

Study 10: Chapter 9

Introduction

Paul now gives some specific instructions concerning the collection. Paul is very skilfully motivating the Corinthians into action over the matter of the collection. He does not *command* them, but rather provides an irrefutable reason for action.

Body of the Study

The problem in Corinth

The Corinthian's obligation

The cheerful giver

Illustration from the Psalms

Final application

Homework and preparation for next week:

- *What ways can you “give” to the Lord, besides the physical act of giving money to the contribution? Make a list, and think about how you can do more for the Lord.*
- *In these two chapters (8 & 9) and (particularly) 1:16:1-3 we have a New Testament pattern for christians giving and the church collecting money. What is the pattern? Make a list in point form.*
- Read the notes as a review of the study.
- Read chapter 10 in preparation for the next study.

Notes for study 10: Chapter 9

Introduction

Paul now gives some specific instructions concerning the collection. Paul is very skilfully motivating the Corinthians into action over the matter of the collection. He does not *command* them, but rather provides an irrefutable reason for action.

Body of the Study

The problem in Corinth

The Corinthians had made a promise a year ago for the collection. As a result, Paul had “...boasted about [them] to the Macedonians...” (2:9:2) with the result that the Macedonians had been “...stirred up...” into action (2:9:2).

But there’s a problem. Whilst the Corinthians had made a *promise* a year earlier, they had not delivered on that promise. Titus (apparently) had been sent to gather the collection, and had come back empty handed. [Alternately, the collection was to be ready when Paul came (1:16:2-3), and Titus, whilst not having come to collect it, simply reported back to Paul that it was not ready].

So, what’s Paul to do? The situation presents a double embarrassment. Paul had been boasting about the Corinthians and how they had promised to give liberally. As a result, the Macedonians had given “...beyond their means...” (2:82). But, now the chips are down. What *happens* “...if some Macedonians come with [Paul]...”? (2:9:4) and then find that the collection was not ready as Paul had said? Both the Corinthians **AND** Paul would be severely embarrassed by the circumstances.

To act prudently, Paul thought it would be a *good idea* to make sure that things were right before he came, and so sent Titus back with the two other representatives.

The Corinthian’s obligation

As a result of Paul’s urging (2:9:5), instruction (1:16:1), and embarrassment (2:9:4), the Corinthians may well have felt that they were required to give as a matter of *obligation*. However Paul reminds and instructs them that this is not the case, and nothing could be further from the truth.

He has already instructed them as to the nature of giving (2:8:13-15), and reminds them again that it is not “...a matter of *grudging obligation*, but rather a matter of *generosity*...” (2:9:5).

Our gifts to God are a reflection of our relationship with Him, and His gift to us (2:8:9). We need to “...purpose in our heart...” how we give (2:9:7), and give *cheerfully and willingly*.

Paul reminds them of the fact (as in all things, not just giving) that “...if we sow sparingly, that we shall also reap sparingly, but if we sow bountifully we shall also reap bountifully...” (2:9:6). We cannot expect to be bountifully rewarded with God’s blessings if we only give sparingly of the things that He has given to us. Such instruction is not limited to giving financially – although that is the specific application that Paul is making here – but we can also give of our time to the Lord, and give to Him in praying for others, or sharing hospitality.

From the very beginning of the church in Jerusalem, the Christians faced poverty, which was countered by a spirit of abundant giving. The first situation was countered by *selling of land and houses* (Acts 4:34). However this situation was not sustainable. The Christians were also ostracised by their Jewish brethren, so the need continued. Paul on numerous occasions took money to help the poor in Jerusalem, and was particularly forward in remembering them and helping them whenever he could (Gal 2:10).

The cheerful giver

God expects us to give cheerfully. We must not do it out of a sense of *obligation* – because *we have to* – or because we think that is *what is expected*. How much we give is up to us. The only thing that God expects is that we will do it *freely* and *cheerfully*. We need to remember that we came into this world with nothing, and when we leave, we will take nothing out of it (except, hopefully, our salvation, which is the most precious and important thing that we can ever have). Everything that we have in this world is only because God allows us to have it. When we give a gift back to God, we are only giving back the things that He has already given to us! Everything that we “possess” already belongs to Him anyway. Our possessions are not ours at all – they are just borrowed for a while.

When we have this perspective of our possessions, it is not hard to realise how God blesses us and looks after us. Jesus tells us, that God feeds the sparrows, and we are much more important than they are (Mt 6:25-26). The greatest example of a person who gave cheerfully was the widow in the Temple (Mk 12:41-44).

Paul exhorts us that generous giving is not a hazard! For, “...*God is able to make all grace abound to you...that you might have all sufficiency...an abundance to every good work...*” (2:9:8). The Macedonians illustrated the point very clearly, and God is able to do the same for the Corinthians (and for us) as he did for the Macedonians.

Illustration from the Psalms

The quotation from Psalm 112:9 is of a righteous man who expresses his desire to serve God. He will find the way and the means to give back to God, and will ensure that poor are taken care of. In return, God will take care of him, so that “...*his righteousness remains for ever...*” (2:9:9; Ps 112:9) and he will therefore have an eternal reward.

Paul has already used the example of the sower (he who sows sparingly / plentifully). He now asks the question: *Where does the seed come from? and where do we get the bread for our food?* No matter how hard we try, we can’t “create” food. We can only take and eat that which God has provided – even though we may have had to work hard with our hands to grow and process it.

If we trust in God, then He will reward us, and make sure that we have everything that we need. We need to learn to trust God, and not rely on what we have. The natural consequences are that we will give to the aid of the needy, even when it *costs us*. Our trust must be in Him, not in our riches!

Final application

In verses 11-15, Paul makes some final application of what he has been saying over the last two chapters. His line of argument is as follows:

- You are enriched in everything (2:9:11)
- We give thanks to God for your blessings (2:9:11)
- You have a double blessing – helping the needs of the saints (the poor), and also blessings from God (2:9:12)
- Others glorify God, because of your gift (2:9:13)
- And they also pray for and long for you (2:9:14)
- They can see God’s grace working in you (2:9:14)
- God be thanked for such a gift! (2:9:15)

We can make great application of the things that Paul has described here for the Corinthians.