
2 Corinthians

Lesson 10

“2 Corinthians 8”

Objective: To explore the ancient text of 2 Corinthians in order to understand more fully and completely the call of God for us today as we seek to live out our lives in service to the Kingdom of God, to His glory, His Honor and His will. These ancient texts can challenge us, and inspire us, to live life more fully as participants in God’s story of redemption and love. At the core, the hope and desire for doing this study is that we will be continually transformed more fully and completely into useful instruments in the hands of God for bringing His message of love and compassion, and life to every creature.

Materials: The Bible, Commentaries, journal articles, dictionaries, the internet and other resources as may be appropriate. It is also our hope that each person will bring to the discussion and class times the things that God has placed upon their heart through their unique journey as people seeking the face of God and the life He seeks to bring.

Procedures

1. To explore biblically and logically what matters most to God in order to understand how we are to live. This will entail exploring the background of these texts in order to understand more fully their intended meaning for their original target audience.
2. We will also seek to explore how these ancient texts, addressed to ancient peoples, should, and must challenge us today in our walk of faith and obedience to the will of God.

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 - 3.** We intend in each instance to offer some practical suggestions as to how the call of God, through His Apostle, Paul, calls us to live our lives in such a way as to reflect our confident hope and expectation in the power of God. We seek the face of God.

As we begin this section of 2 Corinthians I would like to mention that some scholars put forward the theory that chapters 8-9 are not to be seen as an actual part of Paul's letter known as 2 Corinthians. The idea is that chapter 8 is some kind of "administrative correspondence" sent from Paul to the church in Corinth and that somehow it has been inserted by an editor into the text of what we now know as 2 Corinthians. These scholars would also say that chapter 9 is then another, separate, document. That would then mean that chapters 8 and 9 would constitute "independent, self-contained, textual units" rather than being a part of the letter that Paul began in 1:1.¹ There are a few who hold this view, but there are far more that do not believe there is any validity to this view; not to mention the fact that we have quite good textual evidence for 2 Corinthians as it stands, and certainly nothing that stands as substantive evidence for this partition theory. There is only one argument, made by Betz, that really even deserves a response and that is the use the phrase of **Περὶ μὲν γὰρ**, ("for it is not necessary"). Betz puts forward the view that this

¹ Hans Dieter Betz, 2 Corinthians 8 and 9, First Edition, Hermeneia Commentary Series (Philadelphia PA: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1985).

phrase is not used to open new sections within a larger discourse, but that is used to introduce a document.²

Not only does Betz believe that Paul uses this phrase to introduce a new letter, he also believes that some editor has removed the postscript to that letter. This same expression (Περὶ μὲν γὰρ) is also found in the New Testament at Acts 28:22, where it absolutely does not introduce a new letter and even occurs in the middle of a sentence. The editors of every modern Greek text of the New Testament have construed that Acts 28:22 is one complete sentence. This phrase does not even begin a new sentence, much less a new section in Acts 28:22. Stowers studied ninety textually certain uses of this phrase (Περὶ μὲν γὰρ). In not one single example does this phrase introduce the body of a document, or even come near the beginning of a document. Very frequently this phrase is used to introduce a reason, a warrant, or even an explanation for what is said. Even Acts 28:22 falls into this category. This phrase can also be used to introduce quotations, or references to what others have said. In most of

² Stanley K. Stowers, "Peri Men Gar and the Integrity of 2 Cor. 8 and 9," *Novum Testamentum*, 32:4 (1990), pp. 340-348.

those case the quotations then serve as a reason, explanation, or example for what has previously been said.³

In chapter 9, Paul uses **Περὶ μὲν γὰρ** in a manner that is consistent with the manner it is used in the other Greek sources examined by Stowers. In chapter 8, Paul begins by using the Macedonians as model to somehow spur the Corinthians on in their efforts of the collection of funds for the poor brothers at Jerusalem. Paul will use the rhetoric of “honor and shame” to compel action on the part of the Corinthian believers. Paul’s usage of **Περὶ μὲν γὰρ** looks much like its usage by other all the other authors examined by Stowers. Paul’s usage of this phrase signals that he is now treating the main point, which is not the contribution as such, but the reception of the delegation coming for the collection. The bottom line is that there is no reason to treat chapters 8 and 9 as anything other than an integral part of 2 Corinthians.⁴ This letter is a single document that has come faithfully down to us through history.

³ Stanley K. Stowers, “Peri Men Gar and the Integrity of 2 Cor. 8 and 9,” *Novum Testamentum*, 32:4 (1990), pp. 340-348.

⁴ Stanley K. Stowers, “Peri Men Gar and the Integrity of 2 Cor. 8 and 9,” *Novum Testamentum*, 32:4 (1990), pp. 340-348.

In light of this, Paul begins chapter 8 holding up the Macedonians as an example that will be used in order to spur the Corinthians to respond appropriately when the delegation comes for the collection for the saints at Jerusalem. Paul links the response of the Macedonians closely with the “grace” of God (τὴν χάριν τοῦ θεοῦ). As Paul is boasting about the efforts and the reaction of the Macedonians he makes it clear that this has been utterly positive and rather than vesting the credit for this in the Macedonians themselves he links it where it should be linked, within the context of the “grace of God.” He indicates that they (the Macedonians) responded with extreme generosity in the midst of “affliction” (θλίψεως) while also in extreme “poverty” (πτωχεία). Paul makes it clear that they did not give out of their abundance, or from their excess, they gave in a manner, and at a time, that demonstrated that the “grace of God” was at the core of their response. Their giving was a demonstration that they understood, and had truly been transformed by the power of the Gospel.

Their response to the need is described as coming “according to their means and even beyond their means.” It is not

as if Paul had to beg them to be generous, or to give; as a matter of fact it is very much the opposite as they not only gave “voluntarily” (verse 3) they begged for the “privilege” (χάρις - grace) of sharing (κοινωνία). Some of the connections here are hard for us to see as our English translations mask them. The word here translated by the NRSV as “privilege” is actually the same word that is used in verse 1 and translated as “grace.” There is a link here in what Paul writes. For those that understand the “grace” that God has given there is created a desire, a heart, to be a part of spreading: grace to others, to be participants in God’s ministry of “grace.”

Another aspect of the Greek text, that is not immediately apparent from the English translations, is that Paul uses the word for “fellowship” (κοινωνία), the word *koinonia*. This is a word that is closely associated with “giving” or “sharing.” It is a word that indicates close association and involvement (1 Corinthians 1:9). Paul likely wants his audience to understand that the reaction of the Macedonians to this need came about as a result of their close association with Christ and as an outworking of His grace pouring out through them. They have a deep, compelling

desire in their very being that draws them to serve in this way, after all these people (the believers at Jeruslaem) that are suffering are a part of their family, their community, their fellowship (κοινωνία). They are all a part of the group designated as “the holy ones” (“saints” Verse 4).

Paul spends a lot of time examining their motivation (the Macedonians) as he desires that this same motivation be behind the response of the Corinthians believers. He does not want them to contribute for selfish reasons, or simply to please Paul, or even out of shame. He wants them to do this because, first of all, they have given themselves to the Lord. He does want, and expect, obedience and devotion to him, and his companions, but he wants the foundation and the matrix upon which that devotion comes to be based in their giving of themselves first to the Lord.

Verse 5 makes it clear that even with the high expectations that Paul had of the Macedonians they exceeded his, and his companions, expectations. They gave themselves “first” (πρῶτον) to the Lord and then, “by the will of God” to the poor at Jerusalem. This seems to have been more than Paul could have hoped for, but it demonstrates that the power of God is very much at work in a

successful fashion in them. This outcome so encouraged Paul and his companions that they urged Titus to complete his efforts to make the collection for the saints by following up with the Corinthians (verse 6). Notice how Paul starts out in verse 7 with a complement and with a very positive expectation of how the Corinthians would indeed respond.

This is a lesson for all of us to remember. If we have expectations for things to go badly it is highly likely that people will respond to negative, or low expectations. If our expectations are high and we begin by expecting things to go well it is much more likely that people will come closer to those expectations. This is especially important for us to remember. As I was told by uncle you catch more flies with honey than you do with vinegar. This also fits well with Paul tells us when he says in Philippians 4:4 **“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.”** Truly the life of the Christian should be marked by joy rather than by the opposite. As Paul compliments the Corinthians he highlights how they “excel” (περισσεύετε) at a number of things and Paul indicates out of love for them, like a proud parent, he also wants them to excel in this “act of grace” (χάριτι) too. He links his hopes

and expectations not in some form of vain flattery, but back to the Grace of God. In this way, even their excellent performance is clearly connected to the work of God's grace in their life.

At 8:8 Paul indicates that what he is speaking to about them is not some form of command, but rather to “prove” (δοκιμάζων) the “genuineness” of their love. Even in this, he leaves in place their “freewill” to chose one thing over another indicating that even though he has expectations he does not give a command that they live up to a certain expectation. This person who has been proving that his apostolic authority comes from God does not use that sort of authority in this manner, or in this instance. He recognizes their ability to make the right choice and encourages them to make a good choice. He couches this ability, and indeed responsibility to chose, in terms of the fact that our “Lord Jesus Christ” “chose” to give up his riches (heaven itself and his power) in order to remove our utter poverty. He expresses in this instance the riches that we as Christians have as being the benefit that comes from the generosity of Christ who gave all that he had in order to enrich us.

Here he is clearly talking about something far more valuable than simply earthly riches (verse 9). The riches of Christ are incomparably more valuable than money. The challenge that Paul is laying before the Corinthians is that even if they gave all that they possessed it would be as if nothing compared to the great wealth that Jesus sacrificed on their behalf. In this he wants them to understand their calling as disciples and even though they might not possess the vast wealth of Jesus, there is the expectation, that they will share generously, and graciously what they do have, with those that have a need. In this way, at least in some small way they express their true discipleship of Jesus Christ. They give as Jesus gave. Paul reminds them (verse 10), by giving them some advice, that indeed they had begun to do something “last year.” He challenges them to complete what they had begun. This was likely before all of the things happened that brought in turmoil and confusion and were the reason for writing 2 Corinthians in the first instance. Turmoil and confusion destroys good intent and stops the mission of the church from moving forward as it should. The god of this world loves to create

confusion, discord, and turmoil so that the mission of the church is interrupted or even stopped altogether.

At verse 11, Paul continues the challenge to complete what they began, “according to their means.” In verse 12, he goes on to express that motivation is important too. If they are not “eager” to do this, but do it grudgingly then this will not be a gift that is “acceptable” (εὐπρόσδεκτος). One of the marks too of this earnestness is that the gift that they give will be linked with their means. He does not call upon them to in some sense deprive themselves so that they suffer, but he calls for an equity. He wants there to be an “equality” (ἰσότητος): An equality of ratios with one not being inordinately more wealthy than the other. He makes this concept very clear in verse 13 going over the issue in more detail. In some instances people have come away from Scripture with the idea that the early church lived in some kind of communal arrangement where personal property was in some sense removed as a possibility.

As a basis for this people often would refer to the text from the Book of Acts that says: **All the ones who were believing were together and had all things in common;** Walter


Brueggemann addresses this matter in his book on *Money and Possessions*, in his section that deals with the New Testament. He indicates that the matter was not of some kind of communal living, but of an equitable living where there was a sharing of things with those that were in need as an act of grace. This grace reflects the nature not only of the Gospel, but also the nature of the Kingdom of God.⁵ In every way Paul continues to challenge the believers at Corinth to become true disciples of Jesus Christ and this includes every aspect of their world-view. They no longer should live with a world-view of limited resources and limited possibilities. As they began to live into this new perspective their reliance would not be upon material resources in a way that humanity most often sees these resources (ie. as of a limited quantity).

The believers of Jesus Christ serve the God of the universe who is not limited in any way and through the power of His Spirit releases that power of unlimited possibilities into his people. Paul is challenging the believer to live a new paradigm, the paradigm of kingdom values and kingdom possibilities. He quotes a passage

⁵ Walter Brueggemann, Richard Horsley, *Money and Possessions*, in the Interpretation: Resources for the Use of Scripture in the Church series (Louisville KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2016).


from Exodus 16:18. This is a passage related to the gathering of manna in the wilderness where some gathered much and had nothing left over, and others gathered little and had no shortage. This is kingdom living. It is not based on ability to accumulate and acquire, but based in the concept that all things come from God. Nothing that we have is not God's. It is in some sense a bit like the old preacher that got up in front of his church to make an announcement regarding a fundraising effort that his church was having. He said in regard to this fundraising effort there is some good news and some bad news. The good news is that God revealed to me that we have more than we need right now, the bad news is that the money is still in your pockets.

Just as the time of wandering in the wilderness was a test of the faith of the Ancient Israelite community so today we face the same challenge. Will we trust God, or will we trust in our own efforts, and in the economic system of our country. One way is the way of godliness the other the way is the way of idolatry and we are all tempted to put our faith in the one that is idolatry. That path seems an easier, more logical way to us, but the way of faith is to trust in God and in his ability to supply what we need, rather



than what we desire. Paul lays out these two paths before the believers not as an optional extra, but as a central tenet of faith. One path leads toward God and true discipleship in Christ, the other leads away from God and away from discipleship in Christ. Notice that Paul does not challenge the Corinthians to give until it hurts, despite the fact that this is precisely what Jesus did. He gave until it killed him, literally. Paul is here being very practical while at the time challenging them to walk in faith.

Paul is very positive in his challenge to the people of Corinth; he calls them to act as a disciple of Christ should act and to be generous, giving and compassionate. He praises them and encourages them while all the while challenging them to step up to the challenge placed before them. We face the same challenges today in our church as we seek each week not to just pay our way as a church, but to truly live as kingdom people who are about caring for our brothers and sisters in need while all the while we understand that we serve an unlimited God who has already begun the process of inaugurating His Kingdom. This is a kingdom that does not live by the values and limitations of the god of this world where resources are limited and things are



impossible based upon limited resources. Paul challenges the Corinthians to open their eyes to new possibilities, new potentials, and new ways of living.


This effort of benevolence for the poor at Jerusalem is about far more than expressing the grace of God to those who are in need, it is about demonstrating that kingdom transformation has truly taken root in the hearts and souls of those who believe the Gospel message. For them, the sharing of God's good blessings should be as natural as breathing. Paul believes that the power of God has already transformed the thinking of the believers at Corinth and he has been boasting of this fact openly among the other churches, he now challenges them to live up to that expectation. This contribution (for the poor at Jerusalem) is couched in terms of being about the "glory of Christ" (verse 23). This moment of grace is a coming about as a consequence of Jesus Christ. He has shown the way that God intended for His image-bearers to demonstrate to a lost and dying world that God is still alive, active, and moving everything toward the fulfillment of all the promises He has made. The challenge for the church at Corinth is will they step up and demonstrate in this act the "proof"

of their love. In this way they would demonstrate not only their understanding of this new kingdom paradigm, but also their actual living out of this kingdom paradigm in their generosity of spirit.

Synopsis

Some have wanted us to believe that this chapter, and chapter 9, were not a part of Paul's original letter to the Corinthians that we know as 2 Corinthians. The evidence for this view is weak, unnecessary, and should be disregarded. Paul begins this section citing, for the believers at Corinth, the example of the Macedonians in giving to the poor at Jerusalem. He indicates that their generosity is a demonstration of the "grace of God." In their giving, they gave of themselves, not just of their money. They gave themselves to the Lord in a way that seems to have surprised Paul and his companions. They even begged to be a part of this collection which is described as a "ministry to the saints."

In this section, Paul continues to challenge the world-view of the Corinthians and challenge them to see the world from the perspective of God and the inbreaking of the kingdom of God transforming everything, including economics. He challenges them in very positive terms to participate in this new paradigm by contributing toward the needs of the poor at Jerusalem. He calls for a certain equity. He uses the context of the manna in the



wilderness as the background for them understanding this new paradigm by quoting a passage from that context. He calls them to do this as a demonstration of the genuineness of their love. He sets it alongside the generous act of Jesus Christ, who though rich, became poor for their sake.

He clearly wants them to be prepared for the arrival of Titus and those who will be traveling with him and to recognize that Paul strives to be transparent to all in the usage of this collected money. He also wants them to know he has already been boasting in anticipation of what he expects from them expressing a confidence that the good work begun by God in them will produce much.

Questions

1. How would you define grace?
2. What are some ways that you have seen demonstrations of grace?
3. What are some special demonstrations of grace that you have seen while someone was in the midst of affliction?
4. What are the causes of poverty? Why do you think that? How do you think God sees this issue? Why?
5. When is a time that you have seen someone beg to give to someone else?
6. What do you think it means to “give first to the Lord?”
7. Why do you think Paul praises the Corinthians in the midst of his appeal to them?
8. In verse 8, what do you think Paul means by the terminology “the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ?”
9. How was Christ rich before this generous act, and poor after it?
10. Are there some instances when you have been eager to participate in an effort? Why were you eager?
11. How would you define balance in America today, keeping in mind what Paul says 2 Corinthians 8:13-14?
12. Why do you think Paul quotes a passage associated with the collection of “manna” when he makes his appeal to the believers at Corinth?

What do you think “manna” has to do with possessions?
13. Why do you think transparency is so important to Paul in this letter?

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14. What are some ways that we today could act as messengers of the churches?
 15. How would you define the “glory of Christ?”
 16. In Paul’s boasting, he is careful to give all credit to God, what are some ways that we might do this better today?
 17. What are some ways that the paradigm of using possessions, given by Paul to the Corinthians, challenges our American paradigm?
 18. What is the most important thing that you have taken away from this chapter? Why?