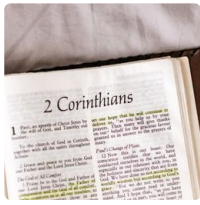


OpenTheo

2 Corinthians 7 - 9



2 Corinthians - Steve Gregg

In this talk, Steve Gregg discusses 2 Corinthians 7-9. He emphasizes the exhortation to perfect holiness and the significance of cleansing oneself from filthiness in both the flesh and spirit. Gregg examines different forms of corruption and sin, discussing Paul's concern for endurance against false teachers and opponents. The speaker also delves into the theme of generosity and grace, discussing how giving can be an expression of God's benevolence toward us.

Transcript

2 Corinthians 7-9 When we can't divide the sessions along the same points as the division of the book, there are three parts of the book of 2 Corinthians, the first seven chapters, making the first major part where Paul is essentially expressing his thanks or appreciation for the fact that they have come around after having given him a good scare for a while. Chapters 8 and 9 deal with the issue of the collection he's taking for the church in Jerusalem, and then chapters 10 through 13 express even more great concern for some of the false teachers and false apostles that are in the church. It will be no problem, it seems to me, getting through chapter 7 rather quickly, because most of the things in it have been discussed in the introduction or are repeats of things that have been discussed in chapter 2 or somewhere else prior to this.

And there won't be very many new comments to make, which means we will be able to get into chapter 8 in this session. The question is whether we'll get through chapter 9 as well in one session. That's a lot of material to cover.

But chapters 8 and 9 are one continuous discussion, and the getting through of both chapters in one session would be the most natural way to treat it. There's only 15 verses in chapter 9, which means it's a short chapter, and only 16 verses in chapter 7, so we may be able to do all of that. We don't know, but I will say this, getting past chapter 7 and into the next section, which is chapter 8, is a given.

Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God. Now, the bottom line of this

exhortation is to be perfected in holiness. And that sounds like a steep order, to be perfect in holiness.

I mean, God is perfect in holiness. But how are we to be perfect in holiness? Well, perfect, of course, can mean, and very probably does mean, complete. In a case like this, that we should be completely holy.

Because he mentions being cleansed of all filthiness of flesh and spirit, so that we'll be completely holy. Not just outwardly, but inwardly as well. Not just cleaning up our act outwardly by avoiding the gross sins of the flesh, but dealing severely with ourselves in the areas of sins of the mind and of the spirit as well.

I don't know exactly which sins Paul would categorize as sins of the spirit, as opposed to sins of the flesh. And the reason that's difficult is that the word flesh doesn't always technically mean the body. Sometimes it means something like the fallen nature.

Which would include, of course, leanings of the mind and things like that. So sins of the flesh we might think of as things like sexual sins, and maybe things like drunkenness and outward bad behavior, robbing and so forth. Whereas sins of the spirit we might be inclined to think of as those things that go on simply inside, as opposed to external sins.

Lust or greed or pride, envy. That may be the way that we would understand this dichotomy, I don't know. But it's clear that Paul, by saying all filthiness of flesh and spirit, he means to include all parts of our being.

We are not to tolerate uncleanness in any part of our being. And this is based on, of course, what he said at the end of chapter 6. He doesn't actually specifically quote a passage, but he links together phrases from a variety of Old Testament passages. And says, God has said, I will dwell in them and walk among them and will be their God and they shall be my people.

Therefore come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean and I will receive you. I will be a father to you and you shall be my sons and my daughters, says the Lord Almighty.

And so chapter 7 verse 1 says, therefore having these promises. Now the basis for motivating us to be cleansed of all uncleanness of flesh and spirit is that we have these promises. What promises? Well, God said he'd dwell among us and walk among us and be our God and we'll be his people.

He said if we separate ourselves and don't touch the unclean, then we'll be received by him. He'll be a father to us and we'll be children of his. And these are great promises.

These are lofty privileges. And they certainly are of value sufficiently to warrant our putting out great effort. Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit.

Now, all Christians are seeking to be cleansed of filth. All Christians want to be holy. But sometimes the desire to be holy is not as strong as at other times or in some persons.

And what Paul is seeking to do is urge all Christians to continue and make it their priority to lay hold on these promises that God has made through meeting the conditions stated. And that condition is that we be holy, that we be separate. Now, the particular kind of separation that he was calling the Corinthians to is not all that clear.

Some have suggested maybe idolatry was in view. Although, as I said last time, if the church was into idolatry, it seems like Paul would have stayed so more clearly and been more harsh on that particular point. Of course, there's a possibility there was sexual sin.

There was that in 1 Corinthians, but he doesn't state that either. It seems that in 2 Corinthians he's mainly concerned about their endurance of false teachers or persons who are opponents of Paul's. But on the other hand, well, this is not really on the other hand.

This is perhaps a confirmation of that. He goes on from this point to talk about the one that has been disciplined in the church. The one that they have, in fact, separated themselves from.

And he is the one that Paul had required them to discipline. And now he has, in chapter 2, asked them to restore that person again because he apparently has repented. He's going to have more to say about that person and that event in the remainder of this chapter.

But it is possible that it is with reference to the kicking of this person out of the church that Paul is encouraging them that this is generally the right thing to do if there are people in the church causing corruption and filth, either by advocating moral sins, sins of the flesh, or whether it's by simply perverting the church through division and suspicion, which might be sins of the spirit, that these persons should be separated from. Now back in 1 Corinthians, when there was a man living with his father's wife, and Paul urged them to kick him out of the church, he made it clear that a little leaven in the church will leaven the whole lump. He said that in 1 Corinthians chapter 5. And that they should separate themselves from that wicked person so he doesn't corrupt the whole church.

That was perhaps a different kind of corruption or a different kind of sin and a different participant in it in 1 Corinthians 5 than this one here. But it is probable that by urging them to stay separate from what is unclean, he may have in mind those persons in the church who incline toward causing division and suspicion against Paul and his ministry, and that kicking such a person out of the church was in fact the right way to do it, although of course that particular person having repented should be restored at this time. He says, open your hearts to us.

We have wronged no one. We have corrupted no one. We have defrauded no one.

I do not say this to condemn, for I have said before that you are in our hearts to die together and to live together. Great is my boldness of speech toward you. Great is my boasting on your behalf.

I am filled with comfort. I am exceedingly joyful in all our tribulation. For indeed, when we came to Macedonia, our flesh had no rest, but we were troubled on every side.

Outside were conflicts. Inside were fears. Nevertheless, God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus, and not only by his coming, but also by the consolation with which he was comforted in you when he told us of your earnest desire, your mourning, your zeal for me, so that I rejoiced even more.

Now, in verse 5 there, he resumes the narrative of things in the recent past, which he had actually broken it off back in chapter 2, and he's said very little along these lines since chapter 2, verse 13. So, he interposes once in a while a few personal narratives about what he's been doing lately, and he said in chapter 2, verses 12 and 13, Furthermore, when I came to Troas to preach Christ's gospel, and a door was opened to me by the Lord, I had no rest in my spirit, because I did not find Titus my brother. But taking my leave of them, I departed for Macedonia.

And then he says no more about his travels here until chapter 7, verse 5, where he says, For indeed, when we came to Macedonia, our flesh had no rest. Now, he was in Troas first, waiting for Titus to bring back news of the way the Corinthians had received the letter. Paul had sent by Titus a letter to the Corinthians of rebuke, a letter written in agony, in affliction, in tears.

He was not at all confident that it was going to do what it should do. He even had some regrets about having sent it initially, wondering if he'd been too strong. He went to Troas, hoping to meet up with Titus.

Titus didn't come. It says there in chapter 2, verse 13, I had no rest in my spirit, because I did not find Titus my brother. And so he went to Macedonia.

Now we read that when he came to Macedonia, chapter 7, verse 5, our flesh had no rest. It's interesting that when he was in Troas, he says his spirit had no rest. When he came to Macedonia, he says his flesh had no rest.

Now this may be no big issue. Perhaps it's just another way of saying we had no rest. But he does use a different language.

And perhaps it's that in Troas, his biggest conflict was inward, his concern, his anxiety about Titus and about the church. Whereas when he came to Macedonia, he not only had that anxiety, but he had problems in the flesh, probably meaning physical problems. We

know that Paul tended to be afflicted from time to time with physical problems.

And even in this book, in chapter 12, he talks about a thorn in his flesh that was an infirmity that afflicted him. And it may be that when he came to Macedonia, he had a flare-up of this problem, whatever it may have been. Some people said he might have had malaria, or he might have had some eye disease, or some other kind of eastern malady that flared up from time to time.

And that when he came to Macedonia, additional to the no rest that he had in his spirit, he had no rest in his body either. There was no comfort. He says, our flesh had no rest, but we were troubled on every side.

Outside were conflicts, inside were fears. Outside were conflicts, could mean conflicts, of course, with other people, with opponents. And in Macedonia, Paul had had no shortage of those, but we don't have any record of the specific conflicts in Acts that he's referring to here.

He says, nevertheless, God who comforts the downcast, verse 6. Now that's how he opened the epistle in chapter 1, that God is the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction. And now he tells one of the ways that God comforted him when he was downcast. God who comforts the downcast comforted us by, first of all, bringing Titus, and especially with Titus' encouraging news about the church.

He said Titus himself was comforted by what he saw there at Corinth and brought the encouraging news back to Paul. What he describes of the church's reaction to Paul's letter in verse 7 was that the churches had earnest desire, mourning, and zeal for Paul. Now earnest desire apparently means that they desired to do what was right, and they were earnest about it.

They mourned over having done what was wrong, namely having tolerated the man who was an opponent of Paul's. And they wanted to make clear that they were zealously on Paul's side in this matter. And so Paul says, I rejoiced even more when I heard that.

Now verse 8, for even if I made you sorry with my letter, I do not regret it, though I did regret it. So initially when he sent it, he thought, maybe this is good. I shouldn't have sent that letter.

I don't know if you've ever done that before. I certainly have. I've written some strong letters to people, and I send them off.

You spend a long time composing the letter, maybe. Just say that you do it all right. There are letters I've written that are 45 pages long.

And it took a month to write. And by the time you're done, you figure this is a masterpiece of rebuke to somebody. And you put it in the mail, and no sooner is it in the

mail, you think, I wonder if I should have sent that.

You've been working on it. You've been consumed with it. You're really into it when you're writing it.

And as soon as it's in the mail, you think, there's no turning back now. It's in the mail. Whatever it's going to do, it's going to do.

I wonder if I did the right thing. I have considered publishing some of them. Because I have responses to them from the parties I wrote to that are 45 pages long, too.

I have a binder full of these. But anyway, I know how Paul felt. When he wrote the letter and sent it, he was upset.

He regretted sending it. He says, but now, having seen how things turned out, I don't regret it. For I perceive that the same epistle made you sorry, though only for a while.

He didn't want to make them sorry forever, but he did want to make them mourn. He did want them to turn and see the error of their ways. And he sees that the epistle accomplished just that.

It must have been a very good epistle. It's a shame we don't have it. Or we might, of course, as some have suggested, in the chapters 10 through 13 of this epistle, some have felt that that is a segment that really didn't belong to this epistle, but was somehow misplaced and really originally belonged to the epistle he's referring to here.

But that's not anything that can be proven, just one of those fancy theories of scholars. Now, I rejoice not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance. For you were made sorry in a godly manner that you might suffer loss from us in nothing.

For godly sorrow produces repentance to salvation, not to be regretted. But the sorrow of the world produces death. Now, Paul says there's a sorrow that is desirable and there's a sorrow that is not desirable.

The godly sorrow that produces repentance is not to be regretted. Nobody enjoys sorrow when they're going through it, or else it wouldn't be sorrow. If you enjoy it, you're not sorry.

I mean, sorrow is by nature the opposite of enjoying yourself. It's an unpleasant experience. And so, Paul reminds us that there are sorrows, that once we've had them, there's no regrets about having had them.

When you're going through sorrows, you need to ask yourself, not how do I feel right now, but how will I feel about this later, when I don't feel this present weight and burden on my heart, and I won't forever. This is something that's hard to realize when you're in sorrow. It seems like you'll never be able to get over it.

You'll never be happy again. But, of course, realistic people can just look at their past and look at reality and say, well, I won't always be feeling this badly as I feel now. But when I don't anymore, will I look back at it and feel sorry that I felt sorry? Will I regret having had this sorrow? And there are times when you should be embarrassed about things that you were upset about.

That you saw yourself get all upset about something that wasn't really that important. But if the sorrow leads you to improvement, leads you to repentance, then, of course, you don't regret having been through it. There is a sorrow of the world, he says, that produces death.

I'm not sure exactly how he means that. The sorrow of the world produces death, as opposed to godly sorrow leads to repentance. A sorrow that is godly must be a sorrow that is based upon the fact that we have offended God.

It's a God-word kind of affection. People can be sorry for other reasons without any reference to God. But the sorrow that leads to repentance is a God-word kind of sorrow.

It is like the prodigal son's repentance. He said, Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight. Not just against man, but against heaven.

And true repentance is not just bothered by the fact that somebody got hurt out there, some person was injured by my actions, or that I was injured by my actions. True repentance comes from a sorrow that is directed toward God. God was injured by my actions, and that's what grieves me most.

That's a godly sorrow. Now, worldly sorrow often looks and feels just like a godly sorrow in a sense. I mean, it's just as sorry.

And a person who's going through sorrow, it's not always easy to tell instantly by looking what they're sorry about, whether it's a godly sorrow or another sort. Many people are sorry about things they did, but it's not godly, it's worldly. They're sorry because they are suffering consequences they wish they didn't have to suffer.

Or, you know, they've done some damage they can't undo, and they're going to have to live with the consequences of that for a long time. This makes them sorry, but it doesn't lead them to repentance, because it is a sorrow entirely motivated by self-interest, entirely motivated by the fact that I have done myself a great disservice in what I've done. And this does not lead to true repentance that leads to salvation.

This simply, I think, is something that leads to a false repentance, and therefore leads to death that does not lead to salvation. It may lead to death for the simple reason that a person may feel that they have repented and haven't, and therefore they seek no further genuine repentance, and therefore they die and are lost. But a person who has a godly sorrow turns to God and is concerned about what they've done to God, and they're not

self-centered in their regrets, but they regret having injured God.

And that is the sorrow that leads to genuine repentance and salvation, Paul says. Verse 11, Observe this very thing, that you sorrowed in a godly manner. What diligence it produced in you! What clearing of yourselves! What indignation! What fear! What vehement desire! What zeal! What vindication! Apparently, I mean vindicating Paul.

In all things, you proved yourselves clear in this matter. Now, proved yourselves clear doesn't mean that you were innocent. The reason they had a repentance is because they weren't innocent.

They had tolerated, they may have even encouraged, they may even have promoted this person who had opposed Paul. They were not clear in that sense, but they cleared themselves by repentance, and true repentance should leave a person truly clear in conscience and in reality. If a person is truly repentant, they are no longer guilty before God, and they should bear no guilt on the conscience.

And yet there is, of course, as I said a moment ago, a false repentance that does not leave the conscience clear. And Paul gives us here one of the most helpful lists of what we might call the fruits of true repentance. How do we know if repentance is genuine? Well, you know, anyone who works this ministry in the street, which I've done, with drug addicts and people who drink and things like that, knows that there are people who show signs of sorrow for their lifestyle of substance abuse.

Many of them, you know, are really sorry because their lives are messed up, they've wasted the best years of their life, they've hurt everybody around them, they've destroyed their financial situation, their family is broken up, their liver is, you know, on the fritz, and they're going to die young, and they're a slave of the drink, and they're really unhappy about that at times. They still drink. But they can sometimes be made to cry and show great sorrow for all the things, especially when they're drunk.

It's possible to witness to someone in that case and see them get all sorry and act all genuinely repentant. And yet it's so hard to know in those cases, is this genuine repentance? Will they change? Will they turn from their sin? Or is this just an emotional catharsis they're going through because the guilt is just burdening them, and they're just kind of letting it all hang out and having a good cry. And it's not always easy to tell, but there is a difference.

The fruit of true repentance is seen in the behaviors that Paul lists here in verse 11. The diligence, which means that they were not lazy about, they were not slow or slothful about setting things right. They didn't receive Paul's letter saying, ho-hum, well, maybe we have done something wrong here, we'll give this some consideration.

But they recognized, they were stunned, no doubt, by the recognition and conviction

about what they had done. And they diligently set about to set it right. And they cleared themselves in that way.

They had indignation toward the offender and probably toward their own selves for having sided with the offender. They had fear of God and vehement desire and zeal. In other words, their actions after they were confronted and after they felt sorry were constructive.

They zealously and diligently set about to do what was required of them in the letter and showed themselves to be truly repentant in this way, acting in the fear of God with indignation toward the sinner and probably toward the sin in themselves that they had tolerated. And these things, Paul indicates, were the way that they showed themselves or proved themselves to be cleared now. So, in a sense, it would be useful to be able to prove true repentance all the time.

And maybe you can all the time. But there are cases where there is no such proof. There is the evidence of some sorrow on the part of a person, but there is not this kind of proof that they've really come clear, that they're really clear of the matter anymore.

And perhaps some dwelling on these things in verse 11 would help us a great deal in discerning more frequently the difference between true and false repentance. Therefore, although I wrote to you, I did not do it for the sake of him who had done the wrong, nor for the sake of him who suffered the wrong. That latter party is usually considered to be Paul himself, the one who suffered the wrong.

But that our care for you in the sight of God might appear to you. Now, he's not doing it principally for the improvement of the offender, although, of course, there's always the hope that with church discipline the person might turn around. And in this case, it appears that he did.

But it wasn't out of primarily concern for that man's soul that Paul wrote, nor for the concern for Paul's own self. It wasn't just because of Paul being hurt that he wrote. But it was rather that the church was in danger.

And Paul's emotion expressed in that letter was a demonstration of his care for the church and their well-being. Because that man was threatening to destroy them. Therefore, we have been comforted in your comfort.

Meaning, now that you're comforted by having experienced true repentance and your conscience is clear, we are also comforted by that circumstance. And we rejoiced exceedingly more for the joy of Titus, because his spirit has been refreshed by you all. Now, he said already, of course, back in verse 7, that Titus also had been consoled by what had gone on.

Titus apparently came back to Paul cheerful, encouraged. He had probably gone off

heavy with this heavy letter in his hand, not knowing what would happen. He comes back light and happy and cheerful with good news and tremendously comforted, the burden gone.

And Paul says, you know, just seeing Titus in that way, the joy of Titus also comforted us. It lifted our spirits to see the man so refreshed by you. For if in anything I have boasted to him about you, I am not ashamed.

Now, what he means is that I don't know whether Titus had really been with Paul during the time that he had ministered in Corinth. Titus is never mentioned, actually, by name in the book of Acts. So we don't know whether Titus was there during those 18 months that Paul was with the Corinthians.

And Paul may well have run into Titus and recruited him at a later date, but had told Titus a great deal about the wonderful things that God had done in the Corinthian church, and had boasted about that church. And then he'd received the bad news that was so embarrassing that here he'd boasted about these people, and now Titus was aware of this breach of trust on their part. It was something of an embarrassment to Paul that these people he'd boasted about to Titus were now known to be messing up so badly.

And now Titus, of course, had seen with his own eyes how quick these people were to repent when confronted. And it vindicated Paul's boasting of the Corinthian church in the sight of Titus, and it made Paul feel better that the boasting he had done to Titus about the church was confirmed by Titus' own experience among them. But as we spoke all things to you in truth, even so our boasting to Titus was found true.

And his affections are greater for you, as he remembers the obedience of you all, how with fear and trembling you received him. Therefore I rejoice that I have confidence in you in everything. So when Titus came with the letter, apparently they thought, oh, Paul sent Titus, we're in trouble now.

And with fear and trembling they received him and read the letter with seriousness and responded. And that's the last we hear in this epistle of that matter. And that matter has basically dominated the discussion with various digressions from chapter 1 to this present point.

There is another matter of business, though, Paul wants to deal with in this letter. And that is occupying chapters 8 and 9. Now, 8 and 9 tell us that Paul has been going about through Macedonia. Now, if you remember the geography, Greece is a peninsula.

And Macedonia is the northern part of that peninsula. And so the peninsula extends southward down into the Mediterranean Sea from the continent of Europe. And the part of the peninsula that connects to the mainland of Europe, the northern section, is

Macedonia.

And the cities of Philippi and Thessalonica and Berea were among some of the cities that were in Macedonia. But Achaia was the southern tip, the southern end of the peninsula. And that's where Corinth was, in Athens.

So, Paul is going to be talking about Macedonia and Achaia in these chapters. And since we don't use those, well, Macedonia is still a term used today for the region, but Achaia, I don't believe, is any more a current term. These were the Roman names, the Roman provinces.

What Paul is telling him is that he has now been in Macedonia. Of course, he mentioned that already. Titus rejoined him in Macedonia.

And Paul has been going about through the churches of Macedonia, asking them to help with a known financial need. Not that he had for his ministry, but for the churches in Jerusalem, which, amazingly, were not even his churches, as it were. I mean, Paul's churches were the ones that were among the Gentiles.

Now, today, if you hear someone on the radio begging for money, or on television, or a preacher, saying they're going to take a special offering for a special need, it usually has to do with a need for their church, their ministers, or at least someone in their movement, in their denomination. Paul is never known to have ever done such a thing. We never read of Paul asking for money directly.

He does say to churches sometimes that he plans to come visit them on his way to somewhere else so that he could be sent along by them. A subtle way of saying that they could help him financially. But he never actually asks for money in any direct way from the churches.

In fact, he is very clear that he doesn't ever want to fall prey to the temptation to ask for money from the churches, because he'd rather support himself so that he'd have this boasting that he does not charge for the gospel. But he was very plainly and forthrightly begging for money among the churches, not for himself, but for a need of another group of churches that these people would never ever have probable contact with. I mean, some might.

But we're talking about churches way over across the Mediterranean, another part of the world for them, in Jerusalem. Now, this church had suffered a variety of problems. There had been a famine.

Agabus had predicted that in Acts chapter 11. And we read that that happened in the reign of Claudius. That had caused, I think, probably a lot of general poverty in Judea, among Christians and non-Christians alike.

And there's reason to believe that perhaps Christians in Jerusalem were also boycotted somewhat in their businesses, because the Jews objected to them being believers in Christ and may have lost their jobs in some cases and may have been written out of the family will, I mean, disowned by their families for becoming Christians. And some of those ways that ordinary people make their living, a lot of the Christians in Jerusalem may have suffered extraordinarily because of the malice of their Jewish relatives and neighbors toward them for becoming Christians. We don't know this very much in our society.

I mean, you may have non-Christian parents, but they're probably not malicious toward you for the simple reason that you're a Christian and see you as one who betrayed the family and are a traitor and are dead to them. I mean, even if you were Madeline Murray O'Hare's son and became a Christian, as her son did, probably you'd be written out of the will for that. You'd probably be disowned.

But most people don't have parents that are so vehemently opposed to Christianity as to, even if they're not Christian, as to treat them the way Jews have typically treated their family members who become Christians, because it is seen as a stab in the back. It is seen as a slap in the face. It's seen as a total rejection of all that their family stands for and called sacred.

And therefore, the Jews who became Christians in Judea, which was, of course, a Jewish environment and culture, were no doubt frequently, as I say, boycotted, fired from their jobs, written out of the will, kicked out of their parents' homes, and therefore deprived of many of the normal means of livelihood that ordinary people receive, and therefore were poor. And the evidence is throughout the Scriptures, especially from the latter part of Acts until through all the epistles, really, that the church in Jerusalem continued to be largely a poor church, financially. When Paul was in Jerusalem, according to Galatians chapter 2, and he presented to Peter and James and John the evidence of the anointing of his ministry, they approved of his ministry, and they didn't lay any burden on him, he says, except they did ask that we would remember the poor.

And it is understood that the poor means them. The poor means the church in Jerusalem. That Paul was blessed by the church in Jerusalem to go out and minister among the Gentiles, but don't forget us poor folks here in Jerusalem, the brethren here.

And so the poor often was a term that was used of the Jewish Christians. And Paul, you know, Paul's relationship with the Jewish Christians was a bit strained at times. It's not that he had anything against them, but they had suspicions about him.

We don't know how many of these suspicions were cherished by the apostles in Jerusalem themselves, but there were a large number of Pharisees who believed in the gospel and were still pretty much Judaizers in the church. And these peoples spread rumors and entertained rumors that Paul was teaching the Jewish converts not to

circumcise their children. We have no evidence in scripture that Paul was teaching such a thing, but that was what he was accused of, and that made him very unpopular among the Jewish people and Jewish Christians who were typically zealous for the law.

And we know that from the things Paul wrote in Galatians and in Romans and some other places that Paul was pretty strong against the idea that the law had any value in salvation. So this made him unpopular sometimes, and there was a felt strain in relations between the church in Jerusalem or the Jewish churches in general on one hand, and Paul's Gentile congregations on the other. Now Paul, therefore, for two reasons, wanted to help the church in Jerusalem financially.

One was because they were poor, and you want to help the poor. They're brethren, and we care for the brethren, and if any man sees his brother in need and shuts up his vows of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him, John said. And James said, who was the head of the church in Jerusalem, essentially, in his epistle, he said, what does it profit if you see a brother's sister naked and desks her with daily food and say, be warmed and filled, and you don't give them those things that they need? What does it profit? Even so, faith without works is dead.

Be alone, James said. So it was understood that Christians need to help the poor, need to help those who are needy, especially their brethren who are poor. And that alone would be a reason for Paul to want to take a collection among the churches in Greece and in Asia Minor and deliver some of their surplus, if possible, to the poor in Jerusalem.

But there is a second reason, I believe, and that was his desire to show good feeling and goodwill between the churches of the Gentiles and the church of Jerusalem. Giving them a gift is one way to show you're really friendly. And to try to fix the breach between them.

You know, when Paul wrote Romans, he told the Roman Christians to pray for him that when he took the gift he was carrying to the church in Jerusalem, which he was carrying when he wrote Romans and was on his way to Jerusalem to deliver it, he said, pray that this gift will be received by them. And perhaps the reason for his concern about this is that the Jews typically had a stigma that they attached to anything from the Gentiles. They wouldn't receive gifts from Gentiles.

Now the Jewish Christians, hopefully, would be a little more freed up and more willing to receive from their Gentile brethren, but Paul wasn't sure. He said to the Roman Christians, pray that this gift, this ministry of ours will be accepted by them. So there were some strained relations and Paul hoped to melt some of the barriers by bringing a generous gift from the Gentile churches and delivering it to the Jewish churches.

And that is what he's writing about in chapters 8 and 9. He has been going about the churches of Macedonia and he's coming down to Achaia. He's coming down to Corinth.

And what he's doing essentially is preparing for his trip back to Jerusalem and he's hoping to take money for the church in Jerusalem, which he's gathered among the Gentile churches.

Now chapters 8 and 9 of this epistle are basically to urge the Corinthian church to have some money ready, some money ready to send. Now he had already urged them along these lines back in 1 Corinthians 16. He says in chapter 16 of 1 Corinthians, in the opening verses, it's now concerning the collection for the saints.

As I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also. On the first day of the week, let each of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come. And when I come, whomsoever you approve by your letters, I will send to bear your gift to Jerusalem.

But if it is fitting that I go also, they will go with me. So at the time he wrote 1 Corinthians, he wasn't sure if he'd carry the gift himself to Jerusalem or whether he'd just be the catalyst in the churches to get them to take their offering and then they could pick some approved men of their own ranks to carry the gift. He says, if I need to go, I'll go with them.

I won't take it myself. Paul wanted to keep clear of any charges that he was embezzling. So he was initially hoping that he wouldn't even have to be along on the trip carrying the gift.

Let someone you trust take it. But if I have to go, make sure someone you trust goes with me. So he told them to start laying it aside for the collection.

Apparently, news had come to him that they were ready for him to come pick up the collection, but he had not been able to come back. And this news was a year earlier. And so Paul makes reference as he writes 2 Corinthians, that a year ago you said you were ready.

Now I hope you are, because I'm coming down there and I'm hoping to receive the gift and take it down to Jerusalem. And he says a number of things in this context, but one of the things he begins by saying is that these churches in Macedonia where I've been collecting, they're in poverty. And yet they've been very generous in this gift, in this collection.

And he hopes that that may inspire the Corinthians to be generous too. I don't know whether there was any natural rivalry between the regions of Macedonia and Achaia. If there was, Paul might have been playing on this a little bit, saying, you know, the Macedonians have given a lot of money to this collection, I'm coming down to see what you've got.

You wouldn't want to be outdone by them. Not that Paul would resort to worldly

competition or anything like that, but there may have, I don't know, been some rivalry between the regions. Not so much among the churches, but just in the regions in general.

And so Paul tells them what the Macedonians have done, and tells them he'd like to think that they would do at least as much. He says, And the fellowship of the ministering to the saints. And this they did not as we had hoped, but first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God.

So we urge Titus that as he had begun, so he would also complete this grace in you as well. But as you abound in everything, in faith and speech and knowledge, in all diligence and in your love for us, see that you abound in this grace also. Now, notice he says that the church in Macedonia, or the churches in Macedonia, had abounded with great riches of generosity, although he speaks of them as being in deep poverty.

Verse two. He saw this generosity as a manifestation of the grace of God bestowed on those churches. It's in verse one.

I want you to know that the grace of God bestowed on those churches, the generosity of poor people is a work of God. The generosity of anyone is a work of God. It's grace at work in the life.

And Paul says that it's evident that God's grace has been poured out on these people in their hearts, because they are so graceful, they're so gracious, so generous. And even though they were in deep poverty, they gave generously. Now, Paul didn't mention that they were doing this as a seed faith kind of act, because they were poor and they wanted to get a hundredfold back, so they gave a big gift.

Paul didn't know that kind of theology. A modern preacher would, of course, tell them something like that. You know, you're in poverty, here's what you got to do.

Give a big gift and you'll get back a lot more. Oral Roberts popularized that with his seed faith book. Interestingly enough, when he needed eight million dollars or die by a certain date, because Jesus allegedly told him he'd kill him if he didn't get eight million dollars by a certain date, it never occurred to Oral Roberts to start giving big gifts.

Although that's what he told people to do for years if they need money. All you have to do is just give generously to him and God will bless you. You'll get a lot back.

But suddenly, when he was in desperate need of money, he thought it probably didn't ever occur to him to start sending out huge gifts to people. Maybe he doesn't really believe the principle. Anyway, he wouldn't get it from here.

The Apostle Paul indicates that these people were not acting out of a self-interest to get more money to relieve their own poverty. They did it out of a grace that was bestowed

upon them by God, a concern to be generous toward Christians they had never even met, but that they heard were in need. For I bear witness, he says in verse 3, according to their ability and beyond their ability they were willing to give.

That is, they didn't just give what they could afford to give, they gave beyond what they could really afford to give. They didn't just give the cream off the top after they'd had all their needs met. They were already too poor.

And yet they gave far beyond what they could safely give. Now, Paul apparently was reluctant to even receive it, knowing how poor these churches were and seeing how much they were pouring out their hearts to these other brethren. Paul realized that the amount they were giving could conceivably, well, it was very sacrificial and could really maybe put these people who were giving in financial hardship.

And the reason I deduce that Paul was reluctant to accept the gift is it says in verse 4, they were imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints. They not only were abundantly eager to give till it hurt them, but they were insistent upon it. When Paul apparently was saying, Oh, no, this is much too much to take from you.

You people have needs of your own. They said, No, we won't even hear of it. We insist.

Let us participate. I remember my pastor years ago, mentioning that there had been a time when some poor, when he'd been asked to go speak in some poor congregation with very few people in it. And they gave him an honorarium, they gave him an offering.

And the offering was quite generous. I mean, quite a lot for such a group of poor people. I think it might have even been during the depression.

And he felt guilty taking it. He said, I can't take this gift from you. I mean, you have more needs than I do.

And they said, What, you're going to deprive us of the blessing? Jesus said, It's more blessed to give than to receive. And you're not going to allow us to be blessed? And he realized that he had to think differently than he did. I mean, in fact, we do think of giving as something that creates deficiency.

And receiving is something that is a blessing. But Jesus said the opposite. Giving is a bigger blessing than receiving.

And Paul apparently was reluctant on the same grounds. He saw them as impoverishing themselves by giving. But he had to realize, and they realized already, that giving was a better blessing than holding their goods.

They already lacked. They already were in deep poverty. I mean, they weren't going to

be rich by holding on to their goods.

They might not even have all their needs met by holding on to their goods. They assumed that if they gave, that God's blessing would be on them more than if they did not. And they were correct.

Because Jesus says so. It says, And this they did, verse 5, not as we had hoped. Now, it doesn't mean he wished they hadn't done what he's about to describe.

But I think he means they did this not even as we didn't even dare to hope that they would do this. I mean, we expected them to give, but we didn't expect them to give so fully and so purely. Because he says, They gave not to us only, but they gave themselves first to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God.

So they're not giving because of pressure that's put on them. They're giving because they are personally given to God. If you belong to God, then your possessions belong to God.

There are people who in no way belong to God, or at least they don't live or think as if they belong to God. They live for self. But when the offering is passed, they put something in.

They give money, but they don't give themselves. And many people give money as sort of a bribe to God. Since they know they don't give themselves, and they ought to owe them more, but they don't, they figure they can buy off God's wrath by putting a little bit in the offering plate.

But Paul says the way these people did it, of course what ought to be done, is that first they give themselves to the Lord, and then they give their offering. Ideally, the church should not have to receive money from people who have not given themselves to the Lord. The church should not have to receive money from unbelievers and from people who grudgingly give it.

And so he says, we urged Titus that as he had begun, so he would also complete this grace in you as well. Apparently, Paul was now sending Titus back to them. Titus had just come from them with the good news about how they'd responded to the previous crisis.

And now Paul and Titus is affectionate toward these people and feels well toward them. And Paul says, well, I'll tell you what, why don't you go back down there ahead of me, and just make sure their money is available. And he says a little later on why.

He's afraid that if he comes down there and the Corinthian church isn't available, that the Macedonian Christians who accompany him might see the Corinthian church as kind of stingy, or whatever, in comparison to Macedonia. And here Paul has been boasting about the Corinthians to the Macedonians, so he doesn't want his boasting to be

embarrassed. He says in verse eight, I speak not by commandment.

Oh, no, I need to say something about verse seven. He says, but as you abound in everything, in faith, in speech, in knowledge. In all diligence and in your love for us, see that you abound in this grace also.

Now, in this section, Paul is going to use the word grace quite a few times in a way that's maybe different than the most common way that we think of grace. We think of grace as God's unmerited favor. We think of grace as God's benevolent attitude toward us and his benevolent treatment of us.

But Paul uses the word grace here, and there are other places too, in different ways than that. In this case, grace is a manifestation of personal generosity. Actually, a grace, as Paul uses it here, is a term that is used in some of the older Christian writers.

And I mean some of the Puritans, for example. They speak of graces in the life. For each positive Christ-like character trait is a grace, whether it's kindness or patience or self-control.

These are called graces in the life. I don't know if that terminology is used as often in modern preaching and writing, but that was a common way to speak. And Paul apparently uses it that way too, because he speaks of faith, speech, knowledge, diligence, love.

These are all graces. But he says, I want you also to be abounding in this other grace as well, this grace of generosity. And in calling generosity a grace, and of course, speaking of the grace of God bestowed on the Macedonians in verse 1, meaning their generosity, it calls to mind that the grace of God isn't just forgiveness of sins.

The grace of God isn't just God's kindness toward us and his mercy toward us. The grace of God is bestowed upon us, manifesting itself in graces in our lives. If you receive grace, grace is manifested in the variety of graces, generosity and others.

And this is one place where we see this terminology used in the scripture this way. Verse 8 says, I speak not by commandment, but I am testing the sincerity of your love by the diligence of others. Now, he means the diligence of the Macedonians.

He's using their example to give the Corinthians an opportunity to test their own devotion. How devoted are you? I want you to know how devoted the Macedonians are. Are you that devoted? I give you a standard to measure yourself by in that respect.

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that you through his poverty might become rich. Unfortunately, this verse has been used as a proof text for the prosperity doctrine, a doctrine which can hardly be supported from anything Paul ever said, and least of all here. When he talks

about the deep poverty of the Macedonian churches, you can hardly find in this a doctrine of prosperity.

But what is sometimes said is that Jesus became physically poor so that we could become rich. And since he became physically poor, he must mean that we've become physically rich. But this is not a fair assumption.

It says that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, and that you through his poverty might become rich. Now, Jesus became poor in a physical, material sense, but he had previously been rich. Though he was rich, he became poor.

In what sense was he rich? When he was in heaven, before he came to earth in a poor family, what sense was Jesus rich? In material things? Did Jesus have a lot of money up there in heaven before he came to earth? Did he have fancy cars and fancy houses and the signs and trappings of affluence? I don't think so. It's talking about privilege, spiritual privilege, and glory, and things of a spiritual nature that Jesus enjoyed before he came to earth and emptied himself, and took on the form of a servant, and made himself poor, a pauper. Now, Jesus' riches that he left behind in order to become an earthly pauper were not physical riches.

They were heavenly riches that he left behind. So when he says, and that through his poverty you might become rich, it is most likely it means that the riches he abandoned for himself, he abandoned so that you could have them. He took on poverty for us so that through his poverty we could have the riches that he abandoned for himself.

And since those were heavenly riches, it seems obvious that Paul is talking about heavenly riches here, not earthly riches that he intends for us to have. If Paul was in fact saying that God wanted us to be materially rich, then this would contradict so many things that both Jesus and Paul taught us. Elsewhere in James, James said God has chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which God has promised those who love him.

The Apostle Paul himself said that he possessed nothing, and that he was in poverty, and nakedness, and hunger, and things like that. I mean, it's impossible to harmonize the prosperity doctrines interpretation of this verse with that teaching of scripture in general, even of Paul in the same epistle elsewhere. But it is saying that Jesus' willingness to lay aside his glory and his privilege in heaven, and to come and make us have those privileges, is a manifestation of his grace.

You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. That, this is the grace of our Lord, that though he was rich he became poor. Do you have grace? Jesus had grace, what did he do? He gave up his privilege in order to enrich others, and to be poor.

Do you have grace like that? Jesus is the example. And Paul says in verse 10, And in this

I give my advice, it is to your advantage not only to be doing what you began, and were desiring to do a year ago, but now you also must complete the doing of it, that as there was a readiness to desire it, so there also may be a completion out of what you have. Now, Paul is saying that a year ago you were expressing eagerness and willingness and readiness to give this gift.

Something, some news Paul has received apparently makes him think that maybe that money isn't there now. Maybe they're not, haven't been quite so eager, and maybe because of the rise of someone who is opposed to Paul, possibly even someone who is accusing Paul of embezzling, it kind of dampens the generosity of the church in their desire to give great amounts of money if there's some suspicion that the money is going to be misappropriated. If the church has some expensive project it's taking an offering for, and the people in the church don't believe in the project, it's going to be hard to squeeze the money out of them.

And when Paul had been among them, they had believed in him, they had trusted him, and they were eager to do what he was suggesting, and they were willing to give money. But since then there had been some opposition to Paul, and maybe they had stopped taking the collection. And so Paul's sending Timothy back.

Now that their hearts are right toward Paul again, he wants them to get back on track with this collection because he's going to want it, to pick it up soon. And he wants to send Titus, excuse me, ahead of him to make sure that they're prepared with it. Now he says in verse 12, For if there is first a willing mind, it is accepted according to what one has and not according to what one does not have.

Now it's possible that they didn't have as much money now as they did a year earlier when they were eager to give. We don't know. He seems to be saying it doesn't matter if you don't have to give what you're eager to give.

Give according to what you do have. The acceptableness of your heart's generosity will not be judged by what you don't have, but what you do have to give. If you have a willing heart, that's what God's looking for.

If you don't have much to give, God doesn't penalize you for that. It's the willing heart, and it'll be acceptable not according to what you don't have, but according to what you do have to give. The woman who put the two mites in the temple treasury, Jesus said she gave more than the Pharisees and the other rich people who gave larger sums because she was judged, and they were too, not by what they didn't have to give, but what they did have to give.

She gave all that she had, showing that she had a willingness of heart to give. The others didn't have quite as eager a desire to impoverish themselves for the poor, and so she did more than they did. It says, I do not mean that others should be eased, verse 13, and

you burdened, but by an equality that now, at this time, your abundance may supply their lack, that their abundance also may supply your lack, that there may be equality.

As it is written, he who gathered much had nothing left over, and he who gathered little had no lack. Now, the scripture that he quotes, he who gathered much had nothing left over, and he who gathered little had no lack, is from Exodus 16, verse 18, where the manna was collected for the first time. Apparently, everyone went out and collected as much manna as he could, but some people, being more vigorous, were able to collect more.

Some being older or younger or weaker or whatever, they didn't collect quite as much. Everyone collected as much as they could. They put it into a common pot, and they measured out one omer per person out of the common pot.

And as it turned out, regardless how little or much someone had gathered, there was just enough for everyone to have an omer. What that means, of course, is that God provided just enough for everyone to have what they needed, though in the process of collecting what God provided, some didn't collect very much. Some collected, no doubt, less than an omer, but they received an omer anyway.

And others collected more than an omer, but they received an omer. Everyone received exactly the amount, and there was nothing left over. So that those who gathered much had no extra, and those who gathered little had no lack.

This is what Paul suggests is a model for Christian mentality toward money. He said that it's not so much that I want you to be burdened and then made rich, it's rather I just want to see some equality here. Just like God said that those who gather much have no extra.

Now the suggestion is that perhaps the Corinthians are doing well financially at this point in time, and they do have a surplus. They have gathered extra. The Jerusalem church are poor at that point in time.

They have gathered too little. But the needs for survival of Jewish Christians are essentially the same as the needs of survival for Greek Christians. And therefore for everyone to have enough, it's necessary for those who gathered extra to help those who gathered little.

And that's what Paul is using as an argument for them to give. Now, I'm not convinced that God's rule is that everyone must have the exact same amount. There are too many examples in Scripture, even in the church, of there being some who have houses and others who don't have houses.

I mean, not everyone has exactly the same amount. But certainly what is suggested by this is that everyone needs to have enough. If somebody has more than they need, and

another person has less than they really need, then that inequality is something that God wishes to see redressed.

Just as God provided the sum total of manna that fed the whole community, He provided just enough for everyone to have enough. So it could be argued that God provides, through the labors of Christians worldwide, or maybe just in a local area, sufficient to meet the needs of the whole Christian community. I have to say worldwide, because there are certainly lands where there's famine and there isn't enough to feed everyone there.

And there are lands like ours where there's much more produced than it takes to feed us. And by the way, America is a very generous country. We ship out more food to other countries, even our enemies.

Than any other country does. We're very generous. But we still live with much more surplus than perhaps we should.

I mean, I'm not to make anyone feel guilty about what they personally are doing. You have to ask God. But when we know that there are Christians who do go without things, and we have extra, then we need to, you know, shine the light of this scripture on us.

And say, am I living in accord with this scripture? If I'm gathering extra, does God want me to have no extra? So that somebody who gathers too little will have no lack. That is something that each person should really look at seriously. I'm not here to preach that everyone has to have exactly the same amount, or that you shouldn't have anything extra at all.

But it is certainly something to consider between every man and God to decide how to steward the things that God has given him. But this is a principle of stewardship that we need to take into consideration as we deal with our finances. But thanks be to God who puts the same earnest care for you into the heart of Titus.

That is, Titus feels about you the same way I do, and I'm glad. I thank God for that, because I can send him down and know that he'll treat you with the same affection that I would. For he not only accepted the exhortation, but being more diligent, he went to you of his own accord.

That is, Paul exhorted Titus to go down and get these people ready before Paul would be coming down, and Titus was eager to do that, quite willing. And we have sent with him the brother whose praise is in the gospel throughout all the churches. And not only that, but who was also chosen by the churches is to travel with us with this gift, which is administered by us to the glory of the Lord himself, and to show your ready mind, avoiding this, that anyone should blame us in this lavish gift, which is administered by us, providing honorable things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of

men.

And he says, we're sending with this gift trusted men from each church, particularly along with Titus, I'm sending a brother. He doesn't say who it is, who is praised in all the churches, and who is chosen by the churches to be a participant in this. Now, we don't know who that brother is.

Certainly, it seems with the high praise Paul gives him, it should be someone we've heard of before, but it may not be. It may be some lesser known Christian, lesser known to us, but well-known in the early church. My guess is it might be somebody like Timothy or Luke, and there have been other guesses, but we just have to admit, these are guesses and nothing else, so we might as well not worry ourselves too much about the passage.

Some trusted Christian along with Titus was sent so that, Paul says, we could avoid that anyone would blame us in our handling of this lavish gift that we're administering. It was a lot of money, and it was a thing that would tempt critics to question and suspect whether Paul was really taking all this money for the poor in Jerusalem. After all, he's taking our money and leaving town on a ship.

How do we know what he's going to do with this money? By the way, there had already, in recent times, just before this, been a notable case in the Roman Empire of two Jewish men who advertised themselves in Rome as teachers of Judaism to Gentile proselytes. And there was a senator in Rome whose wife wanted to become a Jewish proselyte, and she hired these two Jews to teach her the Jewish religion. This is not taught in the Bible.

This is a story known from secular history of the time. Suetonius or Tacitus, if someone reports this. Or Josephus, I forget who.

It's one of the historians. And so this Roman woman, who was a proselyte to Judaism, hired these guys to teach her the law and teach her Judaism. Well, they persuaded her to give a very substantial gift for them to take to the temple in Jerusalem for the maintenance of the temple in Jerusalem.

And she gave the gift, but they absconded with it. They misappropriated the money. And this became a scandal, probably mostly because she was a senator's wife.

She was not just any woman. And so the Jews were greatly humiliated in Rome because of this. And it caused them to be viewed very badly because a couple of Jews had taken this money from this Roman woman, claimed they were giving it to the temple in Jerusalem, but didn't.

They left town with it and never came back, and it never got to the temple. Well, that was a well-known story in Paul's day. It was a recent occurrence.

So he could just imagine people having similar suspicions about him. Here he's taking all this money from these Gentiles, claiming he's going to go give it to the Christians in Jerusalem. But once he's left town, how would they know? After all, there have been dishonest people doing similar sounding things before.

So Paul says it allows each church to pick somebody that they trust to accompany to keep them accountable. This is his way, he says in verse 21, of providing honorable things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but in the sight of men. He says God knows.

In the sight of God I'm acting honorably, but I want to act honorably in the sight of men also. I want people to know that I'm honest as well as God knowing. And we have sent with them our brother, whom we have often proved diligent in many things, but now much more diligent because of the great confidence which we have in you.

Now, it's hard to know whether this brother is the one mentioned earlier as the brother whose praise is in the gospel throughout the churches in verse 18, or if it's talking about yet another Christian who is unnamed. I'm afraid some people would be fascinated and would spend the rest of the time speculating who these people might be since they're not named. But since they're not named, there's no sense speculating.

We could not ever know whether we were right in our speculations. We might as well just go forward and say Paul sent some well-known, well-trusted brethren along with Titus. If anyone inquires about Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker concerning you.

So he's given sort of a letter of commendation for Titus. Anyone wonders if Titus is okay, I'm giving my commendation. He's my partner.

Trust him. Or if the brethren, meaning these other brothers they mentioned that are accompanying Titus, are inquired about, they are messengers of the churches. Literally, they are apostles of the churches in the Greek.

The glory of Christ. Now it's interesting that he says apostles of the churches. He doesn't say apostles of Jesus Christ.

He says apostles of the churches and the glory of Christ. Remember the word apostle means a sent one. Are there apostles today? As you know, I sometimes say I doubt it.

But I should qualify that. If we say apostles of Jesus Christ, that is ones that are sent by Jesus in the sense that the twelve were sent or Paul was sent or some of these others were, then I would have to say I don't know and I seriously doubt that there are apostles of that kind today. There may be, but I'm not aware of them.

And I have my doubts. But if someone says, well, what about apostles of the churches? That is ones who were sent out not by Jesus Christ by direct commission, but by the churches, sent out by the churches like these men. Well, of course, there are people like

that.

We could use the word apostle that way, I suppose. Today, of certain people. People who are apostles of the churches, not apostles of Jesus Christ, like Paul and Peter and those guys were, but not sent out by Christ, but sent out by the churches.

And that's what these men were like. They were the glory of Christ, which seemed to mean simply that their lives were a good testimony and brought great praise and honor to God and to Christ. Therefore, show them and before the churches the proof of your love and of our boasting on your behalf.

In other words, give money. Now, chapter nine. Now, concerning the ministering to the saints, he means ministering, not in the sense that we think of it, but he's talking about giving the money.

Ministering is a word that just means serving. Unfortunately, the word minister in our day has come to mean a clergyman and ministry means full time preaching as a vocation. When you talk about someone being a minister or going into the ministry, that's unfortunate because the word ministry actually just means service or servant.

And so here he's not talking about anything other than the service that he's been talking about previous to this, about the service of supplying the needs of saints who are poor. Now, concerning this service, this ministry to the saints, it is superfluous for me to write to you, for I know your willingness about which I boast of you to the Macedonians, that Achaia, meaning Corinth, was ready a year ago and your zeal has stirred up the majority. Yet I have sent the brethren, lest our boasting of you should be in vain in this respect, that as I said, you may be ready, lest if some of the Macedonians come with me and find you unprepared, we, not to mention you, should be ashamed of this confident boasting.

Therefore, I thought it necessary to exhort the brethren to go to you ahead of time and prepare your bountiful gift beforehand which you had previously promised that it may be ready as a matter of generosity and not a grudging obligation. This I find very humorous, because Paul says, you know, I've told these Macedonians how quick you are to give, how a year ago you were willing to give this great gift, and the story that I've told them about you has stirred them up and encouraged them to give. And now what's he doing? He's telling about the Macedonians how they were to stir the Corinthians up.

He says, now I've used a report about your generosity to get these people to give, now I'm using the report about their generosity to see if you'll give. And he says, I'm taking your word. You said you were eager to give, but I'm not really 100% sure with all the stuff that's gone under the bridge recently, and I just want to make sure, because when I come down there to get your gift, I'd be terribly embarrassed to say nothing about how embarrassed you'd be after I boasted about you like this, and if some Macedonians who heard me boasting about you happened to accompany me and see that you don't even

have any money together, your act is not together at all, this would make my boasting embarrassing to me, and how much more to you, he says.

So he says, I'm sending these guys down to make sure you've got your act together before you arrive, so that you can do it without the sense of being under the gun, as it were, but you can do it out of more sense of freedom and generosity before we're here actually with our handout. But this I say, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity, for God loves a cheerful giver.

And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you always having all sufficiency in all things may have an abundance for every good work. As it is written, he is dispersed abroad, he is given to the poor, his righteousness remains forever. Now may he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food, supply and multiply the seed you have sown and increase the fruits of your righteousness.

While you are enriched in everything for all liberality or generosity which causes thanksgiving through us to God. Now, I read this far because it's all about sowing and reaping. Paul is saying that when you give, it's sort of like, it's not just throwing money down the toilet, it is like sowing seeds in the ground.

Farmers, you know, if you have a bag of seed and you're hungry, you might want to grind that seed into flour and eat bread. On the other hand, if you do that, it's gone. If you take the same seed and throw it into the ground where you can't eat it, you may seem at first to be losing it.

But as a matter of fact, in the course of the change of seasons and the care for the ground and so forth, it produces a multitude of seeds, far more than you sowed. Some 30, some 60, some 100 fold, Jesus said. And that being so, giving to the poor is a lot like sowing seed in the ground.

The money you give, if you hadn't give it, you could use it on yourself. If you give it, you can't use it on yourself. And giving it, therefore, may seem like something that will impoverish you.

But it's no more so the case than when a sower sows seed in the ground. Sure, he can't eat that seed once he's thrown it in the ground. But he's not impoverishing himself.

He's investing. He's involved in a system that God has arranged where the surrender of what you have produces an increase in what you have. And he says in verse 6 there, He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly.

But he who sows bountifully will reap bountifully. What he's just saying is a farmer who sows a lot of seed is going to have a big crop. A sower who says, well, I've got to keep some of this seed to grind into flour and have bread for the next season.

I can only sow a little bit of my seed. Well, he can sow a little bit of seed, but he'll only have a little bit of a crop too. The more you tighten the belt now and throw your seed out for a future return of another sort, the more you will rejoice later about it.

The farmer, if he sows all of his seed now, he won't have any to eat while he's waiting for the crop to grow. But if he doesn't throw out any seed because he wants to eat all of it, he won't have any crops either. It's very much the same, Paul says, with reference to money.

Now, he speaks of God in verse 10 as he who supplies the seed for the sower and bread for food. God supplies us with money. Some of it he expects to be bread for our food, and some he expects it to be seed for us to sow.

Paul will not tell us, and nor will even Jesus or anywhere in the Bible, tell us what portion must be sown and what portion should be eaten. That is, of all the goods that God gives you, he intends for some of it to meet your own personal needs, to be consumed by you. The other portion he expects to be sown, to be administered, to be given out to the poor.

Remember it says in the Old Testament, he that has mercy on the poor lends to the Lord and he will repay him. God will pay you back if you give to the poor, but maybe not immediately. So there's an initial outlay and loss of consumable goods to yourself when you give.

However, the reaping is what motivates. Now, when I say the reaping motivates you to give, I don't mean to say the idea that you'll get rich is what motivates you to give, but rather that there will be benefit. The benefit might actually be in some other coinage than money.

You might receive benefit in many other forms. It may be that it establishes relationships between you and the people that you give to, of a blessing sort. It may be that you just have a liberation from your materialism that you experience by giving.

It may be that you do receive back more in time of your need, because God said, Jesus said, give and it will be given unto you. Full measure, pressed down, shaken together, shall men give into your bosom if you give. You can receive material back.

You can receive spiritual blessing back. Or you can simply be blessed to know that the kingdom of God is promoted by your sacrifice. And that is really what you're living for anyway.

And so an increase in the crop in the kingdom is an increase that you rejoice in. The point is, though, that everyone has to decide. God has given seed to the sower and bread to the eater.

Which portion of what he's given me, is it to be the bread that I'm supposed to eat and

which part is the seed I'm supposed to sow? And that's a hard call that everyone must make in his own conscience before God. But Paul says in verse 7, So let each one give as he purposes in his heart. That is, there's no set amount that Paul's going to dictate you have to give.

There's no demand in the New Testament that a person give 10 percent. And Paul's not going to dictate that you give 5, 10, 15, 20, 30 percent. Just give as you purpose in your heart to give.

Whatever God lays on your heart, give that. Not grudgingly or of necessity. There's no one's twisting your arm.

Don't let someone give you a guilt trip about it. Just do it because your heart wants to give. For God loves a cheerful giver.

It's one thing to be a giver. It's another thing to do it happily. God loves the heart of the person who happily gives.

Partly because that person has love for the person they're giving to. And love pleases God. Giving is an act of love.

It is also an act of faith if it is sacrificial. Because if you don't have faith that God will care for you, you'll want to hang on to as much as you can for the future. If you have faith in God, you'll be more inclined to release what you have now knowing, well, God will provide when I need it.

And these people need it more than I do right now. So that giving cheerfully, giving willingly out of a cheerful heart is at once an act of love and it's an act of faith. There's a promise here that Paul gives in verse 8. God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work.

Now, he's saying that if you give, if you extend this grace to others, God will give grace to you. And that grace can take many forms. The grace that God gives to you is sufficiency in all things.

You need money? There'll be money. You need strength? He'll give you strength. You need deliverance? He'll give you deliverance.

Whatever. I mean, all sufficiency. Whatever you need, God will be your sufficiency.

His grace will be your sufficiency. If you are gracious, then He will be gracious toward you. Blessed are the merciful, they shall obtain mercy.

If you extend grace in giving, God is able to make all grace abound toward you. The result is that all sufficiency in all things will be yours. All things you really need.

And you'll have an abundance, verse 8, for what purpose? To get rich and get fat and live affluently? No, for every good work. God gives you an abundance so that you can do every good work with it. The money you give is simply your stewardship.

The gifts you have, the talents you have, the time you have, the money you have, it all belongs to God and He's testing you with it. He gives it to you so that you might use it for Him, like the talents that are given. And there's an accounting later on.

As it is written, He has dispersed abroad, He has given to the poor, His righteousness remains forever. Who is that? That quotation is not about God. It is about a righteous man.

It's in Psalm 112, verse 9. It is describing the righteous man. The righteous man has dispersed his seed abroad. Seed meaning his money.

He's given to the poor and his righteousness remains forever. That is to say, there is an eternal reward of righteousness. That is the reward of those who give.

You will reap in righteousness if you sow in money, if you sow in goods to the poor, you will reap an eternal harvest of righteousness. Now may he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food, supply and multiply the seed that you have sown and increase the fruits of your righteousness. So you sow the seed of finances and the principal fruit you reap is righteousness, he says in verse 10 there, while you are enriched in everything for all liberality, which causes thanksgiving through us to God.

Now he says the one thing is for sure, you sow these seeds and you'll have a harvest guaranteed. That harvest is the fruit of righteousness. If nothing else comes back to you, you have at least that which is most important.

You'll have a harvest in terms of being right before God. But additional to that, God is also likely to enrich you in everything for your liberality. And in addition to that, there's another benefit that comes from giving, which he hints at at the end of verse 11 and states more clearly in verse 12.

It causes thanksgiving to God for the administration of this service, not only supplies the needs of the saints, which is good enough reason to do it in itself, but also is abounding through many thanksgivings to God. So that the harvest of this sowing. Is not only that it provides the needs of the people who you give to, it also brings honor and glory to God.

It provides many people to give thanks to God. Not only are their temporal needs met, which is a good thing, but they end up giving thanks to God for your generosity. And God receives praise and worship.

And if you've ever been on the receiving end of generosity, when you were in deep need and you'd look to God, you didn't know where it was coming from and it came, you know

how your appreciation to God is spontaneous. And I mean, God receives praise. And that's really what the universe is here for, is for God to receive praise.

The more he gets, the better. And your giving is likely to contribute to that. While the proof of this ministry, verse 13.

They glorify God for the fall through the proof of this ministry. They glorify God for the obedience of your confession to the gospel of Christ and for your liberal sharing with them and all men. And by their prayer for you, there's another benefit that comes from giving.

They'll pray for you. If they see you as a cash cow, they'll pray that you keep having cash. That's not really, of course, what he means, but that is true.

It's easy to remember to pray for people who are a source of your livelihood. Pray that they'll live long, you know, their death or their, if they go into poverty, it's going to hurt your, your livelihood. Now, I'm not saying that Paul is referring principally to selfish motivations like this, but it is the case that giving to two people is, is more likely to have you be on their prayer list.

Not because they're trading their prayers for your money. It's not that they're selling prayers. You send me \$10 and I go up in the prayer tower and pray for you.

It's not that. It's just that they will more spontaneously remember you out of gratitude when they pray and wish blessing on you and pray for you. And so he says, their prayer for you, who long for you because of the exceeding grace of God in you.

Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift. His final statement. So these are the many benefits that come, he says in verses six through 15 from your giving.

First of all, obviously it helps the, it helps the needs of the saints. That's one reason. And if that were the only reason it'd be reason enough to give just out of love for them that they need it.

You give because they need it, not because you're going to get something back. But there are additional benefits. One is that you're sowing seeds which result in a crop of righteousness, which is simply a way of saying that you are made more righteous or you are, you are put in right standing with God, not in the sense of being justified as you as being saved, but rather that it's a righteous thing for you to do.

And you are more righteous for doing it than for not doing it. And the very act, the very privilege of being righteous is the benefit you receive from giving. But additional to that, God is likely to enrich you in all things for all liberality.

That is, God is able to make all grace abound to you that you would have all sufficiency

in all things. He says in verse eight that God provides all your needs because you provide the needs of others. Paul said that to the Philippians in chapter four.

They had sent him a gift and because he had received their gift, he says, and my God is able to supply all your need or my God will supply all your need. According to his riches and glory by Christ Jesus. If you give to God and to God's concerns like the poor, then he will give to you, Paul says.

And finally, a couple other things that are benefits is one is that God gets more praise as a result because people who are poor and get gifts, praise God for them. And the giver will probably be prayed for more because the people who receive the gift spontaneously out of appreciation are more likely to remember them in prayer. So there's a payback.

And if there was no payback, giving should still be done. But there is a payback. You get to be right in your heart before God.

You get to have people praying for you. You get to have God committed to helping you with your needs because you've helped others. The merciful shall obtain mercy.

And also, of course, God gets something out of this as well because he gets praised and thanked by those who have received of your generosity. And that's how Paul argues his case for giving. It's a good argument and thorough.

But we're done with it now. And so next time we'll come back to that last portion that makes up the conclusion of 2 Corinthians 10-13.