarnation rich-poor//poor-rich
10		<u>And in this matter I give you my advice</u> :	Paul's Best Advice
11		it is best for you now to complete what a year ago you began not only to do but to desire,	Reason: Integrity
12		so that your readiness in desiring it might be matched by your completing it out of what you have.	
		<i>For</i> if the readiness is there,	
		it is acceptable according to what a man has, not according to what he has not.	
13		<u>I do not mean</u> that others should be eased and you burdened, (14) but that as a matter of <u>equality</u> ,	What Not Mean What Paul Does Mean: Equality Romans 15:27
		your abundance at the present time should supply their want,	
		so that their abundance may supply your want,	
		that there may be <u>equality</u> .	equality-abundance-want// want-abundance-equality
15		<i>As it is written</i> , "He who gathered much (i.e. manna) had nothing left over, and he who gathered little had no lack."	Reason: Scripture Miracle Of Manna, Exodus 16:18

B. 8:16-9:5 A COMMENDATION OF THE REPRESENTATIVES (Omitted).

A' 9:6-15 WHY THE CORINTHIANS NEEDS TO GIVE GENEROUSLY.

1) vv.6-9 Sowing And Reaping.

6	a	The point is this: he (she) who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he (she) who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.	Matthew 7:2 Sowing/ Reaping (2x) (Proverb)
7	b	Each one of you must do as he (she) has made up his (her) mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.	Proverbs 22:8a Comment On Sowing
8	b'	And God is able to provide you with <i>every</i> blessing in <i>abundance</i> , so that you may <i>always have enough of everything</i> and may provide in <i>abundance</i> for every good work,	Comment On Reaping
9	a'	As it is written, 'He scatters abroad, he gives to the poor; his righteousness endures for ever.'	Sowing (Psalm 112:9) The Righteous Man/ Woman

2) vv.10-15 How Givers, Receivers, And God Share In Benefits.

10		He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your resources (lit. "sowing") and increase the harvest of your righteousness.	Isaiah 55:10, Hosea 10:12 (LXX)
11		You will be enriched in every way for <u>great generosity</u> ,	
		which through us will produce thanksgiving to God ;	
12		for the rendering of this (sacred) service not only supplies the WANTS OF THE SAINTS but also overflows in many thanksgivings to God .	
13		Under the test of this service, you will glorify God by your obedience in acknowledging the gospel of Christ, and by the <u>generosity</u> of your contribution for them and for all others;	
14		while they long for you and pray for you, because of the surpassing GRACE of God in you.	
15		Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!	Concluding Doxology Of Praise To God For Christ

PUSHING ALL THE BUTTONS

“Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!”

Why the doxology is sung *after* the offering is taken.

II CORINTHIANS 9:15

A man called the church and asked if he could speak to the Head Hog at the Trough. “Who?” said Emmie. The man repeated, “I want to speak to the Head Hog at the Trough!” Now that she heard correctly, she said, “Sir if you mean our pastor, you’ll have to treat him with a little more respect and ask for ‘The Reverend Thrailkill’ or ‘Pastor Phil.’ You cannot refer to him as the Head Hog at the Trough!”

At this he came back, “Oh, I see. Well I have a hundred thousand dollars I was thinking about donating to the Building Fund.”

Secretary: “Hold the line- I think the Big Pig just walked in the door.”¹

Money talks, doesn’t it? Sometimes too loudly. That donor found the secretary and the pastor’s button and pushed it. My goal today is to find the button, the place of deep motivation which differs from one to the next. There are three kinds of givers in every church: a few flints, lots of sponges, and a few honeycombs. To get anything out of the flint you have to hammer it; then you get only chips and sparks. Then there are the sponges. Nothing at all till you squeeze, and the harder you squeeze the more you get till generosity dries up. Then there are honeycombs which overflow with fullness.

The Apostle Paul struck the flints and squeezed the sponges, but he preferred honeycombs. The churches of Northern Greece- Philippi, Thessalonika, and Beroea- were honeycombs, but Corinth- the large port city to the south- was all flint, which is why Paul pushed every button in sight, from rank competition to the noblest motives of giving. Paul agreed with the Methodist preacher Clovis Chappell, “I have never felt any hesitation in speaking to my congregation about money.... I thrill to it. I revel in it. I love to see the liberal enjoy it. I love to watch the stingy suffer.”²

¹ Edited, J. Hewett, *Illustrations Unlimited* (Wheaton, ILL: Tyndale, 1988), 463.

² Ibid., 464.

TURNING TO THE TEXT

Comparison And Motivation (8:1-7)

Each year in the fall I spend a few weeks working on the issue of stewardship and giving. But Paul spent *eight years*- from 48AD at the Jerusalem Council till the writing of the Book of Romans in 56AD- working on what has come to be called *The Great Collection*.³ It was for the poor saints in Jerusalem, the mother church of the apostles that had been through an extended famine and occasional persecution. It was charity, but it was more. The gift became a symbol at a number of levels, almost a sacrament. It was a demonstration that though divided into two racial and ethnic wings- Jew and Gentile, the church was one people in Christ. It was also a powerful validation of Paul's own missionary endeavors. The Gentiles had received the spiritual blessings of the Christian message from Jews like Paul who believed Jesus to be the Messiah, and now they were making a material response.

Spiritual blessing calls for a material response. Since it was believed that at the end of the age the Gentiles would come into Jerusalem with their gifts to Mount Zion, this Great Collection was also an enacted parable that the new age was already on the way. It was about money- and a whole lot more. We hear about the offering first in Galatians, then in 1 and 2 Corinthians, and finally in Romans with these words:

“For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem; they were pleased to do it, and indeed they are *in debt to them*, for if the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings, *they ought also to be of service to them in material blessings*. When therefore I have completed this, and have delivered to them what has been raised, I shall go on by way of you to Spain...”⁴

So when Paul writes with intensity as he does in II Corinthians 8 and 9, when he pushes every button, recognize that here is a missionary who's made promises to Peter and James and John not to forget the poor in Jerusalem, and for him the *Great Collection* has enormous symbolic importance alongside the *Great Commission*.

³ See Jouette M. Bassler, “Perspectives from Paul, 2: The Great Collection,” in *God & Mammon: Asking for Money in the New Testament* (Nashville, TN: Abington, 1991), 89-115. For a recent treatment of Paul's teaching on money, see Ben Witherington III, *Jesus and Money: A Guide for Times of Financial Crisis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2010), Chapter 7, “Paul- On Work, Remuneration, and the Love of Money,” 107-130.

⁴ 15:26-28.

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The first button Paul pushes is the big red one: *comparison and competition*, as if to say, “Did you hear about what the Baptists are doing down the street?” He lets the Corinthian church take a look at the offering of the Macedonian churches who under the pressures of persecution and financial distress gave a more-than-generous gift, thus verse 1: “We want you to know, brothers, about the grace which God has given the Macedonian churches.” Paul dwells on both how hard things were and how enormous was their generosity; a *severe test of affliction* and *extreme poverty* did not make them beg off. Rather, they begged Paul not to rob them of this opportunity to give to those who had made the message of Christ available to them. Giving is about gratitude for Jesus. Period.

In fact, if we pay close attention, we see that their financial generosity was the result of two other types of self-giving. “But first,” says Paul in verse 5, “...they gave themselves *to the Lord* (Gift No. 1) and *to us* (Gift No. 2) by the will of God.”

Stingy giving is a symptom of a spiritual disease. Have you first given yourself *and your stuff* to the Lord Jesus? Are you a steward, or still an owner? Secondly, do you trust the leadership of your church so that you can follow our lead? Do you trust me as a spiritual leader? If not, why not? I’m giving you everything I have.

How about Karl Kelly our Council chair? Is he trustworthy and worth following? Yes. How about our Finance Chair John Thompson or our Treasurer Bob Cureton? I trust them all. You have a solid Church Council, people of character who love the Lord and this church. Have you given yourself first to the Lord Jesus in faith, and then secondly to follow the lead of the faulty but faithful spiritual leaders of this church? That, says Paul, was the root of Macedonian generosity. They gave themselves to God and to one another, then oozed with giving. Paul held it up for the Corinthians to admire. “See what they did in tough times. You Corinthians can do even better!”

I have almost come to a vow in my life not to visit any more Baptist churches, especially not the larger ones. Why? Because it often embarrasses me- makes me wonder what I’ve been doing. They are better educated in missions and teach tithing without apology, which is something we Methodists have not emphasized in a long time. Are they perfect? Not by a long shot, but in giving and in missions and in outreach they often beat us to death. Why am I engaging in this comparison? Because Paul did, and because it’s true. It is a button worth pushing from time to time. For some it’s motivational.

Not only did Paul compare performance between Macedonia and Corinth, he sent a Titus as a personal representative to Corinth to make sure it happened, that they completed what they had started. Comparison, competition, and now personal pressure: heavy stuff! Then Paul went for the jugular.

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The Corinthian church was a charismatic church that took great pride in all the gifts of the Spirit that were operative in their midst: they had tongues, prophecy, healing, discernment of spirits, faith, words of wisdom and knowledge.⁵ It was a spiritually charged place. Paul said- in effect, “If you are so good at gifts, let’s see how good you are at giving. This is the thrust of verse 7: “Now as you excel in everything- in faith, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love- see that you also excel in this gracious work also.” Talk about tough! It’s like when my mother says, “Now, son, because you’re a pastor, I’d like you to...,” You’ve been hit with such a big club you don’t even feel the blow.

Several years ago the seniors at St. Luke in Hartsville to Shiloh Fish Camp for an early supper. There were not many people at tables when we arrived, but soon they started in, and most were from Cheraw- my home town. I had to get up four times to greet acquaintances, and by the time I finished two older women in their eighties had given me the same assignment. “Oh Phil,” they started in, “did you hear that young Lewis has a brain tumor and is in Carolina’s Hospital? I think you ought to go see and pray for him; you know, his momma died of a brain tumor when he was only a baby.”

What could I say but, “Yes mam,” to them both? I chuckled as I went back to my food, then it hit me, and I was filled with gratitude and a few quickly-hidden tears. They treated me this way because this is how they treated my father. They knew him to be a caring man and transferred that to me. Like father, like son. It was big gift, the kind Paul wanted, and so I read verse 7 to you again, “Now as you excel in everything- in faith, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love- *see that you also excel in this gracious work also.*” When people appeal to the best of your character, it’s hard to say No! I went to see Lewis the next day. And while there, I found another blessing.

His brother was there, and as soon as I gave my name he said, “I remember the day your Dad came to see my in Florence after I had cancer surgery. He was not my doctor but came anyway.” He then in great detail he described everything that happened in their conversation from twenty years ago. I walked away with the thought: Love and care really do leave a permanent impact.

2013 can be a year of advance at Main Street, a year of spiritual growth and a harvest of people. On November 4th I want you to make a pledge to give generously, so that we can be at least as good as the Baptists, but even more that we can get ready for the people God is sending our way to be saved and healed and taught and set on the path of discipleship. One of the biggest communication gaps here at Main Street is that we do not share all the great things that are going on with the result that we do not have the momentum or confidence that should be ours. And if I have to lean on you a little and beat you up with the Bible like Paul did the Corinthians, so be it. It’s part of my job.

⁵ I Cor. 12-14.

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In fact, I'm looking for some help in this great work, someone like the rough-and-tumble man who was converted in a Methodist revival. Not too well educated, a little crude, but on fire, and every week he kept bugging his pastor for something to do. In desperation, the pastor gave him a list of ten people, "Charlie, these are the members who seldom attend; some are prominent men in the city. Contact them any way you can; see if you can get them to be more faithful. Use church stationery if you want, but get them back in church." Three weeks later the church received a letter from a physician that included a large check:

"Dear Pastor: Enclosed is a check to make up for my missed offerings. I'm sorry for missing worship so much, and I shall not miss again if it can be prevented. Sincerely, M.B Jones, M.D.

Then this P.S. 'Would you kindly tell your secretary there is only one 't' in *dirty* and no 'c' in *skunk*.'"

Who'd like to be my Charlie? Think we could raise a few bucks for the kingdom?

Heart To Heart (8:8-15)

One of the most useful techniques police use in interrogation is *good cop/ bad cop*. One the heavy, the other a friend. If in verses 1 through 7 Paul puts on the pressure, in verses 8 through 15 he takes it off; he moves from bad cop to good cop.

What Paul says here is not a command- though as an apostle he had the right to issue authoritative orders to the churches. It is rather his best pastoral inspiration and advice. He moves from confrontation to counselor in order to push a different set of buttons. He wants the best for them and tells them so in verse 8: "I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love is also genuine." Some in the church give because others give and they don't want to be caught short; others give out of love. They are two different buttons, and a clever pastor pushes both.

Paul was immensely skillful. He knew not only what to say but how to say it in a memorable way. John Kennedy said,

"Ask not what your country/
can do for you//
but what you can do/
for your country." ⁶

⁶ The technical name for this rhetorical form is a *chiasm*. The a-b//a'-b' form was common both in short and longer texts for both aesthetic and mnemonic reasons.

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This is the same pattern Paul uses in verse 9:

“For you know the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ,
that though he was *rich*,
yet for your sakes he became *poor* //
so that by his *poverty*/
you might become *rich*.”

Absolutely brilliant, Paul. The whole message in a short slogan made memorable. Jesus took on our lack that we might receive his surplus. He came into our mess to lift us up into his glory. Left the halls of heaven to come to earth, be born of a peasant woman, suffer the indignities of human life and finally die as a condemned criminal on a Roman instrument of execution. “Though he was *rich*, yet for your sakes he became *poor*.”

But why? Why give it all up? It’s in the second half, “so that by his *poverty* you might become *rich*.” Jesus became as we are so that we might become as he is. Without his becoming poor we would still be lost, alienated from God and in the death grip of the Evil One. Jesus is the model not only for our living but for our giving. He freely gave to enrich others. Those who know him take delight in the same path.

We all know the gap that stands between what we’d like to do in giving, what we honestly intend to do, and what we actually accomplish. Over time desire cools and the deed recedes to some far horizon. The *want-to* is there but the *follow-through* is missing. It is this credibility gap that Paul seeks to close in verses 10 through 12. “Just do it,” said Paul. “A year ago you were excited about the Jerusalem project. What happened? My best advice is to get back in touch with your original desire, then put it into action again. Remember the dream you had of being of aid to the Jerusalem saints.”

Spend some time dreaming about what God might want to do here at Main Street. This will help close the gap between what you’d like to give and what you will. Some people say, “Since I don’t have much, I can’t give much, and since what I give won’t matter much, I won’t give anything at all.” Thus they reason themselves into stinginess. Paul counters that excuse in verse 12, “For if the readiness is there (if your desire is to honor God from your heart), it is acceptable (to God) according to what a man has, not according to what he has not.” Giving is from what you have, not from what you don’t have. God values the gift not on the amount given but on the percentage and on the balance that remains.

At a church meeting a wealthy man rose to give testimony. “I’m a multi-millionaire,” he said, “and I attribute it all to the blessing of God. I remember the turning point. I had just earned my first dollar, and I went to church that night. The speaker was a missionary who

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told about her work. I knew that I had only a dollar and had to give it all or not at all. At that moment I decided to give. God blessed that decision, and today I'm rich man." There was an awed silence in the church as he left the pulpit and moved towards his seat.

When he sat down, the little old lady beside him spoke in a stage whisper, "I dare you to do it again."⁷ Don't you love it!

The core issue is a generous spirit, being the kind of person that God can tap when necessary. Someone listed seven levels of giving from the least to the most generous. See if you can locate yourself and make the decision today to take a step up:

1. Not giving at all (Every church has some users who coast on others).
2. Giving to the needy, but giving reluctantly (The Christmas guilt squeeze).
3. Giving with a good attitude, but not enough (Most church folk).
4. Giving enough, but only after being asked (Some church folk).
5. Giving enough without being asked (Few church folk).
6. Giving without the beneficiary knowing who is giving (Who knows?).
7. Giving one's life to eliminate the causes of need (Saints).⁸

Were you able to find yourself? Do you have faith to take the next step?

"Life is a team sport," wrote Ann Pearson, "sometimes you give and sometimes you get."⁹ That is the next point Paul makes in verse 13 through 15 as he corrects a possible misunderstanding. He's not asking the Corinthians to do more than they should, but he does know that- compared to Jerusalem- they are in a position of relative affluence and there may come a time in the future when they are on the receiving end as well.

It's simple in God's economy: When we have, we give; and when we are in need it comes back through all sorts of surprising channels. That is one way God knits his people

⁷ Hewett, 458.

⁸ Quoted in Donald Joiner and Norma Wimberly, *The Abington Guide to Funding Ministry, Volume 2* (Nashville, TN: Abington, 1996), 53.

⁹ Ibid., 109.

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together. We can give, and they can pray. It's the same deal Paul set up between Corinth and Jerusalem in verse 14: "while they *long for you* and *pray for you*, because of the surpassing grace of God in you."

There was a belief in the early church- which Paul apparently shared- that the prayers of the poor are especially beneficial.¹⁰ Poorer Christians need the gifts of richer Christians, and richer Christians need the prayers of poorer Christians. But if you value money over prayer- what you can see over what you can't- you will not be able to understand this equality and instead see it as a pious rip-off. It ain't so. When I go into the homes of the well-off, I pray for them; when I go into the homes of the poor; I ask them to pray for me.

Sowing And Reaping (9:6-9)

Jack Exum tells the story that he once visited a Christian farmer in Canada who operated a large farm of twenty-five hundred acres. When asked how he planted, the farmer reached into the bin and pulled out an ear of corn. He popped off kernels one by one as he walked along, demonstrating the process. Do you believe that? No, and neither did Jack Exum.

The farmer then took him over to an equipment shed to a distributor that was thirty feet wide. "We take that double tandem truck, fill it with certified seed, back it up to the distributor, open the slots, and pour in the seed." He then said, "If you're going to be cheap, *don't be cheap with the seed.*"¹¹

Paul knew this. "The point is this," he wrote in verse 6 of chapter 9, "he who sows sparingly will reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will reap bountifully." That is a common sense proverb Paul applies to giving. God's truth is seen in nature as well as in Scripture. First a comment on sowing, "Each one of you must do as he had made up his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver."¹² So if you're not smiling when the plate comes by, we need to talk! Why aren't you happy?

Two Sundays from now you will make up your mind. Spouses that both work should make independent decisions, then merge them. Children and youth should decide as well and not just piggyback on their parents' giving. Children should begin to give and to make a decision whenever money begins to cross their grubby little hands, money they earn as well as gifts that come at birthdays and other special events. Ten percent belong to God. Martin

¹⁰ Charles Talbert, *Reading Corinthians* (New York: Crossroads , 1987), 185 refers to *Hermas* "Parable" 2.5-7 and I Clement 38:2.

¹¹ Hewett, 463.

¹² 9:7b.

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Luther wrote, “God divided the hand into fingers so money could slip through.”¹³

I know families where one is a tither and the other not. I know families where one partner resents what the other gives to the church. And in those situations you have to ask a hard question, Which is more important, God’s approval or my spouse’s who is not yet spiritually mature or perhaps even a believer? Shall I let my faith and stewardship be held hostage to my spouse’s stinginess? To say Yes is the wrong answer.

Some people say you should give till it hurts. That is not Paul’s angle. He recommends giving till you get happy. The Greek word translated *cheerful* in verse 15 is *hilarotes* from which we get the word *hilarious*- which is at least three or four steps up the humor scale from cheerful. God loves it when we laugh when writing a check; God loves it when we act like his kids. God loves it when we trust his abundance. God loves a cheerful giver, and cheerful givers make a happy finance committee. Make us all happy this year!

Paul’s parallel comment on reaping is found in verse 8. There is probably not a more faith-filled verse in all the Bible. Paul can’t say enough things about God’s generosity to those who sow in abundance, “And God is able to provide you with *every blessing in abundance*, so that you may *always have enough of everything* and may provide *in abundance for every good work*.” Enough to live, enough to give; God’s fresh supply for every new challenge: this is abundance.

This is the principle of *flow-to* in order to *flow-through*. Flow-to without flow-through is stagnation. Life comes in but doesn’t go back out, but flow-to in order to flow-through is life. It’s the difference between the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea, one full of fish and fresh water, the other so full of salt you cannot sink and nothing survives there but bacteria. Sea of Galilee people are *flow-though*; Dead Sea people have no outlet.

Some of you are really suspicious of this; I see it on your faces. You are hardening your hearts against the truth of the Word of God that can set you free. You are full of fear that if you give ten percent- or take a firm step in that direction, you will come up short and do without, or that someone at the church will misspend your precious money. It ain’t so. It’s unbelief talking. “If you’re going to be cheap,” the man said, “don’t be cheap with the seed.” The man or woman who sows bountifully, who gives cheerfully, who trusts God for flow-to and flow-through will be like the righteous one celebrated in Psalm 112:9, “They scatter abroad, they give to the poor, their righteousness endures for ever.”

Deep down inside, don’t you want to be a good man or woman? One who knows and

¹³ Ibid., 370.

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walks with God? One to whom God can entrust more than survival rations? Wouldn't you like for some pastor to take Psalm 112:9 as the text for your funeral sermon? "They scatter abroad, they give to the poor, their righteousness endures for ever." November 4th is your chance to start down that path.

In an article in *Fortune* magazine, Lee Iacocca once made these sobering remarks:

"What do guys like me do who've got the world by the string? I got some notoriety... and made some money in the car business.... Now that chapter has closed, and I don't think much about cars anymore. You can plan everything in life, and then the roof caves in because you haven't done enough thinking about *who you are* and *what to do with the rest of your life*."¹⁴

A Spiral Of Beneficiaries (9:10-15)

Paul closes with answers to two questions in verses 10 through 15, and the first is: Who benefits from all this? The simplest answer is *everyone*. The Macedonians benefit by being the pace-setters; the Corinthians benefit by taking a step up from flints to sponges; the church in Jerusalem benefits by having Gentile Christians be the answer to their prayers; even God benefits because of the increase of thanksgiving and gratitude. It's win-win all around.

At the center of this little thought unit of six verses in verse 12 is an important phrase, "for the rendering of this service not only supplies the *wants of the saints*...." Not *wants* in the sense of frivolous desire but *wants* in the sense of real need. As I see it, the church has three primary responsibilities: 1) worship the Triune God in Word and Sacrament and in the power of the Spirit, 2) evangelize the lost around the corner and around the world by telling the full Jesus story, and 3) care for the needs of the saints.

If someone in this church has lost their job and can't make the house payment, it's our responsibility. If there's violence or alcoholism or adultery in a home, it's our responsibility to intervene, not to gossip. When a single parent is worn to an absolute frazzle, it's our responsibility to help. When a member of this church needs medical care for which they cannot pay, it's our responsibility to help. Families are to help first, but when no help is there, the church must step in. Christians are to help one another, and in this case it was from Greece to Jerusalem, across great geographic, racial, and language barriers. It starts close to home, but it can't stop there.

The second question is: Where did it all start? When Paul reflects on the spiral of

¹⁴ "To Illustrate: Purpose," *Leadership*, Winter 1997, 75.

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blessing for all concerned, it leads him right back to Jesus Christ, verse 15: “Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!” So after Paul has pushed every button at his disposal, and after I have pushed every button allowed by Paul, it comes down to this. What you pledge and give, not the amount but the percentage, not what you give but the balance that remains, and whether or not it starts a spiral of joy and praise, is an index of your relationship to Jesus Christ and the gratitude you feel. I don’t normally do this, but today I end with a poem:

“Go give to the needy sweet charity’s bread.
For giving is living,” the angel said.
“And must I be giving again and again?”
My peevish, petulant answer ran.
“O no,” said the angel, piercing me through,
“Just give till the Master stops giving to you.”¹⁵

Two weeks from today is Celebration Sunday. The free catered lunch is a hook to get you here so you don’t miss out on the opportunity. We want you to know the blessing of giving to God’s work through this church. It feels good for Lori and I to be beyond the tithe for the last several years. How about you? Will you join me in giving your church a new future? Will you add generosity and hope to your faith?

Phil Thrailkill
Main Street UMC
October 14, 2012

STUDY AND APPLICATION QUESTIONS

2 Corinthians 8:1-7

1. What is inherently motivating about competition? Why does Paul use it without apology?
2. Why is giving people motivating examples such a wise thing to do?
3. Read vv.3-5 aloud. Why are spiritual gifts- good as they are- not enough? Why are giving ourselves first to God and then to one another prior to making a gift to those who are far away?

2 Corinthians 8:8-15

4. Why is Paul so careful in his use of authority in this paragraph? Notice the parallel phrases, “I say this not as a command...,” “And in this matter I give you my advice...,” “I do not mean....” Why is it important for pastoral and lay leaders do exemplify both clarity and tact?
5. Mediate for a minute on the mini-creed of v.9. Ask, How has Christ enriched me?

¹⁵ Hewett, 460.

2 Corinthians 8:1-15, 9:6-15 14

6. Spiritual good calls for a material response. Is this a fair summary of vv.13-15.

2 Corinthians 9:6-9

- 7 Summarize in your own words the teaching of vv.6-9. Does God give to givers?
8. How is verse 8 a blank check for the faithful?
9. Why does Paul ground his nugget of teaching in a quote from Psalm 112:9?

2 Corinthians 9:10-15

10. Paul lays out the cycle of giving in vv.10-15. Try to identify the components.
11. How does giving contribute to worship?
12. If someone gives with a reluctant spirit, what does it say about how their view *the gospel of Christ* (v.13)?
13. What would it mean to live with a mindset and habit of hilarious generosity?

PRAYER OF CONFESSION FROM THE SUNDAY SERVICE

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Let us pray:

**Almighty and living God, our heavenly Father,
you are the true one, the one who makes and keeps all your vows.
You have promised never to leave or forsake us.
You have promised to hear us when we pray and to respond for our good.
But we, because of our sin and rebellion, are promise breakers.
We sin when we exaggerate and promise what we cannot deliver.
We sin when we deceive to avoid accountability.
We break trust when we do not keep our common vows of baptism.
Forgive, heal, and restore us,
that we may be a people of deep character who gladly follow Jesus Christ.
By your Holy Spirit,
give us the grace and courage to be promise keepers,
that this cynical and lost world may see in us a people who know their God.
Amen. (Silence is kept for confession of sin. Pardon is announced.)**
