

## 2 Cor 9:1-5 Practical Principles of Giving

You are probably aware that several of the larger churches in town host fund raising events regularly. For example, every fall, the Catholic church in town puts on an international food festival. Part of that event is a beer tent—that's right, you go to church to buy beer. They are not the only ones trying to profit from the sale of alcohol. The Lutherans have wine and cheese tasting fund raisers. I assume other churches do similar kinds of events to raise funds for the operation of their churches.

The Bible says nothing about fund raising events. All it mentions is generous, sacrificial giving by the people. I would not say that fund raisers are sinful or unorthodox, but they are not really biblical. Biblically speaking, the funds necessary for the operation of the church come from the rich generosity of those who give.

If you've been here over the last few weeks, you know that 2 Cor 8-9 are all about rich generosity toward the Lord's work. These chapters deal with an offering that Paul was collecting for the poor saints at Jerusalem. The people at Corinth had agreed to participate in this offering, but they were a little reluctant to actually collect the money.

The first few verses of chapter 9 deal with the preparation and collection of this offering. Paul is a bit concerned that the folks in Corinth would fail to follow through on their promise to give.

In today's passage, we find several practical principles of giving; guidelines that tell us how we ought to give.

Let's consider what the text says about giving to the Lord's work.

- I. .1 We should not need to say anything about it.
  - A. “superfluous” (περισσόν) – “not necessary, not required.” I think that it's clear that Paul would rather say nothing about this issue.

**App:** Wouldn't it be nice if discussing the financial situation of the church were superfluous/unnecessary? It would be great not to have to say anything about money, financial reports or budgets; that would be fine with me. If the money just came in and we could pay our bills and pay the salaries and pay the missionaries without ever mentioning money, that would be great.

But in reality, for various practical reasons, we have to talk about money and keep track of it and report on it. Budget reports and financial planning are necessary parts of the life of the church.

- B. Even though Paul would rather say nothing about money, that's the very thing he proceeds to talk about. He takes two chapters to talk about money and generosity. He's reminding them about their obligation, with the hopes that they did not really need to be reminded.

**App:** We should not need to harp on money issues or harass people about giving. People should know their financial obligations and fulfill them without having to be reminded. In a perfect world, we simply would not have to talk about it. But we don't live in a perfect world. Practically speaking, we may need to remind people about it occasionally, although we'd rather not.

II. .1 We should know the purpose for it.

- A. It's a "ministry to the saints." The word for "ministry" (διακονία) is just "service." We serve the saints every time we give.
- B. Cf. 8:4—"fellowship of the ministering to the saints." Giving brings us into partnership and union with everyone who is giving.

**App:** One of the ways that we can serve others is to participate in the offerings. We should want to serve the saints. When we put the money in the offering plate, we should remind ourselves that this offering is a way of supporting those who are serving God. It's a way of helping those in need. It's a way of fulfilling the work and purpose of the church.

III. .2 We should have the right attitudes about it.

- A. They had been "willing." The word "willingness" (προθυμία) refers to eager desire, enthusiasm, or readiness. So it's probably a bit more positive than mere willingness. They were eager and enthusiastic about participating.
- B. They had been "ready" – "Achaia was ready..." – Corinth was the capitol city of the region of southern Greece known as Achaia. Paul had boasted about the readiness of the Corinthians to participate in this offering.
- C. They had "zeal" for this project. To have "zeal" for something is to have a deep concern or devotion for it. They heard about this offering for the poor saints in Jerusalem, and they were deeply moved regarding this need. They showed some excitement and enthusiasm for this project.

D. So their initial attitude toward this offering was eager desire, readiness, and deep concern. In other words, they were very interested in participating; they wanted to help; they wanted to give. The plight of the poor saints at Jerusalem moved them emotionally, and they wanted to contribute to their aid.

**App:** That's the kind of attitude we should have about giving. I hope that all of us are sensitive to the needs we hear about, especially from those engaged in Christian service. We should be willing, ready, and eager in our giving.

Sadly, the attitude that many have in giving is reluctance and sorrow. All they consider is the money that they are losing for themselves by giving. They don't think about the blessings of giving, only the personal loss they experience when they give. That should not be our attitude.

**Trans:** The proper attitude toward giving is eagerness and readiness because we know that our giving is a means of serving other believers.

IV. .2end We should be exemplary in it.

A. .2end The Corinthians "stirred up the majority." Their words "stirred up" (ἐρεθίζω) means "to stimulate a change in motivation or attitude; to rouse, to provoke, to spur on to action."

B. The other churches were motivated to give when they heard about how the Corinthians were going to give. In fact, one of the reasons for the generosity of the Macedonians was that Paul told them about how eager the Corinthians were to give.

**App:** Normally speaking, we don't tell other people how much we give. The amount that we give is usually a private matter. So we don't usually set an example by telling others how much we give. We are not supposed to advertise our charitable giving. Cf. Mt 6:1-4—give your alms in secret.

But in some ways, we can set an example in giving. Parents should set the example of giving for their children. When the children are raised in a home where the parents are generous, they pick up that attitude and also become generous. Children learn to give from their parents; parents set an example. If your children know that you give generously and sacrificially to the work of the ministry, they will probably follow that example.

As a church, we can set an example to other churches in our generous giving toward missions.

**Question:** If everyone in church gave the way that you do—i.e., if they followed your example of giving—what would be the result? What would be the financial condition of the church if everyone gave like you do? I.e., the same percentage and the same attitude, the same willingness and eagerness, or the same reluctance. If everyone else were following your example in giving, would it have a positive or a negative impact for the church? Would the work of the Lord in the world be positively or negatively affected if everyone else gave like you do?

**Trans:** Even if no one else knows what we give, we should still give as if we were trying to set a good example for others.

V. .3 We may need to be reminded about it. We may need some help in arranging our giving.

A. Note the word “yet.” Paul hopes that he didn’t really need to write to them about this, yet he’s writing this part of the letter to remind them and to prepare them. They were willing and enthusiastic at the beginning of this project, but they had not followed through on their giving. Their words had not translated into deeds.

B. He’s sent the brothers to prepare them.

1. .3 “I have sent the brethren” – it seems likely that these men were the ones who brought this letter to the Corinthians.

2. .5 the brethren are there to “prepare your generous gift beforehand.” So the people at Corinth needed a little help in making financial arrangements so that they could participate in this offering.

**App:** As much as we’d rather not hear about money matters at church, occasionally it is appropriate for us to be reminded about our financial obligations. Hopefully, we don’t need a group of outsiders to come in and remind us to be generous in our giving.

But we may need a little help in arranging our giving. Everyone should be able to give something if we arrange our affairs so that we can give. If we prepare ourselves and our financial affairs, we should be able to contribute. Some people might need a little extra help in bringing order and organization to their lives so that they can tithe or give generously.

People often don't give, or give a very small amount, because they make poor financial choices. Their priorities are out of whack. But you can change that; you can get your financial house in order, and then you'll have the ability to give as you should.

VI. .3b-5 We don't want to be unprepared or ashamed about it. I.e., we should be thoughtful and organized about it.

A. Although the Corinthians had been eager and concerned about this offering originally, Paul was still concerned that his confidence in the people might be "in vain" (vs. 3) – empty, useless, hollow, void. They had not collected any money yet, and he was worried that they would neglect or forget about this commitment. He's concerned that their supposed eagerness, enthusiasm, and readiness to give would result in nothing.

**Quote:** The boasting would prove hollow if, through the lack of the necessary organization, the Corinthians failed to translate their enthusiasm for the project into action.<sup>1</sup>

This is a common problem—failing to translate interest into action. We may be interested in a project in theory, but in reality, when given the opportunity to do something, we don't follow through. And that can be embarrassing....

B. .4 Imagine their embarrassment ("ashamed") if Paul and his colleagues came to collect this offering and the Corinthians had nothing to give.

1. According to Acts 20:4, several of the men from the churches of Macedonia were part of this group that would be transporting the offering. The people of the Macedonian churches had given generously from their poverty, partly because they had heard that the Corinthians were going to give. If, after Paul boasted about the Corinthians being ready, he shows up and they are not ready, it would be a huge embarrassment to everyone involved.

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<sup>1</sup> Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Milton Keynes, UK: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co.; Paternoster Press, 2005), 624.

2. He didn't want the church to be caught off-guard when he and others arrived to pick up this offering. He wanted to avoid last minute collections. So these men arrived beforehand to help the Corinthians get their financial affairs in order.

**App:** Lack of generous giving should be an embarrassment. Of course, normally, others don't know what you are giving or failing to give; it's a private matter. But if you are either not giving anything or are giving at a very low level, you should feel ashamed about it.

As I've mentioned before, it's embarrassing how little the typical church-goer gives to his church. The average giving is about 4%. Only about 5% tithe. If you ask me, that is a shameful amount; that is embarrassingly small.

If we want to give a reasonable amount, we have to prepare ourselves to do so. We have to be "ready."

- C. Paul uses the word "ready" or "prepared" here several times. In fact, he uses four different words to describe preparation or lack of it.
  1. .3end Paul's concern was that the people be "prepared" (παρασκευάζω) for this.
  2. .4a He does not want them to be "unprepared" (ἀπαρασκευάστος), which would make Paul's confident boasting about them shameful (vs. 4end).
  3. .5b Instead, we should be prepared (προκαταρτίζω)—"to be ready/prepared in advance."
  4. .5c He uses another word, "ready" (ἔτοιμος)—prepared.

**App:** There's an obvious emphasis here on thoughtful and intentional preparation. We should prepare ourselves to give in the sense of thinking about it carefully and giving purposefully/intentionally. Cf. vs. 7—"purposes in his heart."

Giving should be something we think about and prepare for, not something off the cuff or done thoughtlessly. "Oh, they are collecting an offering. Well, let's see what's in my wallet." We ought to be thoughtful and intentional in our giving.

For me personally, I always feel better about giving when I'm prepared to give. I've taken time to think about it and I've come to the service ready to give. I feel a bit awkward when I'm at an event where they are collecting an offering and I'm not prepared to give or I have not thought about it. Giving should be something we think about, pray about, and do intentionally—we budget for it, plan for it, and get ready for it. Giving is much more meaningful and satisfying when we plan for it ahead of time.

**Trans:** Prepare yourself for giving; be thoughtful and organized about it.

VII. We should fulfill our promises about it.

- A. .5b “which you had previously promised” – they had made the commitment; they had obligated themselves to participate.
- B. .2 Paul had told the Macedonians churches that “Achaia was ready a year ago.” They had already committed to give toward this offering, but now it seems that perhaps they were not actually ready. They were willing and zealous about it originally, but they had not actually collected the funds.

**App:** I don't know what you have promised in your heart to give to the Lord through the church. But I assume that many of us have determined to give generously. Whatever we have determined to give, we should follow through on and give. If we have promised to give, then we should give.

I would suggest that we determine to give a certain percentage of our income. I think the tithe is an appropriate amount.

It's a lot easier to make the promise than it is to actually fulfill the promise. If you have made a commitment to give a certain amount, you should follow through on that promise.

VIII. .5end We should have the proper motivations about it. “as a matter of generosity and not as a grudging obligation”

- A. Generosity should motivate us to give. Paul didn't want to command them to give (cf. 8:8a—“I speak not by commandment”). He wanted them to give out of their own generosity.

He's reminding them and gently exhorting them to follow through on their promise, but he wants them to do it out of love, not because he is compelling/commanding/forcing them to give.

Giving is a much more pleasant experience if we give for the right motives and purposes. Our giving should come out of love and generosity.

B. He uses the word “generosity” twice in vs. 5.

The words “generous gift” and “generosity” are based on the same root word (εὐλογία); it’s often translated as “blessing, a benefit bestowed.” Generous giving is an act of blessing.

1. Generous giving is a blessing to those who receive the funds.
2. Generous giving is a blessing to God; it’s an act of worship.
3. Generous giving is even a blessing to ourselves. “It’s more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35).

When we give, we are bestowing a benefit on others; it’s a blessing to them, to God, and to us. We should keep that in mind as we give.

C. Grudging obligation should not be the motivation for giving.

1. The original word here (πλεονεξία) is usually translated as “covetousness.” But the sense of the word seems to be something like “that which is given under compulsion; something given only grudgingly; something extorted through force.” Giving in this way results in a scanty contribution given grudgingly or reluctantly.<sup>2</sup>

One scholar translates this word as “torn away from greed.” Giving with a heart ensnared by greed can never receive God’s approval, for greed ... has taken God’s rightful place (Col. 3:5).<sup>3</sup>

2. Our motivation for giving should not be external pressure—“grudging obligation.” We should not feel like someone is squeezing it out of us. Grace giving is voluntary giving, not under compulsion.

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<sup>2</sup> Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Milton Keynes, UK: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co.; Paternoster Press, 2005), 630.

<sup>3</sup> Simon J. Kistemaker and William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, vol. 19, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953–2001), 309.



3. One of the marks of covetousness is remorseful and reluctant giving. When you love money, you are not generous; you give only because you feel an external pressure to give; someone is squeezing it out of you; someone is tearing it away from you. And when you feel that way, you typically are rather miserly in your giving—cf. vs. 6, giving “sparingly” instead of “bountifully.”

**App:** If you give under a feeling of grudging obligation, you need to get right with God. We should have a willing, enthusiastic eagerness to participate in grace giving. We should sense the blessedness of giving. God’s grace produces generosity, not grudging obligation.

When we think about how we give to the Lord’s work, we should follow these practical principles. Let’s review them:

- ✓ Giving should be such a normal part of our lives that we give generously without being pressured into it. It’s not necessary to remind us about it.
- ✓ We give because we want to be involved in ministry to the saints; we give for the benefit of the work of the Lord here and around the world.
- ✓ We should be eager and enthusiastic in our giving. Our deep concern for others should result in generous giving.
- ✓ We should give in a way that sets a good example for others. If people knew how much we are giving, would that be a good example or a bad one? Would we be embarrassed about how little we give if others found out?
- ✓ Some of us might need help and encouragement in our giving. We need to organize and arrange our financial house so we can give more generously.
- ✓ We should be thoughtful and organized in our giving. We don’t want to be embarrassed by our lack of giving. We must plan for it and be ready to give.
- ✓ We must keep our promises about giving. If we’ve committed to giving a certain amount, then that’s what we should give.
- ✓ We should have the proper motivations for giving. Generous giving should be a blessing, not a grudging obligation.

These are very practical guidelines for giving, and I hope we all take them to heart. Perhaps some of need to admit that we are not following these guidelines. Perhaps some of us should be embarrassed about our giving, or lack of it. I trust that the Spirit of God will work in our hearts so that we can follow these practical guidelines for giving.