

Title: The Gift of Giving
Text: 2 Corinthians 9:1-5
Date: October 17, 2021

Verse 1

In 2 Corinthians 9:1, Paul continued his talks about giving by saying, “Now concerning the ministry to the saints, it is unnecessary for me to write to you.” Some may miss the fact that Paul’s words were concerned with the subject of monetary contributions within the church. The word “ministry” obscures the real meaning of the passage for some. Normally “ministry” is thought of as involving service within the church. Indeed, the word is the one from which we get our modern term “deacon.” It depicted a person figuratively “cutting through the dust” to meet a need related to practical service. It was used of household servants in the ancient world as a title for household servants who ran through dusty streets to perform tasks for their masters. We see it used in passages like Acts 6:1 and Romans 15:31 to depict service directed to the practical needs of others. Considering the meaning of the term, why did Paul use it in reference to giving and tithing? Was it even his purpose to speak on money?

One has rightly commented that Paul’s word selection was appropriate. Since financial offerings support the work of ministry, they can be thought of as a ministry themselves.¹ Money raised for missions and ministry blesses and benefits other Christians, so it can be thought of as a “ministry to the saints.” See in this way, the word “ministry” in our verse was meant to speak of “provision for the needs of distressed and destitute fellow Christians.”²

We also know that the “ministry” of 2 Corinthians 9:1 dealt with monetary contributions in the church because of the context surrounding the verse. Paul’s words should not be regarded as being isolated from the contents of chapter 8. Modern chapter and verse divisions may make us miss the link between the two chapters. If one considers the logical flow between 2 Corinthians 8:24 and 9:1, they will clearly see that Paul meant to continue his talks concerning Christian giving in the latter verse.

Some modern Bible scholars try to separate chapter 8 from chapter 9, claiming that a fragment from a letter Paul wrote to the district of Achaia was inserted into chapter 9 of 2 Corinthians at some point. It is maintained that revisionists or copyists made this addition in order to bolster the apostle’s argument concerning giving.³ In reality, what we have in our passage is a direct continuation of Paul’s discussion from chapter 8. One has said, “The connection and thought is close with the preceding verses. The apostle here intensifies the urgency of his appeal to the Corinthians to complete the offering.”⁴

The relation to chapter 8 and 9 is seen in the syntax of the original language. The definite article before the Greek word rendered “ministry” tied Paul’s words in our verse to his previous discussion.⁵ As a result, chapter 9 was directly linked to chapter 8. The apostle’s instructions concerning the “ministry to the saints” was related to his announcement concerning the coming of “Titus” and the “brothers” in 2 Corinthians 8:23. His intent was to encourage the church to gladly receive the traveling ministers (2 Corinthians 8:24) and to be prepared to provide them with a financial contribution for the work of ministry (2 Corinthians 9:1).

¹ Calvin, 305-306.

² Hughes, 322.

³ Hughes, 321.

⁴ Greenhouse, 584-585.

⁵ Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, 410.

Notice from our verse the reason for which Paul made an appeal for an offering. Any money that was collected was to be directed to the ministry of “the saints.” The Greek word underlying English translations is one that literally meant “holy ones.” It was frequently used in the New Testament to depict believers as being “separated from the world and consecrated to God, and as inwardly renewed and purified by the Holy Spirit.”⁶ Paul used the word to speak of believers in general in Philippians 1:1. As used in our current text, the term indicated that the financial collections in Corinth were to be intended for supporting Christians. It seems there were a great number of poor believers in Corinth.⁷ By studying the New Testament, we learn that Paul had a unique ministry to impoverished believers in Jerusalem (Romans 15:31; 1 Corinthians 16:1-3). Perhaps Paul’s appeal in our verse was aimed at raising money to help poor believers in that city.

In making his request for ministry funds, Paul said, “It is unnecessary for me to write to you.” The King James used the word “superfluous.” Paul meant to say that he really didn’t need to broach the subject with his readers. He had already addressed it in his first letter (1 Corinthians 16:1-3), so they should have been fully aware of the needs of believers in Jerusalem. In addition, they were undoubtedly familiar with Jesus’ teaching on giving and receiving (Matthew 6:19-21; Acts 20:35). The church should have been familiar with its responsibility toward charitable giving. Paul wanted his words to be seen as what they really were – a mere polite and passing reminder to not be negligent in an important Christian duty.

Verse 2

Paul continued his appeal for missions giving in verse 2 by saying, “For I know your eagerness, and I boast about you to the Macedonians, ‘Achaia has been ready since last year,’ and your zeal has stirred up most of them.” The term “Achaia” was used of the region in which the church at Corinth was situated. As used in our text, it was a title for the readers of Paul’s letter.

By studying the book of Acts (Acts 18:11), we learn that Paul lived amongst the Corinthians for eighteen months. He knew the congregation well, and he had firsthand knowledge of their desire to financially support ministries to the poor.⁸ In our text, he said that they had “been ready since last year” to give to his ministry. The original Greek meant “stand prepared.”⁹ The verbiage depicted a past action with abiding results.¹⁰ Paul meant to convey the permanent implications of the Corinthian’s past promises to give. He implied that the offering had begun through a promise, but that it had not yet been completed through an actual collection.¹¹ The Corinthians needed to finish what they had started.

Though they had stalled in their giving for some reason, Paul used our current verse to give his readers the benefit of the doubt. They may have failed to follow through, but Paul politely reminded them of their previous commitment. He was nearly apologetic in mentioning the subject of financial giving once again. He exhibited the type of Christian love that is patient with others (1 Corinthians 13:4) and diligent to believe the best about others (1 Corinthians 13:7).

⁶ Hodge, 589.

⁷ Hodge, 589.

⁸ Hughes, 323.

⁹ Robertson, 247.

¹⁰ Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, 410.

¹¹ Earle, 585.

In the original language of the text, Paul used a present tense verb that depicted him as continually boasting about the Corinthians to Macedonian believers.¹² The “Macedonians” were believers in the first-century region of Macedonia. The church at Philippi was included in that geographical locale. We know from Paul’s letter to the Philippians that the Macedonians had proved faithful in making financial contributions to his ministry (Philippians 4:10-20).

Many believe Paul was staying in Macedonia when he wrote his second letter to the church at Corinth. Apparently he had bragged to his hosts about the Corinthian’s pledge to give.¹³ It was actually his report that prompted the believers in Philippi to give.

Paul made this plain in our verse by saying, “your zeal has stirred up most of them.” The original language of the text used a verb that meant “to excite” or “to stimulate.”¹⁴ The word was used both positively and negatively in the world of the New Testament. A negative use of the verb is found in Colossians 3:21, a passage in which Paul warned fathers about provoking their children to anger.¹⁵ The meaning was positive in our current text. Paul’s report of the Corinthian’s promise to give had provoked the Philippians to give. The apostle now hoped that his readers would not renege on their promise.

It is important to note that Paul’s boasting was not of a sinful sort. One has said, “Paul’s glorying here is neither in man or in human achievements as such, but in the grace of God manifested in and through the lives of men.”¹⁶ One should not see any form of trickery on the apostle’s part either. Some liberal Bible scholars have accused Paul of using guilt and shame in order to manipulate. We should not regard Paul as doing such. We know his proven character. The apostle simply wanted to remind the Corinthians of their previous promise to give. He also wanted them to be aware of the way in which he had boasted about them to others.

Though boasting is automatically regarded as sinful by most, the Bible reveals that there is a healthy type of boasting – boasting in the Lord. Later in 2 Corinthians, Paul will say, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord” (2 Corinthians 10:17). Paul boasted about the Corinthians because he regarded their promise to give as evidence of the grace of God working in their souls (2 Corinthians 8:1).¹⁷ Consequently, his boast on their behalf was a holy and healthy type of boasting, the type of confidence in others that is rooted in Christian love.¹⁸ Knowing that the apostle had gloried in their willingness to give should have motivated the Corinthians to finish what they had started.

Verse 3

In verse 3, Paul shared of his plans to help the Corinthians complete their collection. He said, “But I am sending the brothers so that our boasting about you in this matter would not prove empty, and so that you would be ready just as I said” (2 Corinthians 9:3). In speaking of “the brothers,” Paul used a definite article in the original language.¹⁹ His syntax was significant. It was

¹² Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, 410.

¹³ Hughes, 323.

¹⁴ Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, 410.

¹⁵ Robertson, 247.

¹⁶ Hughes, 323.

¹⁷ Hughes, 323.

¹⁸ Hughes, 326.

¹⁹ Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, 410.

designed to point back to Titus and the other believers who were mentioned back in 2 Corinthians 8:23. Paul was personally dispatching men to collect the promised financial contribution.

His purpose in doing so was “so that” his “boasting...would not prove empty.” Based on what we studied in the previous verse (2 Corinthians 9:2), Paul had apparently told believers throughout the region of Macedonia of the Corinthians’ willingness to give to his ministry. His report was based on a promise the Corinthians had made, a promise mentioned back in 2 Corinthians 8:10. As we have already seen, the Corinthians had simply not fulfilled their vows. Paul planned to send Titus and other ministry counterparts to help them follow through.

The word rendered “empty” in verse 3 was one that meant “futile” or “in vain.” With it, Paul used a verb tense known as the “effective use of the aorist.”²⁰ His intent was to depict a real historical event that could certainly have taken place in the future. The apostle knew there was a real potential that the Corinthians would not keep their vows to give. He desired to avoid such a sad scenario.

Paul wanted his readers to “be ready” when Titus and the others showed up in Corinth. He wanted them to be faithful, just as he had “said” they were when he boasted of their commitment to believers in Macedonia. The word rendered “said” appeared in the imperfect tense of the original language; thus, it referred to a repeated action in the past. Paul meant to emphasize the way in which he had continually boasted of the Corinthians’ commitment to give.²¹ Once again, he reminded the Corinthians of his previous confidence in them. His aim was to avoid the uncomfortable and unfortunate situation that might unfold if they didn’t follow through on their promises.

Verse 4

Paul continued his appeal by describing the uncomfortable situation that might unfold if the Corinthians didn’t fulfill their commitment to give. He said, “Otherwise, if any Macedonians come with me and find you unprepared, we, not to mention you, would be put to shame in that situation” (2 Corinthians 9:4). Apparently, Paul planned to visit the Corinthians once again. His arrival was probably planned to take place after the visit of Titus and the other brothers (2 Corinthians 8:23-24). In the original language of verse 4, Paul used what is now known as the a third class conditional statement. The language conveyed, as A.T. Robertson has said, “a lively possibility” that the Corinthians would indeed be found unprepared to give when Paul arrived.²²

The phrase rendered “come with me” was an ancient Semitic expression that spoke of a group of travelers who travelled together in a convoy.²³ According to his ministry custom, when Paul left a city in which he had been ministering, he often took people from that city to his next ministry location (Acts 16:3). Such a practice was in accordance with his methodology for multiplying disciples (2 Timothy 2:2). In order to expand the work of gospel ministry, he identified people who were potentially called to ministry in each city he visited. He then took them along with him as he travelled on to other regions and cities.

From studying Acts 20:4, one can learn that certain individuals from Macedonia were known to accompany Paul on his missionary journeys. Additionally, a study of 2 Corinthians 12:14 and 13:1 reveals that Paul planned to make a third visit to Corinth. Imagine the

²⁰ Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, 410.

²¹ Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, 410.

²² Robertson, 247.

²³ Hughes, 325.

embarrassment for both him and the Corinthians if his Macedonian ministry partners found the Corinthians unprepared to complete the collection they had promised to the apostle. Since Paul had repeatedly told the Macedonians (2 Corinthians 9:2) of the Corinthians' pledge to give (2 Corinthians 8:10), failure on the part of the Corinthians would have certainly produced an uncomfortable situation.

If Paul's readers were unprepared to give when he showed up, both he and they would "be put to shame." The Greek language of the text implemented a compound word that literally meant "to place under."²⁴ It was used by Aristotle to speak of the foundation of a building.²⁵ Paul used the word in such a way in Hebrews 11:1.²⁶ In our current passage, the word was used in a figurative sense to depict one who was weak and flimsy, or without a firm foundation. It often figuratively depicted one who lacked boldness or confidence.²⁷ Paul did not want to experience the unfortunate situation in which he or his readers were embarrassed or without confidence because of his readers' failure to fulfill their obligations.

Verse 5

In 2 Corinthians 9:5, Paul said, "Therefore I considered it necessary to urge the brothers to go on ahead to you and arrange in advance the generous gift you promised, so that it will be ready as a gift and not as an extortion." The Greek word rendered "arrange in advance" is an obscure one for modern students of the New Testament. It was used in only this one place in the New Testament. No other Greek writings from antiquity that survive used the word. It seems that the meaning of the word carried the idea of "to put fully in order."²⁸ Paul wanted his readers to get their promised gift ready. He wanted it to be prepared for collection when he arrived. As a result, Titus and other brothers would arrive in Corinth ahead of Paul (2 Corinthians 8:23-24) to make sure the gift was ready.

In speaking of the offering, Paul referred to it as a "generous gift." His language involved a play on words. He used a term that was closely related to one he used back in 1 Corinthians 16:1. In our current verse, the apostle affixed a prefix to the same Greek word used in that verse to speak of "the collection for the saints." The end result was a word that literally meant "really fine collection."²⁹ The word Paul used was the Greek word from which we get our word "eulogy."³⁰ Among Jews, the term was closely related to the Hebrew concept of breach.³¹ It depicted any sort of benediction or benefaction.³² By using the term, Paul depicted his readers as potential benefactors who had opportunity to bless poor believers in Jerusalem. The apostle's readers should have been motivated by such an opportunity.

²⁴ Robertson, 247.

²⁵ Robertson, 247.

²⁶ Robertson, 247-248.

²⁷ Calvin, 307.

²⁸ Hodge, 593.

²⁹ Earle, 585.

³⁰ Earle, 585.

³¹ Calvin, 307.

³² Hodge, 593.

In addition, they should have been motivated because of their previous promises to the apostle. Notice that Paul referred to the offering by speaking of “the generous gift *you promised*.” In doing so, he used a perfect tense particle that emphasized continuing implications of a past event. The language indicated that the Corinthians’ promise was not forgotten. It remained valid and intact.³³ They had a responsibility to fulfill their vow. The apostle’s intent was to encourage the church to follow through on their promise.

When he arrived, he wanted to find the offering “ready as a gift.” In the original language, one finds vocabulary that was often used in the New Testament of the grace God has extended to His children. The same language from our verse is used in Ephesians 1:3 to say, “Blessed is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavens in Christ.” It seems Paul’s intent was to remind his readers of the gospel. He appealed to grace as the greatest motivating factor for Christian giving and charity.³⁴

He wanted his readers to give from a heart of gratitude for God’s love, not from a begrudging spirit. They needed to give their contribution as a gift, not as “an extortion.” If the offering wasn’t ready when Paul arrived, it would have been necessary for him to collect it himself. Such a scenario would have been uncomfortable to say the least.

The word rendered “extortion” is one that was related to terms that spoke of covetousness. It was an antonym for the word that referred to a gift in the ancient world.³⁵ The Greeks used the word to speak of excessive greediness.³⁶ It depicted “the greedy grasping for more at the expense of others.”³⁷ Perhaps Paul used the word as an innuendo, making a slight allusion to the fact that greed and selfishness were perhaps preventing the Corinthians from making good on their promise. One has explained the apostle’s motive in using the language he used by saying Paul meant to say that the Corinthians’ giving was “to be expressive of a desire to be a blessing to others and not of cupidity which is preoccupied with selfish grasping and gain rather than with the needs of the unfortunate.”³⁸ Sadly, modern believers are often guilty of being stingy. One has commented on the sad state of affairs in the modern church, saying:

One example of the kind of complacency that the affluent West has displayed toward missions has come in my own denomination, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC). Every year, the Southern Baptist missions agency collects funds for missionaries in an offering called the “Lottie Moon Christmas Offering” (LMCO). In 2014 there was approximately 54,000 Southern Baptist churches, and the total LMCO was \$53 million. Ninety-five percent of the offering came from approximately 17,000 of those churches, while the other 37,000 churches gave the other 5 percent. Those 37,000 gave 7.65 million, which amounts to a paltry \$200 per church to keep missionaries on the field winning lost people to Christ. The next year the International Mission Board had to cut its missions force by 1,132 people

³³ Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, 410.

³⁴ Earle, 585.

³⁵ Earle, 585.

³⁶ Calvin, 308.

³⁷ Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, 410.

³⁸ Hughes, 328.

because of lack of funds. It is hard to imagine that those 37,000 churches couldn't cope up with more than \$200 each to keep those laborers in the harvest field.³⁹

In light of the lavish gifts the Lord had bestowed upon believers, each should be compelled to give gifts for the sake of missions and ministry. Since God is a giver, His people ought to be as well. The gospel summons Christians to be generous like the Lord. Paul used such logic in his appeal to the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians 8:9, saying, "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ: Though he was rich, for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich." Charles Hodge has rightly asked, "What are our gifts to the poor compared to the gift of Christ to us?"⁴⁰

³⁹ Davis, Andrew M. *The Power of Christian Contentment: Finding Deeper, Richer, Christ-Centered Job*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2019), 181.

⁴⁰ Hodge, 589.