

2 Corinthians 8-9

- 1) The Corinthians have already agreed to support the hard-up saints in Judea (9:5), but they have had their doubts about Paul since making this pledge. Having defended himself in chapters 1-7 from their doubts and allegations, Paul now pulls out all the stops to motivate them to follow through and give generously to the collection:
 - He uses **examples**: Jesus (8:9), God (9:10, 15), and the Macedonians (8:1-7)¹ who begged to give even beyond their means
 - Paul emphasizes that they must be freely motivated by gratitude to God in their generosity (9:7)
 - He says failure to give would bring **shame**, on them and on him – very potent in that culture (9:4)
 - He reassures them that **God will supply their needs** (9:8), maybe even using the Judeans (8:14)
 - He says it's part of **spiritual growth** (8:7)
 - He points out that their obedience – their **passing Paul's test** (8:8) – will bring **glory to God** (9:12)
 - And after all, it's **only fair** that they share with those in need (8:13-15)

Some months after this, Paul wrote Romans (15:26-27) mentioning that the churches from Achaia (which includes Corinth, the capital of Achaia) were happy to contribute to the offering – so it appears Paul was successful in motivating them. And clearly whatever he said to the Macedonians (plus the work the Holy Spirit) was wildly successful.

Which of the methods Paul employs above do we use when encouraging Christians to give generously, and how do we do it differently? How's that working for us?

- 2) Paul encourages contribution to the collection using a quotation from Exodus 16:18, "The one who had much did not have too much, and the one who had little did not have too little." This quote describes the manna in the desert. What principle is Paul establishing from this quote, and how is it applied to the Corinthians? What would it look like to plan your household budget on this verse?
- 3) Paul here is challenging the Corinthians to step up and do something which is difficult, sacrificial, valuable, and a growth step for them. This is an example of a more general technique of leadership, which is to *call* others to particular tasks – a technique Jesus used often, such as when he called Peter on the beach to feed his sheep, or called the rich young ruler to forsake his riches. Listen to the excerpt from Dennis McCallum's "How to Motivate People" (XSI 2007), 42:00-48:00. How have you been called in the past? How might you, or your church leadership, use this technique to empower and direct members of your church or flock?
- 4) Paul says that "one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully" (9:6). This passage has sometimes been used to support a health-and-wealth message. Paul grounds this by quoting Psalm 112:9 (9:9). Psalm 112 certainly *sounds* like it supports a health and wealth message: those who fear the Lord and are generous to the poor are told that "wealth and riches are in their houses" (112:3) echoing a theme in

1 Bonus *Fun Fact*: the Macedonians, including the Thessalonians and Philippians, were rivals of the Corinthians, making this example all the more potent (*IVP BBC* on 8:1).

Proverbs, “A generous person will be enriched, and one who gives water will get water” (Prov 11:24-25; see also 22:9, 27; 21:13; 29:7; 14:21). Barnett addresses this when he writes (p. 154),

In the Old Testament it is clear that the multiplication of resources was viewed as the blessing of God. In the last chapter of Job, God gave the faithful sufferer twice the prosperity he enjoyed before the onset of his troubles. In the New Testament, however, this enrichment is reinterpreted as spiritual faithfulness [Eph 1:7-8; Col 2:2] and caring support in the family of Christians [Gal 6:10].

Is Barnett right? Did he just say not to rely on any OT promises which are material rather than spiritual?

- 5) Paul says the Macedonians actually begged “earnestly for the privilege of sharing in this ministry to the saints” (8:4). It’s clear that they did not want to be left out of something important that God was doing, that they wanted to share in the gift of getting to contribute to the poor in Judea.

This sort of enthusiasm for sacrifice is a bellwether of the work of the Spirit; when people are piling on the give up time and money, you know God’s at work. Where is this going on in your church?

- 6) Paul wants believers to be deliberate and thoughtful in their giving (9:7) but to give for the right reasons; giving must be voluntary (8:3; 9:5), eager (8:12), cheerful and not reluctant or under compulsion (9:7). Our emotional state when giving speaks volumes of our motives, and can confirm that we are acting out of true gratitude and compassion. In fact, when we give cheerfully we imitate God himself. At the heart of these chapters is an appeal for us to give out of gratitude for Jesus’ love.

Why is motive so important? Isn’t obedience what’s important? Isn’t that the point of the parable of the two sons (Mt 21:28-32)?

- 7) Paul says he is actually *testing* the genuineness of their love (8:8; “test” in some other translations is “prove”). And in fact, by using the “aorist subjunctive” in 9:4, Paul indicates that this isn’t simply a rubber stamp; he knows it’s a real possibility that they might fail.

We are used to being tested by trying circumstances (as in 8:2 and Heb 2:18), and anticipate our work for the kingdom being tested on the day of judgment (1 Cor 3:13), but here Paul is doing the testing. Now, it’s true that the Corinthians themselves promised to make a contribution (9:5). And it’s not just the Corinthians – the custodian of the collection mentioned in 8:22 has also been by Paul “tested in many ways and found earnest” (see also 1 Tim 3:10). Still, this is a very non-Western move; the last thing an American Christian wants is to feel like the pastor or leader is testing him or her.

Can you think of even one instance where you have seen a church leader test you or someone else in the church? Can you imagine doing that yourself, or is it too non-Western? When might it be productive?



Fun fact: Most American synagogues finance their operations by charging dues. Dues are “typically calculated using a tiered system of rates based on family size and member age, or a ‘fair share’ system, in which members are asked to pay 1 to 2.5 percent of their income.” So, unlike Christian churches, synagogues tell you what you owe.

“Synagogues do not turn away people who cannot pay, but generally do require those members who cannot afford the full dues to appeal for an abatement.” (NYT, “The ‘Pay What You Want’ Experiment at Synagogues”, Michael Paulson, Feb 2, 2015, p. A8)

Leader's Introduction:

Paul has spent the last seven chapters defending himself from various allegations.

Recall Paul's disastrous visit to Corinth. In it, someone had done something heinous enough that Paul had called for his being disciplined. When the Corinthians chose not to, Paul left. Sometime later he sent them a lost letter calling them to task, and he sent Titus to follow up and assess the situation. When he finally saw Titus again (recall Titus failed to reach their meeting place, leaving Paul beside himself), he learned the majority *had* supported disciplining the offender, but some new leaders had moved in and were pulling them in the wrong direction.

Hence the allegations. Paul responds to those, but he doesn't want to give up on the collection for the saints in Judea, who have had to content not just with religious persecution but also famine. The Corinthians had pledged support but were wavering, and Paul wants this to be resolved before he visits, so that in the midst of all the other possible conflict he isn't asking for money.

Of course, Paul takes great precautions to be clearly above board, by having the churches appoint members to the delegation which will take the money to Judea.

This collection promises to create and strengthen ties between Jewish Christians and Gentiles and even is a fulfillment of OT prophecies relating the two. It also of course will help the brothers and sisters in need.

2 Corinthians has a great deal to teach Christian leaders. In these two chapters Paul demonstrates how to motivate Christians in a very difficult area – money.