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II Corinthians 8:9-9:5 "All About Stewardship"
June 30, 2019

All right. Let's open our Bibles to II Corinthians Chapter 8 verse 9 as we continue our study through this letter of Paul.

Paul spent seven chapters of this book addressing one issue: The false prophets that had snuck their way into a church that he had planted five years earlier. People that he loved, but yet they had been turned against him by these false teachers who sought to draw this church after themselves, to profit from it, to use it for their own devices.

When Titus finally met with Paul in northern Greece in Macedonia, and Paul heard the good news that things were straightening out, Paul went back to one of the purposes for which he had been traveling, which was to gather from the gentile churches an offering for the poor that were in Jerusalem. On Pentecost, when the church was born, 3,000 people came to the Lord on day one, but many of those folks didn't live in Jerusalem. They came there for the feast day. That's what they were supposed to do. And so when they got saved, there was no church to go to, but the apostles were in Jerusalem, and so they stayed. And staying brought a real financial handicap to the church as a whole. You add to that the fact that the Jewish believers were oftentimes in the first century set aside by their families as having abandoned the faith, that they weren't given medical care or job employment opportunities, or even just social kind of interaction. The church was under a lot of pressure. So when Paul met years earlier with James, Peter and John, he and Barnabas took the right hand of fellowship, go preach to the Gentiles they said to Paul in Galatians 2:9 and 10, don't forget the poor, and Paul said, we are more than happy to help.

Well, over the last couple of months Paul had been traveling and gathering financial support -- actually for the last year and a half or so, for the churches in

Jerusalem, but he was gathering them from the Gentile churches. Now, a couple of significances about that. When the gospel first went to the Gentiles, the Jews who were saved thought since they were God's chosen people, that no one should ever get to Jesus before they got to the Jewish faith. And so, then there was a big conflict about that in the early church, and especially the Jerusalem church, very much at the heart of the religious Judaism. They had a hard time with the grace of God that just saves. Peter, though, saw it; Paul as well. And so Paul thought, gosh, if all these Gentile churches would donate to help the impoverish situation in Jerusalem, that would be a great example to them of God's love and of our unity. Add to that the fact that Paul had spent years of his life as a zealot, putting Christians to death, seeing them arrested. He actually got saved on the way to Damascus to do just that. He carried lots of guilt about his past life. God had forgiven him, but he wanted to make it up. He knew that he could never do that, but he could try. And you'll read that comment from Paul in lots of different places about his own, having to deal with the sin of his past.

The Corinthian church a year earlier before this letter had agreed that they would like to contribute to this fund to help the poor in Jerusalem. The Corinthians were very wealthy. They were in Achaia. It's the southern part of Greece. The churches in the north, in Macedonia, were very poor. But the poor churches in the north had been helping Paul for a long time. In fact, Paul mentions that in verse 1 of Chapter 8. The problem is now the Corinthians who have made this promise that actually had motivated the churches up in the north to help, there had been this year long false teacher kind of influence, and Paul wondered were they still willing? But after seven chapters and then getting the good news, he writes these two chapters, Chapter 8 and 9, about this gathering of the finances for the poor that are in Jerusalem. As he puts these two together -- and by the way, the rest of the book will end with Paul going after the false teachers who are still entrenched, but he won't speak to them kindly. He'll speak to them like your father would. Wait till I get home kind of thing. He'll speak to them as an apostle and demand that they get out, or he's coming to deal with them. It's a different Paul that we read.

But in the middle of these two chapters, which constitute

the single greatest coverage or section in the Bible on giving and stewardship -- and last week or last time we looked at the first eight verses where Paul said, giving in the life of a Christian always begins with realizing the grace of God in our lives. In other words, this is a work of God's grace upon the lives of His people in the church. That giving starts with, I understand what God has given to me.

We looked last time, that giving, because of that, is not affected by difficult circumstances; that giving is proportionate to what God has given to you; that it needs to be sacrificial, because if it doesn't cost you anything, God's not impressed; and then it needs to be voluntary, not pressured. It has to be an act of worship. It's a work of God in the heart of the believer. But that's where we're going to pick up in verse 9 this morning and go to where we read last week, a little earlier there in Chapter 9 verse 5, and then we'll finish next week on this issue of giving.

It is one of the hardest things for me to teach because I was most offended as a young Christian by these clowns on T.V., who wanted me to give them money and would tell me if I believed God, that I'll get money, and if you want to believe God, you can be healthy and wealthy and wise and be like us and have your own plane. I don't know. It offends me to no end. I wrote a book a few years ago called "God's View of Money," because that's not the God of the Bible that you see on T.V. The God of the Bible is not broke, doesn't need your help, isn't depending upon you. He's not interested in the decimal point. It doesn't matter how big the check is or how little it is. He only cares about these things: Voluntary, willing, sacrificial. That's all. In these verses -- and I tend to avoid talking about giving whenever I can, because it made me mad. I figure it makes you mad too. But we don't want to miss when it's in the Bible either, because there are benefits to you and I being available for God to use us to give to others, and we don't want to miss those either, some have ruined it. I'll tread lightly, because it's an irritant to me, but I'm thankful for the way the Lord works.

Verse 9 says this: "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for our sakes He became poor, so that you through His poverty can be made rich." Now, this is given to us in the context of

the verse -- eight verses that it is the grace of God that causes us to be givers to begin with. And then he turns to Jesus' ultimate example. This is one of those theological statement verses, like Chapter 5 verse 21, that isn't couched in theological terms. It's not hard to understand these 21 Greek words in this sentence. God sent His Son Jesus, who left the glory of Heaven to come to the earth so that we on the earth can find a path to Him. He comes to provide the way. He becomes poor in the process, leaving the riches of who He is and what He has. We become rich, being delivered from the poverty that sin leaves us in and the judgment that we're to face.

He says in verse 1 to the Corinthians, you may not know about the grace of God that's been working up in the northern churches, but he says here in verse 9, but I know that you know the grace of Jesus. In other words, you've experienced God's goodness to you; His ultimate sacrifice of Himself, His driven by love, ultimate work, so that you and I could go to Heaven.

He was rich. How was He rich? Well, in every way. It's not just limited to finances or gain or physical holdings. The Lord is God, and as God, He doesn't need or want for anything. All of the riches in Heaven and earth belong to Him, but no doubt this is a statement of the eternal. When Jesus was born, He lived a pretty humble life. There's plenty of rich people in the Bible, but Jesus wasn't one of them, not in terms of physical wealth. When His parents brought Him to the temple to dedicate Him at eight years old, they brought the smallest offering that you could legally bring, according to the law: A couple of turtledoves. That's all they had. He was born in a borrowed stable. He fed a multitude of people with a borrowed lunch. He borrowed a coin from a critic to teach them about what belonged to God and what did not. He borrowed a boat to preach to the crowds that were gathered along the lakeshore. He rode into town on a borrowed donkey. He had dinner in a borrowed room. He died on another man's cross and was buried in another man's tomb. He borrowed a lot of things, didn't He? But He came to give life. At the end of a very long day in John Chapter 7 and 8 where He had been hunted down by the religious opposition, in Chapter 7 verse 53, "It says they all went at the end of the day to their own houses." But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. He had no place to go.

He became poor, but I don't think that's the poverty that this verse talks about. This is really a statement of God about the incarnation; that God came to be a man, born of a woman, as Paul said to the Galatians; made in the likeness of sinful flesh, as Paul said to the Romans; a descendant of David, so that could draw a line through the Old Testament so we could see this was always God's plan. He said to the Hebrews He was made a little lower than the angels. He left Heaven's glory to be here with us, Jesus said in John 17. He laid aside, Philipians 2, the free use of His divine prerogatives.

Let me go over that. He was fully God, but He emptied himself; right? He laid those things aside and He came to this earth as a man. Didn't bring with Him, if you will, the divinity in the sense that He would do His miracles as the Son of God. He would do these miracles as Jesus the man, depending upon the Holy Spirit, who was poured out upon Him without measure, because He's our example. We can't bring our Godhood with us. We can rely upon the Lord who's come to dwell within us. So Jesus, He didn't use the prerogatives that divinity would give Him. He emptied Himself, became of no reputation, and went all the way to the death on the cross. He did that for us.

He existed eternal as God, He possessed all things, but He became poor, He took flesh, He suffered human weakness and the limitations. He was hungry and He was tired. He was tempted in all ways like we were, yet without sin. He became the example of the ultimate gift, isn't He? He gave all away so that we could have everything that He wanted us to have. On Him was poured the sum total of every sin and every weakness found in man, in every man.

In Matthew 18 when Jesus tells the parable of the unforgiving servant, He placed upon the servant, who really represents man, this incalculable debt. He said he owed 10,000 talents. 10,000 is the largest number in Greek. A talent is the heaviest weight. In other words, he was overwhelmed with his obligation for sin. Yet the Lord forgave him his debt. Unfortunately, he went out and found a guy that owed him next to nothing and beat him over the head until he paid him everything he owed him, and the Lord said, this is not going to work. You have an obligation, if I've given you this kind of grace, to extend that to others. And that's really Paul's

motivation in adding this example of Jesus, the ultimate giver, His pattern of service here for us. He leaves Heaven for earth, the rich become poor, so in His poverty we become rich: Rich in salvation, rich in forgiveness, rich in eternity. In the context, though, it's Jesus' voluntary poverty that make us that are spiritually destitute rich. That's Paul's point.

He says in verse 10, "Let me give you some advice," Paul says to the church. "It is to your advantage not only to do what you have been desiring to do for a year; but now also to complete the thing. You had a readiness and a desire to do it. Now you should complete out of what you have. For if you have a willing mind, then it is acceptable with God, according to what one has, and not according to what he does not have." Paul goes on to say in this context of the giving to this church, there must be a willing mind first, and then if there is a willing heart, then it has to be followed with affirmative kind of actions. Because giving in the Bible is willing and voluntary at every place you turn. You will never read Paul or anyone else demanding or commanding that somebody give. Paul says this to them: Let me give you some advice. And he begins his advice by saying, there is a great advantage to you that you would give.

I went over it a couple of weeks ago when we started this topic, and I wanted to repeat it at least for a moment: God's promise to us or His assurance to us as His people is that if God provides for us enough to where we can help others, and He does, then we should. And if we will, there's no way we're going to lose in that transaction. In other words, God assures us that we can't out give Him; that if you're giving, then God will give to you. Right? That's an assurance to those who would be hesitant to maybe make themselves available to the Lord.

Luke 6:38, "Give, and it will be given to you: Full measure, pressed down, shaken together, pouring out of the bosoms of men will God give to you, because with the same measure you measure out, it will be measured to you again." Paul will say in verse 6 of Chapter 9, where we'll start next week, "If you sow sparingly, you'll also reap sparingly. If you sow bountifully, you'll also reap bountifully." And although those are assurances from God to you not to be hesitant to be a vessel through whom God can bless, it is never offered to us as an incentive. In

other words, give to get, which is what the clowns on T.V. usually do. They tell you to give so that you can get. They'll quote the same verse out of the context completely to say, look, you give, God will have to give you. In fact, give what you don't have. Sow seeds of faith. Just go in hock. Send me the money and the Lord will bless you. And then when the Lord doesn't, then they say this: Well, if you had more faith, then you'd be blessed. It's just a big hustle from beginning to end. They obviously don't read their Bibles. Please turn that T.V. off when you hear that kind of stuff. It's irritating.

But what the Lord is saying and what Paul is saying here is, there's a great benefit in being a vessel through whom God can bless others, because that would be God's intention. It would be an outgrowth of the grace of God and the work of the Spirit of God in your life. He says give. Give voluntarily. Be motivated by the love of God. Don't do so out of pressure. And I would say to you, any effort on anybody's part to raise funds that is pressure-driven is illegal in God's eyes. It is unbiblical and it is ungodly. It shouldn't be outward coercion; it should be inward devotion that moves you. And if that can't happen, then you're really in the wrong place.

When the Lord through Malachi said to the children of Israel, who were not in a good place, in Chapter 3, "You've been robbing Me." And they said, "Well, how have we done that?" And He said, "You've been keeping away your tithes and offering." And then the Lord said, "Here. Here's a place you can test Me with." And it's really the only place in the Bible where the Lord said put Me to the test, because He doesn't usually like that. But He said, "I'll tell you what: Bring your offerings into the storehouse so that there can be food in My house, and then test Me with this and see if I won't open up the windows of Heaven so much that you will receive a blessing you won't be able to hold or to gather." All of those are assurances from the Lord that you can't out give Him. It is never presented to anyone as a motivation.

Paul says this: It's to your advantage. And then second of all he said, that you finish what you started. A year ago, you said we want to help and be a blessing to the poor in Jerusalem. Now let's do that. Now it's time to

put up or shut up kind of thing; right? And I thought, one of the most vexing issues to Christians, or for that matter most people, is that we're really good at starting things, not always so good at finishing them. Like dieting. Or vowing -- it's interesting. Every year we put out a reading guide for the Bible so if you follow it, in a year you get through it. How many people will take it and go, "This year for real I'm doing it. This year for real." And you say, "Have you ever done it?" "Well, I've been trying for 13 years." And they get to, like, Leviticus, they go (screeching halt sound). "I'm doing it next year"; right? There's something to be said for finishing. The call I need to make, the class I need to take, the ministry I'm going to get involved in pretty soon.

Moses stood at the Red Sea with a bunch of very afraid Jews who had left the land of Egypt looking over their shoulder at the Egyptian army just pressing down upon them, and Moses began to pray, Exodus. And you'll read there that the Lord literally said to Moses, "Why are you praying now? This would be a good time to start moving." And I think that's what happens sometimes. We get stuck in praying when we ought to be moving. There's a time to pray, but there's also a time to act, and that's what Paul is saying to these guys. Give.

And notice what he said in verse 12: You need a willing mind. And if you have a willing mind, then God doesn't care where the decimal point goes. He doesn't want something you don't have. And he's not really interested in how much you're giving, aside from if it qualifies under willful and sacrificial. Those two are the only two requirements. The only two: Willful and it has to cost you something. And he pointed that out, if you remember, in Mark 12 to the poor widow at the treasury that Jesus was watching.

God's not interested in what you don't have. That's not faith. That's foolish. Spending what you don't have is stupid. Everyone would tell you that in every context, but these clowns on T.V. Do you get how I feel about the clowns on T.V.? These crooks. I can't wait for them to answer to the Lord. Ripping off the old people. Ridiculous. In any event, Paul said as long as your heart's willing, God's interested not in the amount, but in the sacrifice, in the willingness. So as long as you're giving in that spirit. And Paul encouraged them

there's a great advantage to being a vessel that God can use.

He goes on and he says in verse 13, "I'm not trying to ease others and burden you. I just want equality. For now, your abundance can help those with a lack. Later on, their abundance can help you, that there might be that equality." And then he said, "As it is written, 'he who gathered much had nothing left over, and he who had gathered little had no lack.'" One of the accusations that we gather from this letter is that at least some of the false teachers were saying, Paul's just collecting money for the Jews because he's a Jew. And Paul's really wrong, but Paul said, look, I'm not trying to make it hard on you and make it easy on them. I'm not interested in making the rich poor and the poor rich. That's Marxism, that's socialism, and there's a lot of that floating around today. But what he is saying is, look, there's a love in the body because of God's grace that would cause us to be concerned with brethren who are struggling, and that there would be a work of God's in our ability to help when we can.

John was in his 90s when he wrote in 1 John 3, "If you have this world's goods, and yet you see your brother in need, and you close your heart, how can that be the love of God in you?" Paul wrote to Timothy in his first letter, "Make sure that you tell the rich in this life not to be haughty, and not to trust in their uncertain riches, but to trust in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy." And he said, "You tell them to do good. You tell them to be rich in good works, to be ready to give, to be willing to share." So that was Paul's interest here.

And, when God blesses you and you're in a position to help, then don't think you're ever going to go broke helping and passing along what God's given to you. He will take care that. He'll always make you ready for every good work is what it says at the end of Chapter 9.

We on thanksgiving have for years gathered foods and turkeys and monies to feed what becomes thousands of people in our community. Every Tuesday morning here we feed hundreds of families. We do so by the food that you bring and put in the box, or the money that comes in for the Helps Ministry. It is a glorious work, I think, just to be able to love the people and tell them about what

Jesus has done. Our thrift store operates on that premise; right? We help people that are struggling. We hope that the prices are adequate so that we can continue to function, and yet, that they can be blessed, and they hear about the Lord. But most of the stuff in the thrift store has come from you or from the community, and God has richly blessed.

Paul's interested in the teamwork aspect. Interesting quote in verse 15, it is out of Exodus 16, which is the story of the manna. You probably have read that before. But when God began to rain manna down upon the people of God, the children of Israel, there in the wilderness every morning, He gave them some specific instructions, and one of them was every morning go out and gather what you need for your family. That's it. Don't try to hoard it or get more. Just go every day. But on the sixth day, the day before the Sabbath, just gather for two days and then you don't have to break the law of working on that day dedicated to the Lord. I guess most people listened, but there's always somebody who thinks it better. One guy went out -- or somebody went out and gathered enough for the week. Well, I'm done. And he got up in the next morning and that manna that was sitting on the shelf had become infested with worms and were stinking. And they were angry. And the Lord said, "But I told you just go every day." Needs for every day. And they hadn't listened.

Now, Paul picks that verse up in the midst of that here to literally say, look, if you've been given more than you need, you're in a position to bless others, so that even in the gathering of the manna, the fellow who had great need, he had nothing left. The fellow who had only gathered little, he didn't lack, God's provision was enough. But you can't really store it anyway. It's going to end up rotting in your hands, and God won't be able to bless.

The only thing that God was interested in was your heart. How is your heart when you give, and are you giving to get? If you're giving to get, you should just go to dinner and buy for everyone, because at least you're getting dinner. There'll be no record of your giving in Heaven if you're giving to get. But we should be willing as the Lord moves upon our heart.

From verse 16 down to verse 24, Paul then says -- and

from a church standpoint we should handle finances honorable or with great accountability. He says in verse 16, "Thanks be to God who has put this same kind of earnest care for you in the heart of Titus. Because he not only accepted our exhortation to go again with this letter, but being more diligent, he was willing to go on his own accord. And we have sent him with this other brother whose praise is in all of the churches in the gospel, through all of the churches, and not only that, but who was also chosen by the churches to travel with us with this gift, because we want to administer it to the glory of God Himself and to show your ready mind, and we want to avoid that anyone should blame us in this lavish gift which is being administered by us -- so that we can provide honorable things, not only in God's sight, but also in man's sight. And so, we're sending with them our brother whom have often proved himself diligent, and even more diligent now. We have great confidence in him. And if anybody asks about Titus, well, he's my partner and fellow worker concerning you. If they ask about the brethren with him or inquire about them, they're ministers of the churches, to the glory of Christ. So therefore, show to them, and before the churches, the proof of your love and of our boasting on your behalf."

Paul said, look, we want to take care of these finances in a way that's honorable. I imagine that was quite a bit of money in these days with all of those churches participating. It didn't leave a big impression in Jerusalem, which is interesting, but Paul did drop it off there in the book of Acts. But he wanted to be sure that there was an accountability, so he says of Titus, the first time he went you guys didn't treat him very well and he wasn't very happy, but this last time that he went, he came back now with news that things were getting better. He loved how he was treated. The Lord had done a work there. So now Titus said, I'll take the letter and I'll go get the offering ready for when you show up. Paul sends Titus with another guy, and another guy; three of them total. Two of them we don't know who they are. Notice in verse 18, the brother that was known by everyone. He's not named here, but everyone seems to know him. There's another guy down below in verse 22 who also came along. They had a committee of guys. We read in Acts that there were men from different churches that was going along as well. The purpose for Paul was, let's be accountable. This is a lot of money. We don't want to just carry it around or put it in one person's hands.

Let's be responsible to one another so that people trust us. And that's pretty wise, isn't it?

Most of the Bible commentaries suggest that Luke was the fellow that everyone knew well. I would tell you if I thought there was even an inkling in the Bible that that was true, but there's not. Go ahead and pick Luke. That's fine. I think maybe Bobby, but Bobby's not in the Bible either, so we have no idea.

But notice verse 20, "so lest they blame us." We want to just be above reproach, period, so we're sending a partner and fellow coworkers and delegates of the churches, and we want to do that in such a way that we deliver what God has given to us honorably to His glory.

Well, the last five verses -- and you didn't think we'd get through it. Look at us go! -- have to do with financial planning or foresight, if you will. And Paul's word to them, and he said it to them before was, any giving that you do besides willful and sacrificial should be thought of ahead of time. Verse 1 says this, "Now concerning the ministering to the saints, it is superfluous," which means it's not needed, "for me to write to you; for I know your willingness, about which I've boasted to the northern churches in Macedonia, that you in Achaia were even ready a year ago; that your zeal actually stirred up," the churches in the north, "the majority. Yet I have sent the brethren," these three guys, "lest our boasting of you should be vain in this respect, that you might be ready; or if some Macedonians," those from the north, "would come with me when Paul got there, and you would be unprepared, we (not to mention you!) would be ashamed of this confident boasting. Therefore, I thought it necessary to exhort the brethren to have them go ahead of time, till you could prepare your generous gift beforehand, which you previously, by the way, promised, that it might be ready as a matter, not of grudging obligation, but of generosity." Paul's word to them is, if you make a decision, do it beforehand.

In I Corinthians Chapter 16, I think, Paul said that as far as offerings were to go at the church, that the people who went to church to give should plan before they got there what they were going to give. In other words, it should be part of their budgeting, if you will, or

plan. It should be clear and decided, which is, I think, a good thing for us to do.

A lot of the church operates by fundraisers, which is horrible, because there's some people that are really good at it. There's guys that I've listened to, they could talk me out of my lunch. "Oh, here, take it. I don't care." Because they're good at it. Make me feel terrible. Other people are horrible at it. We never let people come up here to preach or to do music that want to take offerings. We just say it's not allowed here. We don't do that. You don't come to market our people. You tell us what it will cost us and we'll decide whether we want you or not. That'll be the way it'll go.

Paul says the same thing here. He was worried that after a year, this church might just have backed away from their commitment, and so Paul said, I send them before I get there so they can prepare the way, because I don't want to be embarrassed. You were like, the stimulus for the other churches before. Boy, it would be horrible if you bailed out on us now. But they didn't know where they stood. His point in verse 5 was, we want it to be generosity from your heart, willingly; not somehow we show up and oh, all right, we promise. Here, take it. Horrible; right? That's not what he wanted it to be like. He sends the guys ahead of time so that it could be given in a way that would honor the Lord.

I'll tell you another story, just happened to me 22 years ago. It seems like yesterday. I went back east to speak at a very large church, and I ended up speaking on Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. Sunday night when the last service ended the pastor got up and said, "Let's ask Pastor -- let's give him a big hand for being here." And you're embarrassed anyway. Knock it off; right? And then he says this, "So we'd like to take up an offering for him." You know how bad that makes you feel? He's over there, I'm sitting over here, so I got up and go, "Hey Pastor, I don't want your money, so tell your people to just give it to the church or take their families to dinner." "No." But it was the most embarrassing thing in my entire life. I wrote a book called "God's View of Money" just because -- and by the way, I get no money for "God's View of Money." It goes right to the church. I signed all of our books over to the church, so there's no conflict. I can hawk it with great proudness -- because I hated how God was

misrepresented so often by these clowns on T.V.

Next week we will finish this subject of giving, which is very uncomfortable to me, and then in two weeks we'll get back to Paul yelling at the false teachers, which I'm all for. I think this will be great.

God loves a cheerful giver. Make sure you're one of those.