

GOD'S MONEY 2 CORINTHIANS 8:10-9:15

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In this section of 2 Corinthians, Paul wanted the contribution for the Christians in Jerusalem to be generous, and for its collection to go smoothly. In order to ensure these things, he encouraged the Corinthians to cooperate with his emissaries, and to give liberally.

STRONG ADVICE (8:10-15)

Although Paul did not command the Corinthians to contribute to Jerusalem, he strongly advised it (8:8) because it was **best for them in this matter** (8:10). His motivation was to see God's blessing come upon the Corinthians, and he knew that a generous contribution to Jerusalem would bring such blessings.

8:8-10. Paul used great wisdom as he dealt with this subject. He began with a strong commendation. **Last year**, when the matter of contributions for Jerusalem came to their attention (see 1 Cor. 16:1-4), the Corinthian Christians **were the first**, or among the first, to begin preparations and **expressed the desire to do so**. At first, the Corinthians were very eager to contribute to the Jerusalem church. This reaction demonstrated their commitment and desire to aid the believers suffering in Jerusalem.

8:11. The sequence of events lying behind this passage needs to be understood. After first informing the Corinthians of the need for contributions, Paul told them that he would travel from Ephesus to Macedonia and then return to Corinth (1 Cor. 16:1-8). After a delay, Paul briefly visited Corinth and sent a harsh letter to them through Titus (2 Cor. 2:1-4). Later Titus met Paul in Macedonia with reports on the conditions at Corinth (2:13; 7:5-7). At first, the Corinthians were eager to contribute to the needs of Jerusalem believers, but troubles in the church had extinguished their eagerness. At this point, Paul encouraged them to complete their commitment. Their **willingness to do it** needed to be **matched by their completion of it**.

As important as it was for the Corinthians to be initially willing to give, it was not enough. Recognizing the need to contribute and responding with commitments is relatively easy. The true test (8:8) is actually handing over the money. So, Paul encouraged the Corinthians to fulfill their commitments.

Even so, Paul had no particular amount in mind. He left it up to the Corinthians to give **according to their means**. Many interpreters incorrectly assume that these words

reject the Old Testament practice of tithing (Lev. 27:30; Num. 18:21-28; Deut. 12:6; 14:22-29; Mal. 3:8-10), but this passage is not about money given to support the church. Rather, it is about charity for the poor above and beyond support for the church (1 Cor. 16:2; compare Lev. 19:9-10; 23:22; Deut. 10:17-19; Matt. 23:23; Luke 11:42). Moreover, even Old Testament believers gave according to their means in that the same percentage from the rich amounted to more than from the poor.

8:12. Paul justified (**for**) proportional giving by appealing to a general principle: a **gift is acceptable** so long as it is **according to what one has**. Of course, Paul also accepted sacrificial giving; he praised the Macedonians for giving beyond their means (8:3). Yet, he felt free only to persuade the Corinthians give as their means allowed. He fixed no particular amount, but left those matters to their consciences.

8:13. Paul's overarching goal justified the principle of giving according to means. He did not desire that the Corinthians be **hard pressed** while the church in Jerusalem was **relieved**. His goal was **that there might be equality**.

Care must be taken not to over-read these words. The New Testament never indicates a goal of ridding the church of all economic inequalities. Instead, the consistent goal of giving in the New Testament church was to insure that the basic needs of the poor within it were met. Even the very early practice of holding all in common (Acts 2:32,34,44-45) was designed to insure in troubled times that basic needs were met. Wealthy Christians are warned against the dangers of riches (Matt. 6:19-21; 19:23-24; Mark 10:25; Luke 12:20-21; 18:25; Jam. 1:10-11; 2:1-17) and told to be generous (Rom. 12:8; 1 Tim. 6:17-19), but not to seek utter economic equality. Just as Moses instructed Israel to care for the poor of the nation (Exod. 22:25-27; Lev. 19:9-10; 23:22; 25:35-41; Deut. 10:17-19; 15:7-11; 24:12-15), so the church is to care for its poor through generous contributions.

8:14-15. At least two reasons undergirded Paul's advice. First, he knew that economic situations change. **At the present time** the Corinthians were in a position to help others, but the day might come when the situation was reversed, and they would have to rely on the generosity of the church in Jerusalem.

Second, Paul appealed to a theological principle based on God's action in Israel's exodus from Egypt. The apostle referred the Corinthians to the Septuagint translation of Exodus 16:18 which indicated that no one in Israel **had too much** or **too little**. During Israel's wilderness wanderings God miraculously supplied each Israelite family according to their needs. Even though some **gathered much**, it did not result in an overabundance. Although others **gathered little**, it did not result in serious deprivation. This miraculous provision indicated God's desire to meet the needs of all of his people (compare Matt. 6:25-26,31-33).

It would have been easy for the Corinthians to think otherwise. They could have reasoned that if God had not wanted the church in Jerusalem to suffer, then he would

have not permitted it. But Paul resisted this fatalistic outlook. God continued to desire that the essential needs of all of his people be met. Even so, God was not accomplishing his desire through miraculous distribution as in the Exodus. Rather, he called on the church to care for his people.

SAFEGUARDS AGAINST MISHANDLING (8:16-24)

Realizing how easily money can be mishandled and how frequently distrust emerges over monetary matters, Paul explained how he intended to collect contributions from the church. His description assured the Corinthians that he was not seeking his own gain, and that he would be very careful with the funds.

8:16-17. In the first place Paul mentioned that **Titus** was returning. From previous comments it would appear that the Corinthian church had a positive relationship with Titus. They received him well and honored him as a servant of Paul (7:6-7,13-15). So, Paul expressed thanks **to God** for putting affection for the Corinthians **into the heart of Titus** as he in Paul's. Titus shared Paul's parental love for the church, and wanted nothing but the well-being of the believers there. Paul explained (**for**) himself by saying that Titus did more than respond to the apostle's **appeal**. He was **coming ... with much enthusiasm and on his own initiative**. He had so much affection for the church in Corinth that he voluntarily made the arduous journey to see them again. Paul's goal was not only to commend Titus for his enthusiastic service, but also to refresh the Corinthians in their love and trust of Titus.

8:18. In the second place, Paul mentioned that the party collecting contributions would include **the brother who is praised by all the churches**. It is uncertain who this brother was. A number of suggestions have been made through the centuries:

Apollos (1 Cor. 1:12; 3:4-9,22; 4:6; 16:12; Tit. 3:1)

Aristarchus (Acts 19:29; 20:4; 27:2; Col. 4:10; Philem. 24)

Barnabas (Acts 9:27; 11:22-26; 12:25; 13:1-2,42-50; 14:11-20; 15:1-35; 1 Cor. 9:6; Gal. 2:1,9)

Luke (Acts 16:10-13,16; 20:6-8,13-15; 21:1-17; 27:1-8,15-18,27,29; 28:1,10-16; Col. 4:14; 2 Tim. 4:11; Philem. 1:24)

Mark (Acts 13:13; 15:37,39)

Silas (Acts 15:22,25-27,40-41; 16:19,25,29; 17:4,10; 18:5; 2 Cor. 1:19; 1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1)

Timothy (Acts 16:1-3; 18:5; 20:4; Rom. 16:21; 1 Cor. 4:17; 16:10; 2 Cor 1:1,19; Phil.

1:1; 2:19; Col. 1:1; 1 Thess. 1:1; 3:2,6; 2 Thess. 1:1; 1 Tim. 1:1-2,18; 6:20; 2 Tim. 1:2; Philem. 1:1)

Some of these candidates are more likely than others, but certain identification is not possible. Apparently, Paul believed that his identity would be clear enough from his reputation **for his service to the gospel**. He reminded the Corinthians of this reputation to instill confidence in this brother as a trustworthy courier.

8:19. If his reputation was not enough, Paul also noted that this unnamed person **was chosen by the churches to accompany** Paul and his company as they collected contributions. It is not clear which churches were in view here. In all likelihood, Paul had in mind wide support for the man as indicated by “all the churches” in 8:18. The term **chosen** (*charotoneo*) probably connotes choice by an official vote or show of hands.

When Paul touched on the fact that this brother was to accompany “**us**” (Paul and his company) with **the offering**, he also turned to his own reliability. At first, he simply mentioned that they would **administer** the offering **in order to honor the Lord himself**, not for self-aggrandizement or for their own support. They sought to **honor the Lord** whose own actions demonstrated his desire to see the poor relieved (see 8:15). Moreover, Paul and his company went through all of this trouble **to show ... eagerness to help**. **Eagerness** or enthusiasm in the service of God is a repeated theme in this context. Paul spoke of himself as helping or assisting because he did not handle the money himself, but merely aided those who had been appointed (1 Cor. 16:3-4). Once again, he showed great wisdom and caution in this sensitive area.

8:20. Paul continued to explain his role as a helper or assistant by noting that he wanted **to avoid any criticism of the way they administer[ed] this liberal gift**. By surrounding himself with trustworthy brothers, Paul circumvented the accusation that he was stealing or misappropriating funds. He expressed his enthusiasm for this role by calling the contributions **liberal** (“generous” NASB, NRSV). He saw this task as important, and demonstrated this awareness by handling the funds with care.

8:21. Paul explained (**for**) what he meant by **avoid[ing] criticism**. He was **taking pains** or going through much trouble **to do what was right**. Unlike other contexts wherein he disdained the opinions of people who stood against the ways of God (e.g. 1 Cor. 4:3), here Paul affirmed an appropriate concern for the opinions of people as well as of God. Much like Jesus who **grew ... in favor with God and men** (Luke 2:52), Paul wanted to be clear of wrong doing not only **in the eyes of the Lord but also in the eyes of men**. In this expression Paul alluded to Proverbs 3:4 (compare Rom. 12:17). In matters of money Paul understood the wisdom of safeguards against criticism, either from God or from people.

8:22-23. Before drawing this matter to its conclusion, Paul rapidly mentioned several of those collecting funds to assure the Corinthian church. First was another

unnamed **brother**. It would appear that the Corinthians did not know this man. He had been in Paul's company for some time because he had **often proved to** Paul and his company **in many ways that he was zealous**. He had **great confidence** in the Corinthians, probably because of Paul's boasting (see 7:4,14; 8:24; 9:2-3).

Second, Paul mentioned **Titus** again (7:6,13,14; 8:6,16; 12:18). This time he praised Titus by calling him his **partner**, and **fellow worker**. These appellations were significant because the Corinthians viewed Paul so positively at his time (7:7).

Third, the apostle spoke of **our brothers**. It is not clear if he had in mind the brothers mentioned before or not (1:1; 2:13; 8:18; 8:22). Apparently, some unnamed Macedonians were possibly to accompany Paul to Corinth, but this group was to precede any Macedonian's arrival (9:4). Paul may have these men in mind here. In all events, these men were **representatives** (literally "apostles" or "ones sent") **of the churches**. Moreover, their Christian lives brought **honor**, not shame, to the name of **Christ**.

8:24. On the basis (**therefore**) of the safeguards Paul had in place for the collection, he called the Corinthians to respond appropriately. Instead of simply calling them to contribute, he spoke indirectly of the contributions as **proof of their love and the reason for his pride in them**. By this approach, he reminded the Corinthians of the effects of their giving. They would offer **proof** in this test (see 8:8) and would justify Paul's boasting in them (7:4,14; 8:24; 9:2-3). Moreover, **the churches** in Macedonia and Jerusalem would see these wonderful qualities of the Corinthian church and would be encouraged.

Throughout this material Paul was very practical and pastoral. Though guided by biblical principles (e.g. 8:15,21), he was deeply concerned with setting to rest any misgivings the Corinthians may have had. His special efforts in this direction provide guidance for all who handle money in ministry.

SERVICE TO THE CHURCHES (9:1-5)

Paul must have felt great tension as he wrote this portion of the epistle. On the one hand, his new confidence in the Corinthians led him to avoid commanding them to give contributions (8:8). On the other hand, his strong conviction that they should contribute led him to come very close to ordering it (8:24) under the rubric of advice (8:10). As a result, Paul couched his strong advice in words of confidence and positive motivations once again.

9:1. He began by admitting that there was **no need ... to write ... about this service to the saints**. The NIV omits the conjunction ("for" NASB; "now" NRSV) at the beginning of this verse. In effect, Paul supported his urging in 8:24 with his belief that the Corinthians already agreed with him. **This service** was none other than the service

of contributions to the Jerusalem believers. Paul did not call the Jerusalem Christians **saints** or “holy ones” because they were special or outstanding believers. Rather, he frequently used this expression synonymously with “believers” (e.g. Rom. 1:7; 8:27; 12:13; 15:25,26,31; 16:2,15; 1 Cor. 1:2; 6:1,2; 14:33; 16:1,15; 2 Cor. 1:1; 8:4; Phil. 1:1; 4:22). Nevertheless, the connotation of “holy ones” highlighted that the Christians in Jerusalem were worthy of special honor and attention from the Corinthians. They were not ordinary, but sanctified by Christ (Gal. 6:10).

9:2. To confirm (**for**) his stated conviction, Paul re-affirmed his belief that the Corinthians were **eager to help**. In fact, he had been **boasting** about them not simply to Titus (7:14), but also to the **Macedonians**. He had even told the Macedonians that **last year** they were **ready to give** (see 8:10). Paul’s boasting about the Corinthians had even **stirred most of** the Macedonians **to action**. Whereas Paul had previously used the example of the Macedonians to inspire the Corinthians to give; he had previously motivated the Macedonians through reports about the initial enthusiasm of the Corinthians (see 8:1-4).

9:3. Despite his confidence, Paul sent Titus and others ahead to collect funds (see 9:4) to insure that his **boasting ... should not prove hollow**. Although at the moment Paul was confident that the Corinthians would prove faithful **in this matter**, he also knew that their attitudes could change. In the least, Paul was afraid that they would not **be ready as** he had **said they would be** when he himself arrived. He sent messengers to make sure that the collection was completed before he arrived.

9:4. Paul explained (**for**) himself further by noting that **Macedonians** might arrive in Corinth with him. While he wrote this letter, Paul was unsure that they would actually go with him. As it turned out, Sopater from Berea, and Aristarchus and Secundus from Thessalonica did go with him (Acts 20:4). If the Corinthians were **unprepared** to make their contributions, then Paul would be **ashamed of having been so confident** in them, and the Corinthians themselves would also have cause for shame (**not to say anything about you**).

9:5. For this reason (**so**) Paul sent **the brothers to visit ... in advance** of his arrival. They would finalize the collection of the **generous gift ... promised** by the Corinthians. The initial enthusiasm at Corinth must have included the promise of a large sum (9:2), and Paul wanted to insure that this promise was kept. If the **brothers** gathered the contribution before Paul and any Macedonians arrived, then the contribution would be received as a genuinely **generous gift** (“as a voluntary gift” NRSV). If not, it might appear to be **begudgingly given** in response to pressure from Paul (“extortion” NRSV).

Paul showed practical concern for the encouragement of the church both in Corinth and Macedonia. Although he was very confident of the Corinthians’ good intentions at that time, he was not naïve. He took the practical precaution of sending messengers ahead to insure that no one would miss the opportunity for a great blessing.

BELIEVERS BENEFIT FROM GENEROSITY (9:6-11)

In the last verse of the preceding section Paul spoke twice of the Corinthian contribution as a **generous gift** (9:5). This motif led the apostle to motivate his readers further by pointing to the benefits that accrue to one who gives generously.

9:6. The NIV adequately translates the opening phrase *touto de* as “**remember this,**” but a variety of translations are possible. Literally, Paul said, “and this,” which may be elliptical for something like “now consider this” or “now this is important.”

The apostle began with what was probably a common agricultural proverb teaching the principle that sowing sparingly results in a poor harvest and that generous sowing results in a plentiful harvest. It is also possible that Paul alluded to Proverbs 11:24,25 and/or 22:9. Paul used a similar analogy in Galatians 6:7,9. In all events, this analogy encouraged generous giving. Just as farmers should not expect a large harvest unless they sow generously, so Christians should not expect many blessings from God unless they bless others generously.

9:7. In light of this wise saying, Paul encouraged the Corinthians to be determined to give. As before, he did not want them to give beyond their means, and the exact amount was a matter of conscience (**decided in his heart**). The reliance on inward conviction in this matter is particularly important because Paul had no directive from God in this matter. As in every ethical choice believers must make, there comes a point when the inward conviction of the Spirit must guide specific actions. Decisions of the heart must not violate the revelation of God, but they are necessary for practical application of the principles derived from the Old and New Testaments.

Acting according to conscience was very important in this situation. Paul wanted the Corinthians to receive God’s blessings in response to their generosity, but this would not occur if they gave **reluctantly or under compulsion** because (**for**) **God loves a cheerful giver**. Once again, Paul relied on proverbial wisdom. This statement alludes to the Septuagint version of Proverbs 22:8a. The entire verse is absent from the traditional Hebrew text of Proverbs. In all likelihood, it circulated widely among Jewish Rabbis and early Christian teachers because Paul freely used it as justification for his view. Whether or not the verse was original to the Hebrew text, Paul’s use of the proverb demonstrates its truth. Needless to say, Paul believed that God’s love extends to all who are in Christ (Rom. 5:5; 8:39; Gal. 2:20; Eph. 2:4; 2 Thess. 2:16; Tit. 3:4-6), but here he had in mind a special affection or approval that leads to significant blessings in the life of the believer.

9:8. Knowing that God is favorably predisposed to those who give cheerfully is important because of God’s ability to bless (**God is able to make all grace abound**). Here Paul focused on God’s ability, not his guarantee. **God is able** (*dunateo*), but he is free to choose whom, how, when, and to what degree he will bless. Once again, there is a sense in which every Christian has received the grace of God in Christ (Rom. 5:15;

1 Cor. 1:4; Gal. 2:20-21), but here Paul thought of special mercy that comes to some and not to others. When God so chooses to bless, the result (**so that**) will be that **in all things at all times** believers will receive **all that they need**, and will **abound in every good work**.

Note the manner in which Paul described these abundant blessings. First, believers may be given **all that they need** (*autarkeia*), not all that they may want (*thelo, zeloo*). God often gives believers things they simply desire, but Paul did not have these blessings in view here. The Corinthians faced the challenge of giving generously, which could have threatened their own livelihood. Paul made it clear, however, that God (not their selfish greed) was able to supply their needs.

Second, the goal of these divine supplies is not primarily the believer's wealth or personal pleasure. God supplies so that believers may **abound in every good work**, so that they will be free from worry over necessities and able to focus on fulfilling the commands of God.

To support his assertion that God is able to do all of these things, Paul quoted Psalm 112:9 from the Septuagint. Psalm 112 describes different characteristic of the righteous man, and verse 9 depicts him as generous to the poor. This theme fit well with Paul's emphasis on generous giving at Corinth because these contributions were destined for the poor of Jerusalem (Rom. 15:26; 2 Cor. 8:13-14). The second line of Psalm 112:9, "**his righteousness endures forever**," troubles some commentators because similar expressions often refer to God (Ps. 111:3; Isa. 51:8). It is possible that the second line doxologically responds to the first in honor of God. Yet, it is also possible that the Psalm focused on the permanence of a righteous person's actions. In other words, God will never forget or ignore a righteous man's generosity (righteousness). This latter interpretation fits well with Paul's purpose in this passage: encouraging the Corinthians to be generous so that God would reward them. Paul's comments in the next verse support this understanding (9:10).

9:10. Paul followed his quotation from Psalm 112 with two allusions to the Old Testament. First, he referred to Isaiah 55:10, which praises God as the one who **supplies seed to the sower and bread for food**. Second, he drew from Hosea 10:12 which promises a harvest of blessing for those who sow righteousness. Paul combined these Old Testament ideas to assure the Corinthians that God would not ignore their generosity, but would **enlarge the harvest** (i.e. rewards) **of their righteousness**. Their righteous deeds would not be overlooked or forgotten.

9:11. Paul went further to describe what the Corinthians could expect as they contributed generously to the poor in Jerusalem. He first said that they would **be made rich in every way**. It would be a serious mistake to think that Paul promised material blessings to those who give generously. He knew that faithful believers are often poor (1 Cor. 11:20-22; 2 Cor. 6:10; Gal. 2:10), just as the Jerusalem saints were at that time (Rom. 15:26; 2 Cor. 8:13-14). The key to understanding this expression is the very

similar language in 1 Corinthians 1:5,7, wherein Paul rejoiced that the Corinthians had been “enriched in every way — in all [their] speaking and in all [their] knowledge,” and did “not lack any spiritual gift.” The riches of the Christian life before the return of Christ are primarily the blessings of the Holy Spirit. He is the down payment of the inheritance of riches we will receive when Christ returns (Eph. 1:13-14). When the Spirit is poured out on believers in dramatic ways, they are made rich in every way.

In this light, Paul’s idea becomes clear. If the Corinthians gave generously, they could expect a dramatic enrichment of their lives by the Spirit. They would be so blessed that would be able to **be generous on every occasion**, able to meet whatever needs they encountered with the rich ministry of the Spirit.

Finally, Paul also assured the Corinthian church that he and his company would be blessed by generous giving. He pledged that **through us** (Paul and his company) the Corinthian generosity would **result in thanksgiving to God**. In other words, Paul would praise God joyfully as he saw them fulfill this responsibility.

In these verses Paul made it clear that giving generously to the poor in Jerusalem would have many benefits. The needs of the poor would be met. The Corinthians would be blessed, and their lives enriched. Paul and his company would be encouraged and thankful to God. These positive benefits were to motivate the Corinthians to fulfill their earlier commitment to giving.

THE RESULT: PRAISE OF GOD (9:12-15)

Paul developed the theme of thanksgiving further by stating that generous contributions would result in widespread praise of God.

9:12-13. He began by asserting that **this service** (compare 9:1) of contributing was not only for **supplying the needs of God’s people**, but also for the **overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God**, so that **men** would **praise God**. The collection of money for Jerusalem was widespread in the church, reaching Achaia, Macedonia and Asia Minor. As these churches heard reports of others’ generosity, it surely caused much worship and praise. The goal of honoring God was supreme in Paul’s perspective, and should have been the Corinthians’ goal as well.

While explaining the process by which God would be praised, Paul mentioned a number of important features of this contribution. First, by it the Corinthians would **prove [themselves]**. In 8:8 the apostle had announced that this event was **a test** of the Corinthians’ sincerity. Here he made clear that fulfilling their promise to give would prove the true condition of their hearts. In this regard, Paul held a similar perspective to that of the apostle John, who said that love for God could not be present without love for other Christians (1 John 4:20).

Second, Paul described fulfilling the contribution as **obedience that** would accompany their **confession of the gospel of Christ**. **Confession** or profession of the gospel must be demonstrated by obedience. Paul stated this principle clearly on many occasions (Rom. 6:1,11-18,22; 12:1-2; 2 Cor. 13:5-6; Eph. 2:8-10; Phil. 2:11-12; Col. 1:21-23; 2:6-7; 2 Thess. 1:8; 1 Tim. 6:12-14). In fact, he warned that flagrant disobedience would reveal the absence of saving faith (2 Cor. 13:5; Col. 1:22-23).

By weaving these comments into his discussion, Paul subtly reminded the Corinthians of how serious this matter was. It was a test of the obedience that must accompany saving faith in Christ.

9:14. As he ended his encouragement to the Corinthians on this matter, Paul assured them that in the **prayers** of other churches the **hearts** of those churches would **go out to** the Corinthians. **Because of the surpassing grace God had given** them, many would pray. Other Christians would be so encouraged by God's work among the Corinthians that they would fervently intercede on their behalf. Paul assured them of this because he understood the importance of intercessory prayer. He encouraged many churches by telling them that he prayed for them (Rom. 1:9-12; 2 Cor. 13:7,9; Eph. 1:15-19; Phil. 1:3-5; Col. 1:3,9; 1 Thess. 1:2; 2 Thess. 1:11-12; 2 Tim. 1:3; Philem. 4-6). At this point, he sought to motivate the Corinthians with thoughts of how wonderful it would be to have many Christians throughout the world praying for them.

9:15. This thought was so magnificent in Paul's outlook that it caused him to break forth in praise. With abandon he wrote, "**Thanks be to God.**" His heart raced to adoration for **God's indescribable gift** that made all of this possible, namely the gift of salvation through Christ. He was overwhelmed by the thought of Gentiles in Corinth joining with other Gentile churches to provide for Jewish believers in Jerusalem. Beyond this, he overflowed with joy that all of these churches would join together in the praise of God and in prayer for each other. Paul was so ecstatic at the thought he could go no further.

DIGGING DEEPER

A. **According to your means (8:11); according to what one has (8:12)**

Godly generosity does not depend upon the absolute size of the gift, but on the love and self-sacrifice that motivate it. The widow who gave **all she had to live on** to the treasury provides an interesting example of this principle. Jesus stated that the widow's offering of less than a cent surpassed the large amounts offered by the wealthy because she gave from her poverty and they from their wealth (Mark 12:41-44). In fact, her offering exceeded the offerings advised by Paul (8:10) in that it cut into her ability to live. In this sense, the giving of the Macedonians (8:1-5) was more similar to the widow's gift. While Paul recognized such giving as admirable, he evidently did not feel comfortable advising it, advising giving out of **plenty** (8:14).

Paul's reluctance to advise the same kind of sacrificial giving that both he and Christ praised creates an interesting tension. Does the Bible teach that Christians should give more than they are able to give? Paul's example indicates that God does not obligate Christians to give beyond their means, but that he rewards them when they do. It is sometimes tempting to think that anything we do short of the absolute best thing that we possibly can do is sin, but Paul indicates this is not the case. Otherwise, he would have been remiss for not calling the Corinthians to give beyond their means.

B. Reap generously (9:6); increase your store of seed (9:10); you will be made rich (9:11)

Because of common abuses this passage, it is important to distinguish carefully between what it does say and what it does not say. The passage does teach that God rewards those who give generously to other Christians in need, and that his rewards may be monetary, sufficient to enable similar or greater generosity in the future. It also teaches that generous giving should be motivated by the desire to minister to others, and that the giving itself is a ministry.

It does not teach, however, that God will always reward giving in this way, or that God is obligated to reward giving in this way. As Paul indicated in 8:14-15, even after giving generously to the Christians in Jerusalem, the Corinthians could expect lean times themselves in the future — so lean that the church in Jerusalem might be called upon to make similar donations to them. Also, the harvest from God need not be financial. It need only continue the giver's ability to minister to others (**abound in every good work** [9:8], **so that you can be generous on every occasion** [9:11]).

Further, Paul did not teach that God would reward givers whose motivation in giving was the reaping of a financial reward from God. His point was that giving motivated by love and concern for others (8:8) was a righteous ministry, and that those who engaged in it would be equipped to **abound in every good work** (9:8; compare Col. 1:10; 2 Thess. 2:17; 2 Tim. 2:21; 3:17). Those whose giving is motivated by a desire for financial gain do not give in a godly fashion motivated by love and generosity. Therefore, they cannot expect any harvest, let alone a financial one.

Paul did not indicate that giving was the solution to the givers' financial problems or desires, but the solution to the recipients' immediate financial problems (9:12). Giving was not a way to obligate God to prosper the givers with earthly wealth (compare Matt. 6:19-21). Paul's assurance that God would reward giving was meant to encourage those who were reluctant to give because it cut into their financial safety nets, and to encourage all his readers that meeting the physical needs of others was a godly ministry (compare Jas. 2:15-17) that would both spiritually benefit the givers (9:8,10-11) and honor God (9:11-12).

ISSUES FOR DISCUSSION

1. Why did Paul offer only an opinion and not a command in this section of the letter? What does this imply about Paul's authority? What does it imply about his motives?
2. What did Paul mean by "equality"? Why is equality important?
3. Why was Paul so interested in collecting money for the saints in Jerusalem? What special connection, if any, did Paul have with Jerusalem that made this of particular personal interest to him?
4. How did Paul use the Old Testament in this passage? Does his use of the Old Testament seem tenuous according to your understanding of how one should read and apply it?
5. Who was Titus? Why did Paul send Titus to help with the collection? Explain the wisdom of this decision?
6. Why had Paul boasted to the Macedonians? Why was Paul worried about being embarrassed before the Macedonians? What if anything does this indicate about the nature of his boasting to the Macedonians?
7. If you received a letter like this, how would you feel? Have you ever felt manipulated by Christian leaders who spoke as Paul speaks here?
8. What exactly was Paul promising God would do to bless those Christians who gave generously to the contribution? On what basis could Paul offer these blessings? Would these blessings be sufficient to motivate you to give generously to Christians in need?
9. What does giving money to needy Christians have to do with obeying your confession of the gospel of Christ?
10. When have you been the giver or recipient of money to or from fellow Christians that was necessary to food, shelter, clothing, etc.? How has this experience made you feel? How much would you be willing to give to help another Christian, and under what circumstances? How does your willingness compare with Paul's teaching in this passage?
11. When has your church given or received money on a large scale to meet the daily needs of another church or group of Christians? When has your church given money to individual Christians to help them meet daily needs? What is your church's policy on and practice of giving money to those in need?