
Stewardship: Concerning the Collection for the Saints

2 Corinthians 9:6-9

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Introduction I will outline a brief summary of the historical context of my primary text; 2 Corinthians 9:6-9, by simply reviewing and summarizing some of the highlights of what Paul refers to as “the Collection of the Saints”.

1 Corinthians 16:2; “On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come.”

Paul was instructing everyone in the church to set aside a sum of money regularly based on each person’s God-gifted wealth, so the church would have resources available to give to other Christians who were in financial need.

Our Biblical Context

Paul’s Commendation to the Corinthian Church

The Macedonian Church Illustrates Sacrificial Giving

We begin to pick this issue back up in the beginning of chapter 8. In 2 Corinthians 8:1-7; Paul uses the example of the Macedonia Church, to encourage generous giving. The Macedonian Church was living in severe poverty, yet they begged Paul to allow them to take part in the relief of the Believers in Jerusalem, and they desired such sacrifice with abundant joy, even giving beyond their means. Paul clearly wanted to motivate the Corinthians to finish the task they had eagerly desired one year earlier.

The Grace of Christ is the Supreme Example of Giving

The grace of Christ is the supreme example of giving in **2 Corinthians 8:8-9**; though he was rich in every way (like the Corinthian Church, and like us today) Jesus made himself poor for our salvation, thus proving his love for God and us, (for the love and delight of God is to be the motivating factor in our giving)

Paul’s Challenge to the Corinthian Church

Finish the Work of Love for Fairness and Equality

In 2 Corinthians 8:10-15; Paul reaches back to Exodus 16:18 and is challenging the Corinthian Church to complete their desired task of setting aside the sum of money they desired to give. Paul encourages the Corinthians through the Old Testament to give out of the riches that they had been given, (like Christ’s example), not out of what they did not have. In addition, they are to give out of love, for the purpose of fairness and equality of all the saints, founded in love. Paul’s intent was to motivate the Corinthians to provide for

others through regular systematic savings. Therefore, they were raising others up through those God-given resources.

Handling Money with Honor

Paul took great care and planning in the accumulation and transportation of the collection to insure that he and the church were viewed in an honorable light, so that no one could use the collection to slander him or the church.

Paul's Concern to the Corinthian Church

Paul's Humiliation - 2 Corinthians 9:1-5; Based on the early zeal of the Corinthians in their desire to give, (and now a possible cooling of desire, and/or a lack of planning), Paul was concerned that both he and they would be humiliated if they did not carry through with their desire to give abundantly to the Jerusalem Church.

Our Present Context:

In this Stewardship Series, we have learned a lot about our responsibility in handling our resources, and the Elders wisely visit this issue each year. This area of teaching has greatly influenced me over the years. I learned from my parents at a young age the importance of tithing and giving as a way of life. However, it was not until I decided to make a vocational change into my current business, that I really sought God's word as it relates to finance and stewardship, and embraced Biblical stewardship as a way of life.

As I have briefly reviewed the Biblical context of this situation in Corinth, I want to illustrate some current world context that will help place you and myself in this letter.

Economic Statistics: Our Comparable Wealth

As you can observe by taking a minute to look at this chart, 2004 economic data showed that Americans were the fourth wealthiest people per capita in the world, with an average salary of \$41,400. They were also third in the world as far as actual purchasing power. Now I am sure this is not earth-shattering news to anyone here. However, I do want to provide a cultural context to help us apply this lesson. Look at Liberia and Burundi who have the lowest measurable annual income of \$90 and \$110.

Upper middle class annual income from all categories averages \$4,770, with those living in the least developed countries by UN classification earning only \$340 annually. In the United States, if someone is living only on Social Security, that person will typically receive \$954 monthly or \$11,458 annually. Now all of this information is in no way a criticism of the United States, wealth, or capitalism, because I certainly am a product of and enjoy great wealth by the world's standard. Just use this information to try to place yourself in the context of this letter that Paul is writing to the Corinthians.

Similarly, *Paul never criticizes the Corinthians for their wealth and giftedness*, but rather explains that with greater wealth and giftedness there is greater responsibility.

A Closer Look at Immediate Context

Open your Bibles to 2 Corinthians 9:1-5

Now it is superfluous for me to write to you about the ministry for the saints, ² for I know your readiness, of which I boast about you to the people of Macedonia, saying that Achaia has been ready since last year. And your zeal has stirred up most of them. ³ But I am sending the brothers so that our boasting about you may not prove vain in this matter, so that you may be ready, as I said you would be. ⁴ Otherwise, if some Macedonians come with me and find that you are not ready, we would be humiliated—to say nothing of you—for being so confident. ⁵ So I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to go on ahead to you and arrange in advance for the gift you have promised, so that it may be ready as a willing gift, not as an exaction. [ESV]

Original Desires to Give

Although the thread regarding the “Collection for the Saints” begins in Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians, we get a good look at the actual problem in this paragraph. You can see that the Corinthians have been aware of this collection for a year, and they were ready and willing, at the time. They were so willing and enthusiastic that their zeal caused much desire and inspiration among the Churches in Macedonia for participating in the relief of the Saints.

A Lack of Follow-Through and Paul’s Humiliation

Now, because of a lack of desire and/or failure to plan, Paul is concerned that both he and they are going to be humiliated. Their previous boasting and willingness about what they were going to give has dissipated and, now that the time is nearing for the money to be collected, he is concerned they are not going to be ready.

Planned, Purposeful Giving

Let us look at 2 Corinthians 9:6-9;

The point is this: “whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. ⁷ Each one must give as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. ⁸ And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work. ⁹ As it is written, He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever.”

God loves a joyful, cheerful giver. God alone is able to provide every blessing in abundance for performing the good work of giving. Paul is instructing that this is every believer’s duty.

Let us look more closely at the principles of these 4 verses.

The Principle Shaping Giving – Our Sowing and Reaping: (v.6)

“whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully”

This principle weaves itself throughout Scripture (Prov. 11:24, 25; 22:9; Gal. 6:7, 9; (Mal. 3:10; Luke 6:38)). We cannot out give God, nevertheless, we will harvest a fruit of righteousness and blessing commensurate of our willingness to give to others. We will receive a harvest of righteousness and enrichment in every way, if we give bountifully from the seed (riches) that we are given. We are caretakers of God’s supply.

The Purpose Launching Giving – Our Determining and Deciding: (v.7)

“Each one must give as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver”

We are to give based on our God-sought, grace-saturated desires. We cannot give sufficiently without God’s enabling grace; God cares about our heart and attitude in the giving, which is to be motivated by love. Our motivation in giving is because we love God first and then our neighbor. Is true worshipful love bitter or begrudging? Do we grumble in our heart when we give? Towards whom is our hardness of heart pointed if we unwillingly give. We need to seek God’s grace in giving to be able to love God and neighbor through joyful, cheerful giving, that we may experience a bountiful harvest of righteousness.

We should give for God’s pleasure.

When giving gets hard and the joy and cheerfulness of giving diminishes, we need to repent and seek the Lord’s forgiveness, while continuing to fulfill our good works. We cannot stop giving simply because our emotions do not line up with our works.

The Provision Supplying Giving – God’s Providing and Empowering: (v. 8)

“And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work”

The desire and ability to give joyfully is fully dependent on God, who, through our act of giving, provides us with every blessing in abundance.

God is fully able to provide us, through our giving, with full blessing and the ability to excel in every good work (which as far as giving is concerned can mean even more giving)

(Personal Giving Testimony of Dependence on God)

Psalm 112; The Lord’s people in character and conduct

Blessed is the man who fears the LORD, delights in His commandments, is generous, merciful and righteous, for the LORD will provide for the righteous, protect him, and provide abundant blessings and honor. It is important to be able to

recognize the characteristics of the righteous as it relates to our resources. We are to be gracious, generous and one who lends and gives freely and fairly, particularly to the poor or those in need. Let us read this passage together:

Praise the LORD! Blessed is the man who fears the LORD, who greatly delights in his commandments! His offspring will be mighty in the land; the generation of the upright will be blessed. Wealth and riches are in his house, and his righteousness endures forever. Light dawns in the darkness for the upright; he is gracious, merciful, and righteous. It is well with the man who deals generously and lends; who conducts his affairs with justice. For the righteous will never be moved; he will be remembered forever. He is not afraid of bad news; his heart is firm, trusting in the LORD. His heart is steady; he will not be afraid, until he looks in triumph on his adversaries. He has distributed freely; he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever; his horn is exalted in honor. The wicked man sees it and is angry; he gnashes his teeth and melts away; the desire of the wicked will perish!

Paul uses this Psalm to illustrate the full character of the Believer. He is reminding the Corinthians of the fullness of God's provision and the duty of their character in generosity and giving.

Practical Instructions for Planned, Purposeful, Giving

Consider the struggles and concerns that affected the Corinthians' lack of follow-through on their plan to give. Perhaps these issues are a clear reflection of our own attitudes in this very common struggle with desire and duty. We can see the needs in the Church, and we know there are many in poverty and under persecution today, but we struggle when it comes to putting a good plan together that will allow sufficient giving. On the other hand, perhaps we want to give, but consequences from past (or present) sin constrain and restrict what we know is our Biblical duty. Perhaps we do not want to be humiliated due to difficult financial situations, so unlike the Corinthians who initially were very confident of what they could give, we are afraid to give anything.

Seek Help with Your Finances

Do not be afraid to get help with your finances. Do not allow your lack of training in finance, past sin with money, or reaping consequences for past sin through finances hold you back. With some simple tools and instruction, you can take control of your planning and increase your ability to give. Talk to **your Elder** initially to see if they can help you get started, or they might have you speak to a number of persons in the Church who work with finances and can provide wisdom and counsel.

The Initial Step in Planning to Give and Organizing Your Finances

The first step in organizing your personal finances is to know where your finances are today. This begins with balancing your checkbook, and being able to continue to do so regularly. I find that half the people I meet with do not balance their checkbooks. By definition, this is simply reconciling your checks and debts with what you have available, confirming that you have not spent more than you have available to spend.

Develop a Spending History

The next step is to determine where you currently and/or historically spend your money. There are a number of ways to do this. You can go back through your checkbook and figure out where you have spent your money. I suggest looking at expenses over a minimum period of one month, and ideally as far back as you can. The other way is to create a notebook that you have easy access to and in which you write down all of your on-going expenses over the next month or longer. I suggest organizing your categories in the following way (Crown Ministries):

Budget Categories:

Income

Taxes

Tithe (giving)

Savings

Housing

Auto

Food

Insurance

Debt

Clothes

Medical

Miscellaneous

Investments

School/child care

Entertainment/recreation

I have also included a breakdown of expenses within each category to help with further organization

Another useful tool that I have not mentioned yet is a computer. Whereas I like to use this material in a spreadsheet, my wife prefers a printed copy. There are also a number of software programs available for money management as well. These are easy to use and interface with the internet to help track expenses, create budgets, and reconcile bank ledgers. I personally use a computer program to help me track and reconcile my banking, and I use spreadsheets to manage my spending plan.

Develop a Spending Plan (Budget)

Based on your past and current expenses, the next step is to develop a spending plan based on the expenses that you have tracked and categorized. The plan needs can be developed based on any reasonable time frame, but an annual plan is typical. I find implementing a plan based on a 12 month, or 24-26 pay time period works best.

Now, many clients I work with consider the idea of budgeting to be as fun as a trip to the dentist or doctor, but all you are really doing is setting up a spending plan. You can look all through Proverbs and see the wisdom of planning, particularly when it comes to money.

Determine Your Planned Giving

To begin to make it your purpose and plan to give, you need to determine what amount you want to give on a regular systematic basis.

Paul exhorted in 1 Corinthians 16:1, 2 that everyone is to give something, and that something should be based on what we have – not on what we lack. Far too often, we approach our giving as what I have to give or what should I give rather than “how have I been blessed, and how can I bless others through my giving.”

Remember that our blessings sprout and grow from the seed we sow.

After we have determined how much to give, determine to pay God first! This is vital. Far too often, we pay God back based on what we have left over. We merely need to view the Old Testament tithe and offerings to recognize that God expected the first and the best...not leftovers.

One of the early principles I learned from my father and then saw lived out in front of clients, was that “the more you make, the more you spend”. Rarely do we determine to give more out of our increase, but instead focus on how much more we can spend on ourselves.

After we decide to pay God first and we determine the amount we will give, next we compare our current spending plan with an “ideal’ budget. Using allocation percentages developed by Crown Ministries is very helpful in this step. Once you have determined changes to your current spending and have developed a spending plan, I suggest using some type of envelope system to assign money to each category as you have determined, and manage the system through actual cash in envelopes, spreadsheets, or a software program specifically made to manage money with this system.

Setting up a budget will allow you to purpose and plan and actualize management of your resources thus enabling you to give to those in need. I also think it is important to get into the habit of setting aside short-term savings, even if you are trying to get out of debt. This will allow you to use your emergency savings, instead of credit cards or other debt sources, and will allow you to continue giving even when unexpected expenses arise.

I have included an example of a budget using most of the categories listed. You should plan to spend money in every category, such as entertainment, clothes, etc...because it is unrealistic to think you can ignore certain aspects of daily living. When you are in debt, the tendency is to go down slope in the opposite direction in a reaction to past consequences of poor, unwise spending.

Last Step: Accountability

One last step that I think is important is accountability. If you are married, your spouse is the primary means of accountability in your planning and spending, and even single persons should seek input from a trusted family member or Flock/Church member. This step can be used to not only reveal unbalanced spending, but also allow loving, concerned questions to arise that can reveal heart issues we need to address concerning our resources.

In Mere Christianity, C.S. Lewis beautifully illustrates the heart of giving:

Conclusion:

“...I do not believe one can settle how much we ought to give. I am afraid the only safe rule is to give more than we can spare. In other words, if our expenditure on comforts, luxuries, amusements, etc., is up to the standard common among those with the same income as our own, we are probably giving away too little. If our charities do not at all hamper us, I should say they are too small. There should be things we should like to do and cannot do because our charitable expenditure excludes them.” Lewis goes on to say that our giving may even put us in a crippling or endangering of our own financial position.

Read 2 Corinthians 9:10-15

¹⁰ He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. ¹¹ You will be enriched in every way for all your generosity, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. ¹² For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints, but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God. ¹³ By their approval of this service, they will glorify God because of your submission flowing from your confession of the gospel of Christ, and the generosity 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 upon you. ¹⁵ Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift! [ESV]

Ultimately, God provides the resources and increases the harvest of righteousness to the giver. By giving joyfully, God is glorified and thanked for His unsurpassing grace. However, it is our duty to give, to plan, and to purpose through wise management the practical out flowing of God’s love and grace through His resources.