*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

May 11 - 16

*Second Corinthians Chapters Eight and Nine*

**Monday, May 11 2 Corinthians 8:1-5**

*“The gift for the believers in Jerusalem”*

 As we read these verses it is apparent that the members of the mother church in Jerusalem were suffering from extreme poverty. The exact cause is not known, but it could have come from a number of sources: a drought, persecution by their employers because of their faith, or even from the brief experiment in which the members sold their property and put it into a common warehouse (Acts 2:44-45). But, whatever the cause, the need was very real.

 Paul knew that the gentile Christians in Corinth needed to experience the joy that comes from helping others – especially their Jewish brethren. Consequently, when the church in Jerusalem asked him to remember the “poor saints in Jerusalem,” he gladly responded and began a campaign to involve every gentile church in an offering. Earlier Paul had mentioned the offering (1 Corinthians 16:1-4) and there had been an eager response, but then that enthusiasm had waned, probably as the church’s relationship with Paul had been strained. But now Paul seeks to revive their interest in the offering.

*We thank you for what you have given us, Lord, so we can share it with others. Amen.*

**Tuesday, May 12 2 Corinthians 8:6-9**

*“The generous grace of our Lord Jesus Christ”*

 Paul’s word choices for describing the collection are all derived from the vocabulary of human relationships with God and sacred acts of worship, and none of them make any direct mention of money. Our application of Paul’s thoughts on giving must therefore emphasize Paul’s reasons for giving. Otherwise, people will quickly decide that requests to give are nothing more than a thinly veiled plea for money. Paul’s primary concern is not the “budget,” but the fruition of genuine grace in the lives of believers.

 We must keep this vertical dimension of giving clearly in focus. For Paul, the basis for giving to others is not what *they* have done or will do for us, but what *God* has already done for us in Christ. The foundation of giving is God’s grace. Just as the language of Christ’s poverty and wealth in verse 9 is metaphorical, so too is the reference in the verse to believers becoming “rich. Giving is the expression of faith that is content with what God has given and gives in accordance with God’s care for us.

*Your grace toward me, Lord, encourages my grace toward others. Amen.*

**Wednesday, May 13 2 Corinthians 8:10-15**

*“Give with eager willingness”*

 Paul encourages the Corinthians to complete the collection that had been previously begun, so that the work of the Spirit in their lives, as seen in their eager willingness to give, may come to fruition. The reference in verse 11 to “give in proportion to what you have” makes it plain that while there is an obligation to give, there is no call to give beyond what one can afford.

 By comparing the Corinthians to the Macedonians, who were less well off and yet gave beyond their means, Paul is not trying to manipulate the believers in Corinth to do likewise. Paul’s qualification that the amount given need not exceed one’s ability serves to emphasize the fundamental point that where the heart is, the will must follow. It is the condition of one’s heart and the circumstances of one’s life, not the attempt to measure up to the practices of others, that should determine how much a person will give. The issue is not the amount given, but the expression of willingness. Action without the right attitude is of no avail, but a genuine attitude inevitably results in action.

*When I give may I do so out of love, Lord, not out of obligation. Amen.*

*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

May 11 - 16

*Second Corinthians Chapters Eight and Nine*

**Thursday, May 14 2 Corinthians 8:16-24**

*“We want everyone to see that we are honorable”*

 While these verses may seem like “housekeeping” details, they give us insight into the comprehensive way in which Paul dealt with an issue. And they also model for us the way we should handle money that has been given for the work of the Lord. In Paul’s day, like our own, participation in charitable giving and the administration of financial affairs were matters of public concern and conversation.

 We see in these verses that Paul was very wise when insisting that the funds donated be handled so as to avoid criticism of any kind. He had a concern for the integrity of the collection, so he asked the church to specify certain persons to be responsible for the money and to deliver it in person to Jerusalem. They chose Titus and two other trusted men. One of the reasons Paul was able to be so enthusiastic and so convincing about the offering was that he was convinced of its importance. But he was also convinced that their giving was essential to spiritual growth. He made no apologies for asking them to help.

*May the finances of our church, Lord, be handled with integrity. Amen.*

**Friday, May 15 2 Corinthians 9:1-5**

*“I want it to be a willing gift”*

 The first verses of this chapter have a very human touch that shows Paul’s understanding of how people think. Because he bragged on the Macedonians to the Corinthians and on the Corinthians to the Macedonians, some have accused Paul of trying to manipulate them. Such criticism seems to overlook the fact that when the offering was first mentioned, the Corinthians had expressed enthusiasm and Paul had shared their feelings with the Macedonian churches. Paul had in this case used the eagerness of one group of Christians to inspire others.

 Another criticism of Paul expresses the idea that he applied pressure by sending advance people on ahead of his visits to guilt people into more liberal giving. But his emphasis on willing rather than grudging giving shows that his motive was not to apply pressure. Rather, he knew that if the Christians were not prepared to participate it would be embarrassing to them. Paul was a good organizer precisely because he cared about the persons involved as well as the task that needed to be completed.

*I am ready and willing, Lord, to financially support the ministry of the church. Amen.*

**Saturday, May 16 2 Corinthians 9:6-15**

 *“God will generously provide”*

 Paul’s farm illustration states both the positive and the negative of the same idea. The negative point emphasizes the truth that when a person makes it a habit to give only a little, he or she can expect very little in the way of blessings. On the other hand, though, the personal rewards are great for those who habitually give generously, although we must be careful to note that nowhere does Paul says that those rewards are necessarily material.

 Instead, Paul points out that it is God who gives us our resources, and it is God who creates the grace of giving in us. “But,” someone might argue, “If I give to help the impoverished Christians in Jerusalem, all it’s going to do is create one more impoverished Christian in Corinth.” Paul’s answer is simply that God would provide them with enough not only to meet their own needs, but to also help others. Paul concludes his discussion of the offering by reminding them that giving has spiritual results: God is glorified and given thanks; their love for God is revealed; the Jerusalem church will pray for their Gentile brothers and sisters.

*One of the blessings of giving, Lord, is that it teaches me to trust you more. Amen.*