

SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS FOR 12/13/09

2 CORINTHIANS 8:15-9:5

Having shared his joy over the Corinthians' earnestness of response and their earnestness on Paul's behalf, actions that are direct results of their godly sorrow, Paul continues the theme of urging the Corinthians to follow through with their intentions for the Jerusalem church. This idea of being earnest (eager desire, haste, diligence) is woven throughout chapters 7-9 and in his use of the term, Paul pushes the Corinthians to follow through on their desire with actions that become it. How often do our hearts well up with the desire to help someone in need and yet the busyness of our lives, or even our perceptions of the person in need, hold us back. Paul is addressing the same sort of situation in Corinth, with the exception that it is on a much larger scale. Paul never questions the ability of the Corinthians to give, but after answering some of the concerns he anticipated (Do we have to give above and beyond what we have? Do we have to suffer in order to relieve other people's suffering?), Paul will now answer the question of his own financial responsibility, and in so doing put to rest the concerns that the Corinthians have. With all barriers removed, there is no reason for them not to give as they once desired to do.

2 Corinthians 8:16-8:24

In this section, Paul tells the Corinthians that he will be sending Titus to them again, as well as two other well-respected brothers to aid them in the completion of the collection. In 8:16, Paul draws upon two prominent themes: grace (thanks) and earnestness. Paul writes that he is thankful to God who has moved in the heart of Titus to be "earnest" on behalf of the Corinthians. Titus has a longstanding relationship with this church and it is clear that God has given him a deep love for them, and a desire to see them prove themselves to be diligent as well. It is also clear that the Corinthians respect and love Titus in return. This next meeting with Titus should be one of sheer joy. Titus will come to collect funds for Jerusalem and the Corinthians should be overflowing in their generosity, but also in the gratitude of being considered fellow workers and partners in the gospel. This is however what Paul hopes. Titus has shared with Paul that the original desire of the Corinthians has waned and Paul entrusts Titus to reignite the smoldering flames. Not only did Paul ask Titus to embark upon this mission, but Titus went on his own accord, likely basking in the comfort he received from the Corinthians on his previous visit (7:7). On the next visit, there will be two "brothers" accompanying Titus on his trip. Paul describes the first brother as "whose fame in the gospel has spread through all the churches," (8:18) and as "having been appointed by the churches to travel with him in this work of gathering the collection (8:19). Although numerous suggestions have been put forth as to who this brother might be (Luke, Timothy, Sopater, Gaius, Aristarchus, and Tychicus—the latter four accompanied Paul on his trip to Jerusalem to deliver the collection, Acts 20:4), Paul leaves us guessing. The point is that this person has the support and commendation of the Macedonian churches, not to mention the support of Paul. Not only is he recommended by many to participate in the work of collecting funds and delivering them to Jerusalem, he has proven himself in his character. In 8:22, Paul also mentions

another brother who will accompany this “famous” brother and Titus. He is one who has been tested and found diligent (earnest) in many things, but he also has great confidence in the Corinthians. Paul describes Titus as his partner and fellow worker and the two brothers as messengers of the churches (8:23). Although Paul has previously proven that he does not need letters of commendation because the changed lives of the Corinthians prove the validity of his ministry, here Paul takes a moment to provide a letter of commendation on behalf of these two brothers who will be coming to Corinth. These men operate with the confidence of Paul, Titus, and the churches in Macedonia. Paul writes that these men will be there to provide financial accountability regarding the collection. The Corinthians may be suspicious of Paul because of the accusations made against him, but Paul puts all the necessary protection in place to ensure that the collection will be properly administered. Paul is very cognizant that his actions are not only viewed by men, but more importantly that they are displayed before the Lord. Knowing that God is so involved in his life, Paul seems to put human accountability in place because the Corinthians needed the assurance. Paul’s eternal view of life with Christ connects his present actions with his future life and becomes a great source of motivation to make right decisions. Throughout 1 and 2 Corinthians, Paul urges his readers to be future focused. It seems that we often get caught up in looking good in terms of what others can see, but not acknowledging the behavior that is done in secret. Paul’s perspective is that there are no secrets; all things are laid bare before God and this provides assurance that he will act honorably considering the collection that the Corinthians are asked to entrust to him.

As Paul commends these men to the Corinthians, he uses two phrases to qualify the work that they are doing: 1) a work that is being administered by us for the glory of the Lord (8:19) and 2) a glory to Christ (8:23). This collection is more than a treatise on giving. Paul sees something far more important, something that reaches the eternal in his encouragement for the Corinthians to participate in this gracious work. Paul and his fellow workers have shown their eagerness and their readiness, now Paul asks the Corinthians to do the same, to revive the desire they once had, to show their solidarity and compassion for the Jerusalem church, and to enter into this element of ministry. In 2 Cor. 3, Paul pitted the fading glory of the Mosaic Law against the surpassing glory of the New Covenant ministry. The conclusion of his argument was that we are all being transformed from one type of glory to another in the Lord. Paul is asking them to allow Christ to transform them as they give themselves to this collection. There is a promise of something far greater than a depleted bank account that Paul suggests will be theirs. There is no way to quantify the benefits of being compassionate, of giving to others, or setting our own desires aside for the moment in order to provide a blessing to those who are in need. Paul describes this as something glorious, but the Corinthians will only know this glory if they participate. Paul concludes this section with the climax of chapter 8 in v. 24. Here Paul uses an imperative verb to tell the Corinthians to *show* the churches the proof of their love and the reason for boasting about the Corinthians. Paul is referring not to the Jerusalem church, but to the Macedonian churches and he desires that the confidence that he has had in the Corinthians prove to be true.

2 Corinthians 9:1-5

As we move into chapter 9, Paul continues to encourage the Corinthians to complete what they started regarding the Jerusalem collection. It seems though that he exerts a little bit more pressure as he now mentions his own impending visit to Corinth. In 9:1, Paul writes that it is superfluous to write about the ministry to the saints (the church in Jerusalem). There is no need to write about this particular ministry because they are well acquainted with it already. Paul had previously received a report that the Corinthians had a strong desire to support this collection and that they had begun to lay aside funds. The eagerness and readiness of the Corinthians encouraged the churches in the surrounding area of Achaia (a region in which Corinth was the capitol) to do the same. The Macedonians were also in the process of giving generously and sacrificially. In the midst of this, Titus gave a second report to Paul that the eagerness of the Corinthians had petered out. Paul sends Titus and the other two brothers to Corinth to help address any lingering concerns, to revive the Corinthians, and to allow them to save face among the churches. It seems a little manipulative on Paul's behalf to bring up the concept of the shame that would come from failing to follow through, but Paul is speaking as a father to his children. Paul knows the consequences that will ensue if this wealthy church backs out of its promise and he wants them to do the right thing, but also to experience the benefits of doing the right thing. The subject is partially about giving, but it is about being a beacon and a light to fellow believers and to the world too. Paul sees the Corinthians for who they are, and he sees their current behavior as unrepresentative. Paul is using strong language to urge them to view themselves with the same perspective. Paul gives the Corinthians the resources (Titus and the two brothers) to help them prepare this collection, but he also gives them the added incentive of accountability in the form of his impending visit. Paul will soon visit Corinth and he will likely be accompanied by several Macedonians who will see the collection through to Jerusalem. It is Paul's great desire that the Corinthians will prove him to be a proud father, that they will resume their activity that was spurred on by a longing in their hearts, and that they will show their support for Jerusalem, but also for the churches in Achaia and in Macedonia. Paul has spent a considerable amount of time answering the concerns of the Corinthians and extolling his confidence in them. At the end of 9:5, he mentions one final problem to overcome and that is covetousness. This will be the subject of the remainder of chapter 9, but it is prefaced by the subject of the bountiful gift (or grace) which is reminiscent of the indescribable gift of Christ.

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2 CORINTHIANS 8:16-9:5

Read 2 Corinthians 8:16-24

2 Corinthians 8:16 – 24

¹⁶ But thanks (**grace**) be to God who puts the same **earnestness** on your behalf in the heart of Titus. ¹⁷ For he not only accepted our appeal, but being himself very **earnest**, he has gone to you of his own accord. ¹⁸ We have sent along with him the brother whose fame in the things of the gospel has spread through all the churches; ¹⁹ and not only this, but he has also been appointed by the churches to travel with us in this **gracious** work, which is being administered by us for the glory of the Lord Himself, and to show our **readiness**, ²⁰ taking precaution so that no one will discredit us in our administration of this generous gift (**grace**); ²¹ for we have regard for what is honorable, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men. ²² We have sent with them our brother, whom we have often tested and found **diligent** (earnest) in many things, but now even more **diligent** (earnest) because of his great confidence in you. ²³ As for Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker among you; as for our brethren, they are messengers of the churches, a glory to Christ. ²⁴ Therefore openly before the churches, show them the proof of your love and of our reason for boasting about you.

1. What precautions does Paul take to ensure that the funds collected will be well protected?

2. What would prevent you from giving to a church or a charitable organization? Is this a good reason for not giving at all?

3. Paul is strongly motivated by the fact that all his actions are on display before the Lord. Do you feel this same sense of motivation in your life? Why or why not?

4. Paul speaks of an earnestness and a diligence regarding giving to this collection. Do you feel this way regarding giving? Do you know anyone who has the gift of giving?

5. How can giving be a proof of love?

Read 2 Corinthians 9:1-5

2 Corinthians 9:1-5

*For it is superfluous for me to write to you about this ministry to the saints; ² for I know your **readiness**, of which I boast about you to the Macedonians, namely, that Achaia has been prepared since last year, and your zeal has stirred up most of them. ³ But I have sent the brethren, in order that our boasting about you may not be made empty in this case, so that, as I was saying, you may be prepared; ⁴ otherwise if any Macedonians come with me and find you unprepared, we-- not to speak of you-- will be put to shame by this confidence. ⁵ So I thought it necessary to urge the brethren that they would go on ahead to you and arrange beforehand your previously promised bountiful gift, so that the same would be ready as a bountiful gift and not affected by covetousness.*

6. How does this passage strike you? Do you think Paul has the right to speak to the Corinthians this way? Why or why not?

7. Have you been in a situation where you initially embarked upon something with a great amount of zeal, only to have the desire wane? What happened?

8. Do you have anyone in your life who can talk to you as honestly as Paul did with the Corinthians? How do you think you would receive such an honest rebuke/encouragement?