

2 COR. 8:1 – 11:6

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V. The Collection for the Saints in Jerusalem - 8:1 - 9:15

Background on Collection

The Jewish Christians of Judea had been hit hard by outbreaks of famine during the reign of emperor Claudius (A.D. 41-54), and the largely Gentile church in Antioch had responded quickly by sending relief through Barnabas and Paul (Acts 11:27-30). In Gal. 2:10, which probably was written around A.D. 48-49, Paul tells how the leaders of the Jerusalem church urged him to continue to remember the poor, something he was eager to do. By the time he wrote 1 Corinthians (around A.D. 55), he had already begun soliciting aid from the churches in Galatia, and the Corinthians had heard about it and had asked to be allowed to participate in it (1 Cor. 16:1-4).

By the time 2 Corinthians was written (around A.D. 56), Paul had contacted the Macedonian churches, and they had begged him for the privilege of taking part in the effort. This collection was both a compassionate response to the pressing needs of the Judean Christians and an important expression of the unity of the Jewish and Gentile sections of the church (2 Cor. 8:14-15; Rom. 15:25-27).

A. Example of the Macedonians (8:1-6)

1. Paul tells the Corinthians about the generosity of the churches in Macedonia (Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea) to stimulate the Corinthians to carry out what they had earlier shown themselves ready to do. God had so worked in the hearts of the Macedonians, that despite the fact they were undergoing a severe trial and were dirt poor, they had abundant joy which overflowed, in the midst of their poverty, in a wealth of generosity. In actuality, they probably gave a small amount, but when measured against their poverty, it was a very liberal gift.

2. The Macedonians not only gave in keeping with their ability, which is all anyone could expect, but they went above and beyond what could be expected in their situation. In other words, their generosity was extraordinary.

3. Moreover, the Macedonians did not have to be coaxed into contributing; they gave voluntarily. In fact, they urgently pleaded with Paul for the privilege of participating in the collection!

4. Not only did the Macedonians give to the collection as Paul had hoped, but they did so as a result of first having dedicated themselves to the Lord, and also to his apostles, as God would have it. In other words, their giving was not simply out of compassion but was motivated by their devotion to Christ and their commitment to his

servants (i.e., Paul and his companions). They saw that the collection being taken by Paul was in fact the work of Christ.

5. Given this tremendous example on the part of the Macedonians, Paul urged Titus to go ahead and complete the collection at Corinth, something he apparently had begun when they responded so positively to Paul's "severe letter."

B. A Plea for Liberal Giving (8:7-12)

1. As they excel in so many things -- in faith, speech, and knowledge (probably referring to spiritual gifts - see, 1 Cor. 1:5, 12:8-9), and now even in earnestness regarding Paul and in love for Paul -- Paul exhorts them to excel also in this act of benevolence.

2. He makes clear, however, that he is not commanding them to do so but encouraging them to take the opportunity to show, by the standard of the Macedonian response, the genuineness of their own love -- for the Lord, for Paul, and for fellow Christians. Love is not simply talk; it finds expression in action.

3. Paul cites the Lord Jesus as the finest example of one who showed eagerness and generosity in giving as a demonstration of his love. Christ gave up the glory of heavenly existence to come to this sinful world and ultimately to be crucified in order to bless others. See, Phil. 2:5-8.

4. Paul urges them to go ahead and complete from what they have (i.e., according to their means) the collection they previously began. He points out that the acceptability of the gift in God's eyes is judged according to what one has. In other words, generosity is always relative. It takes into consideration needs and ability of the giver. They need not balk over the actual size of the gift because that is not the test of acceptability. If they are eager to give, they will naturally give what they can, and that will be acceptable, whatever the amount.

C. The Equality of Reciprocal Need Meeting (8:13-15)

1. They should not balk over the notion that Christian giving is a one way street that flows only to some privileged group (e.g., Jewish Christians). Rather, it is a matter of equality in that all are of equal importance. Their present abundance is to supply the current needs of the poor saints in Jerusalem, and if the shoe is on the other foot, the saints in Jerusalem will supply the needs of the Corinthians.

2. This is not a call to equalize wealth among Christians but a reassurance of the equality of obligation. It is a defense of the collection against the idea that it is somehow due to the privileged status of Jewish Christians. The collection is just one example of the general Christian obligation to meet one another's material needs. This interpretation is supported by the fact Paul elsewhere instructs the wealthy to be generous (1 Tim. 6:17-19),

not to equalize their wealth, and the fact disparity of wealth *per se* went unopposed throughout the history of the church.

3. Paul cites Ex. 16:18, referring to God's provision of manna, for the point that provision is according to need. As instruments of God's provision, Christians are to meet the needs of one another.

D. The Delegates and Their Credentials (8:16-24)

1. Paul commends the three brothers who are to come to Corinth to receive the collection, the first of which is Titus. Paul thanks God that Titus shares Paul's concern for the Corinthians, a concern born of God's work in Titus's life. This concern for them is highlighted by the fact he needed no persuasion to make the considerable journey back to them; he volunteered for the assignment.

2. He then commends the brother whose praise in the gospel is throughout all the (Macedonian?) churches. This guy was a real friend of the cause of the gospel, whether as a preacher or in a more general supportive role. In addition, he had been chosen by "the churches" (doesn't say which ones) to accompany Paul's group in the administration of the collection.

3. Verse 19b provides a glimpse of the purpose of the collection. It was "for the glory of the Lord" in that it was a tangible expression of the unity of Jew and Gentile brought about by the cross. Also, it was a way for the Gentile churches to express their goodwill toward their Jewish brothers by showing their eagerness to help.

4. Paul points out that they appointed men of such impeccable credentials to receive the gift and carry it to Jerusalem to head off any charges of impropriety in their handling of this large sum. They want to avoid even the appearance of impropriety so that the beauty of this collection might in no way be sullied.

5. Paul commends the third brother by saying that he had in many ways proven to be earnest (enthusiastic or focused) and was even more so now because of his confidence in the Corinthians to "come through."

6. Vv. 23 sums up the credentials of the three delegates. If there's any question about Titus, he is Paul's partner and co-worker for the Corinthians. If there's any question about the brothers, they are messengers of the (Macedonian?) churches and, because of their lives and ministry, a credit to Christ.

7. Therefore, Paul urges the Corinthians in v. 24 to show these men their love and to vindicate Paul's boasting about them "in the presence of the churches." This last clause means either so all the churches can see it or as though in the presence of the churches from which the delegates came.

E. The Need to Be Ready (9:1-5)

1. Paul expresses his confidence in them, saying there was no need to write to them about the collection because he knows that they have long been ready to give. In fact, he has boasted to the Macedonians that those in Achaia were ready to give since last year (see, 1 Cor. 16:1-4). This commitment on their part helped to stir the Macedonians to give.

2. But the Macedonians have now completed their contribution, while the Corinthians have not yet followed through on their commitment. So while it is not necessary for Paul to write the Corinthians about participating in the collection, it is necessary to write about the present mission of Titus and the two brothers. They are coming to ensure that the Corinthians good intentions are followed by action.

3. Paul is sending the brothers to organize the gift in advance of his coming so that it will be ready when he arrives. Otherwise, if some of the Macedonians come with him (which they did - Acts 20:2-6), he and the Corinthians will be disgraced by their being unprepared -- Paul because of his misplaced confidence in his brothers and sisters in Corinth and the Corinthians because of their failure to follow through on their noble promise. In that case, the entire sense of a partnership in Christ that Paul hopes to convey in the collection will be damaged.

4. If they go ahead and get the contribution ready before Paul arrives, it will then be ready as something freely given, a gift of love. On the other hand, if they won't give until Paul comes, that suggests reluctance, and their contribution will then take on the cast of something extorted.

F. Encouragement Regarding the Collection (9:6-15)

1. Generosity and God's provision (9:6-10)

a. Paul reminds them that their level of generosity will in some sense be reflected back to them. The more they love God, as reflected in their generosity toward his needy children, the more God will bless them.

b. And part of generosity (or liberal sowing) is that the giving be voluntary. Compulsion negates generosity. The one who gives to avoid censure is not being generous; he's being forced! God loves a cheerful giver because that kind of giving is a reflection of a heart that is devoted to him.

c. They need to remember that the God they serve is able to supply them with everything they need to abound in all good works.

(1) He can provide whatever blessings they need to do good works, be they spiritual or material. And as the reference to Ps. 112:9 (111:9 in LXX, which is the source of the quotation) indicates, giving generously to the poor is a righteous deed in

the eyes of God. The point is that they ought not conclude they are unable to participate in the collection (see, 8:12). God can provide the way. Just look what he did with the Macedonians. He gave them the grace to give generously in the midst of their extreme poverty.

(2) The one who feeds the sower and provides what he needs to sow, will likewise care for them and provide them with plenty of what they need (multiplied seed) to participate in the collection. He will also increase the yield or positive results of their giving (their "righteousness"), as elaborated in vv. 11-15.

2. The fruits of their giving (9:11-15)

a. Paul switches to the present tense, indicating his confidence that they will receive generosity-producing grace (which is why many translate it as future). This generosity on their part will, through the collection, not only meet the needs of God's children in Judea but also will produce much thanksgiving to God.

b. God will be glorified for the Corinthians' faithfulness to the gospel, as evidenced by their generosity toward the needy saints.

c. Paul envisions that the grace of God that produced their generous giving will deepen the unity and bond of fellowship between the Jewish and Gentile Christians.

d. Paul ends with praise to God "for his indescribable gift," probably referring to his grace generally and to his Son specifically. Everything of value is due to God's giving.

Note: Rom. 15:25-26, written from Corinth (probably) around a year later, shows that the Corinthians did indeed contribute to the collection.

VI. Response to a New Crisis - 10:1 - 13:10

Introduction

After receiving the good news of the Corinthians response to the "severe letter," Paul began writing 2 Corinthians. We don't know how long it took to compose the letter, but it seems that he received some more bad news about the church between chaps. 9 and 10. Paul's opponents apparently launched a counteroffensive against him after Titus's successful visit and news reached Paul that the church was coming under their authority. This is the most critical situation in Paul's relationship with this church.

A. An Appeal for Obedience (10:1-6)

1. Paul has obviously been attacked as one who is "wormy." His opponents charged that when he was in Corinth he was a cowardly politician, but when he was at a safe distance, he plucked up his courage and wrote very forceful letters.

2. In appealing to them by the gentleness and graciousness of Christ, Paul demonstrates that his letters are not invariably bold, but more importantly, he reminds the Corinthians that what they consider to be shameful weakness and servility were in reality virtues exemplified by Christ. By embracing a worldly, triumphalist perspective on greatness, they were rejecting (or at least ignoring) the character of the Lord Jesus.

3. Paul's appeal is that the Corinthians exercise the necessary discipline against the Judaizing intruders ("certain persons") so that when he comes he will not have to take the strong action he is anticipating taking against them (see, 10:6).

4. These people, his opponents, consider that Paul "walks according to the flesh," meaning that he does not measure up to their standard of spirituality. In their eyes, he lives and serves at the lowly level of this world. To quote Carson, "they are accusing him of being an ineffective leader, given to excessive timidity, capable of not more than third-rate preaching, and having too little background in spiritual and visionary experiences to claim the allegiance of the Corinthians."

5. Though Paul conducts his life in the world, his detractors certainly are wrong in suggesting that he conducts himself in a worldly way. On the contrary, his weapons are spiritual, not worldly (fleshly), and they are powerful because they are related to God.

a. Paul's "weapons" are the methods of his ministry, the very thing causing his opponents to consider him worldly. He does not rely on the things they rely on, e.g., racial and covenantal pedigree, rhetorical skills, ability to command income, and visionary experiences. Ephesians 6:13-18 is a convenient list of the kind of weapons Paul no doubt has in mind.

b. Paul says that his weapons have power to demolish "strongholds," which he identifies as "reasonings (arguments, plans, or thoughts) and every high thing rising up against the knowledge of God." In other words, his spiritual weapons tear down every mental defense that humans erect against the knowledge of God.

c. And even more, these weapons take captive for Christ the very thought processes once used to deflect the knowledge of God. In other words, the mind of the convert is itself "baptized" into the Lord's service.

d. His weapons are producing results, transforming people's hearts and minds. The intruders may be good at seducing a church and introducing another gospel, but Paul is implicitly asking whether they are any good at breaking down arrogant human beings and bringing them to the refuge of the cross. The Corinthian congregation, for example, is the result of his labor (10:13-15a), not that of the intruders.

6. Paul is ready to punish every disobedience but only after the church itself has been obedient in disciplining the intruders and their followers (as they had previously done - 2 Cor. 2:6-7). If apostolic punishment is still needed, he will administer it.

B. Paul's Answer to the Charges (10:7-11)

1. To discipline the intruders as Paul has instructed, the Corinthians will have to decide whether Paul or the intruders are to be believed and followed. Paul says, "Look at the obvious facts," and then proceeds to offer obvious answers to some of the charges against him.

2. Specific charges alluded to:

a. The intruders apparently claimed to belong to Christ in some special sense (10:7b). They saw themselves as having a special calling or role (see, 11:13, 23), and Paul was presented to the Corinthians as someone who did not belong to Christ in this superior way.

b. The intruders charged Paul with inconsistency, especially in the contrast between his powerful letters and his unimpressive personal appearance (10:10). The implicit charge is that his letters project a false image, a phony boldness. In person it becomes clear, judging by their triumphalist criteria, that he is not the Christian leader he seems to be in his letters.

3. Paul's answer to the charges:

a. Paul insists that he belongs to Christ no less than his opponents. After all, were Paul so inclined, he could boast about the authority the Lord had given him without being disgraced. In other words, his boast would be substantiated by the facts. For the authority Christ gave him was for the (central) purpose of building up believers, and everyone knows that he founded the church in Corinth, built them in their faith, and protected them from errors. The self-proclaimed apostles have merely introduced friction and pulled the church down.

b. Paul says he will not boast of this authority because his opponents will then say that his strong self-defense is typical of his weighty and forceful letters and completely atypical of his person.

c. Paul insists that he is consistent, despite how it may appear. He does so by saying in effect that if the intruders continue making their accusations, they will receive such wrath when Paul arrives that all will see that he is perfectly capable of taking them on in person and not just through letters. They fail to appreciate that his forceful letters have been dictated by the circumstances at the time. If requisite circumstances exist when he visits, they will discover that he can be no less forceful in person (10:11, 13:2, 10).

C. Paul's Countercharge (10:12-18)

1. Paul et al. dare not class themselves with the intruders (those who commend themselves), as though they were a desirable group, or compare themselves to them, as though they were a spiritual standard. Indeed, the very fact they judge themselves by their own self-made criteria shows that they "don't get it." The only criteria that count are those of God.

a. They judged themselves by such things as visionary experiences, racial and cultural pedigrees, rhetorical training, and the ability to command fees, and had little concern for the criteria preferred by Paul: allegiance to the gospel of Christ, growing conformity to the character of Christ, participation in the sufferings of Christ.

b. Many Christians today have become so enamored with styles of leadership in politics, business, or the entertainment industry that they are transferring these culturally conditioned, secular criteria to the church.

2. Paul says that they will measure their boast by the standard of the jurisdiction God apportioned to them in their ministry.

a. Their mission was to preach to the Gentiles, and it included reaching as far as the Corinthians, which they in fact accomplished. So they could rightly be proud of their work in planting and nurturing the church in Corinth because, unlike the intruders, they were not latecomers who enticed away the fruit of someone else's evangelism and sought to take credit for another's work.

b. They hope that they will again be "magnified" among the Corinthians (again secure the church) and that they can reach out even beyond them in carrying out the mission given to them by God.

3. Paul understands quite well that the only acceptable boasting is boasting in the Lord.

a. Paul would boast in what God had done for him in the cross and what God had done through him by the Spirit in his ministry, but he would not boast about his talent, wealth, power, wisdom, eloquence, and the like. He boasted in God's work in his life, not in his own greatness.

b. This is so crucial because what matters most in God's universe is whether he approves of us, and he does not approve of those who boast in themselves rather than in him.

D. Groundwork for Foolish Boasting (11:1-6)

1. Paul has repeatedly insisted to the Corinthians that self-commendation is worthless (3:1, 5:12, 10:12), but the situation before him appears to demand that he stoop to

what he condemns (at least on the surface) if he is going to preserve his converts. Tasker says:

Paul is very conscious that it is no business of an apostle, or indeed of any Christian, to praise himself. Such self-commendation is only justified, in the present instance, because his affection for his converts is so great, that he will go to almost any length to prevent them from becoming dupes of unscrupulous men, and to keep them loyal to Christ.

2. Paul asks them to put up with "a little bit of foolishness" because he is embarrassed by the prospect of his imminent boasting (11:16 - 12:10). He then adds, with much irony, "but you are indeed putting up with me." What he means is that in one sense the Corinthians, misled by the intruders, were already treating him as if he were a fool rather than their father through the gospel (1 Cor. 4:15).

3. In 11:2-6 Paul provides three reasons why he expects the Corinthians to put up with the foolish boasting in which he is about to engage:

a. Because Paul is divinely jealous ("a jealousy of God") for the Corinthians (11:2-3). He has for them something of the jealousy God has for his people (see, Ex. 20:4-5).

(1) God is passionate about the loyalty of his people not only because they owe it to him but also because their wandering to other "gods" results in their exploitation and ultimately their condemnation. The Corinthians wandering from loyalty to Paul means wandering to a false gospel and will yield the same results.

(2) Paul elaborates on his jealousy by telling the Corinthians that he betrothed them to Christ that he might present them as a pure virgin to him. In the N.T., the church is the bride and Jesus is the heavenly bridegroom (Eph. 5:22-23; Rev. 19:7, 21:2, 9, 22:17). Here Paul, who was their spiritual father through the gospel, presents himself as the father of the bride. In other words, Paul is saying that when he led the Corinthians to Christ, when he founded the church, he betrothed them to Christ as a father would betroth his daughter. As an honorable father, he desires to present his daughter as a pure virgin to her prospective husband when he comes for her (at the Parousia). Instead, he hears reports that she is playing around with other lovers.

(3) Though they once manifested the sincerity and purity that is due Christ, Paul fears that they will be suckered into abandoning it. Just as Eve was lured from proper allegiance to God by Satan's craftiness, so the Corinthians were being lured from the true gospel.

b. Because they accept all kinds of nonsense from the rival apostles easily enough (11:4).

(1) The "For" which begins 11:4 probably serves a double function. It relates 11:4 both to Paul's fear that they will be deceived and to his appeal to put up with his foolishness. It is related to his fear of deception in that they are too tolerant of those who teach heresy. Heretics are not to be welcomed (see, Rev. 2:14-16, 2:20).

(2) It is related to Paul's appeal to put up with his foolishness in that, given their willingness to put up with a false gospel, putting up with a little foolish boasting from him should be a breeze.

(3) These Judaizing intruders no doubt preached that Jesus was the promised Messiah – that he performed miracles, preached the kingdom of God, died, and rose from the grave. It seems equally clear, however, that they made human acceptability to God depend in part on human works, abilities, or achievements. In other words, they rejected the *sufficiency* of Christ and his work, and in so doing, ceased to preach the biblical, true Jesus. There is only one gospel, and if you materially alter it, it is no longer the gospel and can no longer save you from your sins (see, Gal. 1:8-9).

c. Because Paul is not inferior to the "super-apostles" who are demeaning him (11:5-6)

(1) Many sophisticated audiences in the Greek-speaking world favored a stylized rhetoric, and not to come up to rhetorical eloquence was considered a mark of inferior training or ability.

(2) Paul concedes that he is untrained in public speaking, but he does have knowledge of the true gospel, and that's what counts. These people were exalting form over substance, making stylized rhetoric more important than the truth. If the right criteria were used, Paul was not the least bit inferior as a preacher.