

# 11. Learning the grace of giving

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Date: 26 May 2013

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, now we come to our Bible reading, and perhaps you turn with me to Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, chapter 8, and you'll find this on page 967 in our church Bibles, page 967.

Paul turns to a new subject at this point in his letter, the subject of Christian giving, the giving of the Corinthians, and this subject will occupy Paul for two chapters, chapter 8 and chapter 9.

So tonight, chapter 8, beginning at the first verse. We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia.

For in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. For they gave, according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own free will, begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints.

And this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord, and then by the will of God to us. Accordingly, we urge Titus that as he had started, so he should complete among you this act of grace.

[ 1 : 30 ] But as you excel in everything, in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you, which possibly should be your love for us, see that you excel in this act of grace also.

I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you, by his poverty, might become rich.

And in this matter, I give my judgment. This benefits you, who a year ago started not only to do this work, but also to desire to do it. So now finish doing it as well, so that your readiness in desiring it may be matched by your completing it out of what you have.

For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have. I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened, but that as a matter of fairness, your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need, that there may be fairness.

As it is written, whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack. But thanks be to God, who put into the heart of Titus the same earnest care I have for you.

[ 3 : 06 ] For he not only accepted our appeal, but being himself very earnest, he is going to you of his own accord. With him, we are sending the brother who is famous among all the churches for his preaching of the gospel.

And not only that, but he has been appointed by the churches to travel with us as we carry out this act of grace that is being ministered by us for the glory of the Lord himself and to show our goodwill. We take this course so that no one should blame us about this generous gift that is being administered by us. For we aim at what is honorable not only in the Lord's sight, but also in the sight of man.

And with them, we are sending our brother, whom we have often tested and found earnest in many matters, and who is now more earnest than ever because of his great confidence in you.

As for Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker for your benefit. And as for our brothers, they are messengers of the churches, the glory of Christ. So give proof before the churches of your love and of our boasting about you to these men.

[ 4 : 17 ] Amen. This is the word of the Lord, and may he bless it to us this evening. Well, can we turn again to 2 Corinthians chapter 8, page 967.

My plan, God willing, is that we take chapter 8 this evening and then chapter 9 next Sunday.

The two chapters, as I said earlier, belong together as a section within the whole letter, and they concern the subject of Christian giving. And then we're due to take a break from 2 Corinthians for a number of weeks until sometime later in the summer.

But I hope to finish the series with a study of the last four chapters, chapters 10 to 13, which are full of interest and drama and take us to the heart of the corrosive damage that was being done by the interlopers who were coming into Corinth and exercising influence in the church there, bad influence.

So chapter 8 tonight. Now, in general terms, it's clear that this chapter and the next one are all about generous giving.

[ 5 : 43 ] And there's no doubt that these two chapters have been enormously influential over the last 20 centuries in teaching the Christian church how to open its wallet cheerfully and willingly.

However, I want to spend the first few minutes this evening asking the question why these chapters come here at this point in this particular letter. We know that Paul never turns to a new subject in one of his letters without good reason.

So before we get into the nooks and crannies of chapter 8, let me sketch in a bit of background. Many of the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem, the folk who belong to what you might call the original mother church, many of these Christians were very poor in the first few decades of the gospel era. And we see a glimpse of this, for example, at the beginning of Acts chapter 6. Remember that incident where the Greek-speaking widows of Jewish Christians were complaining that they were being neglected in what was called the daily distribution, which I guess was the distribution of food and money for the poor folk.

So funds were clearly in short supply in Jerusalem in those early days. And the apostles at that point appointed seven men, we know them as the seven deacons, including Stephen and Philip, to look after the poor widows.

[ 7 : 04 ] Then sometime later, possibly as much as 10 years later, when Paul had come onto the scene, he went up to Jerusalem to meet the leading apostles there. And the ones he mentions particularly in Galatians chapter 2 are James and Peter and John.

And his discussions with these leading apostles led them to agree, and they agreed happily, that Paul was going to direct his evangelistic activities to the Gentiles, while Peter and James and John would head up the evangelization of the Jews.

But these Jerusalem apostles laid down one condition, and that was they asked Paul and his companions to remember the poor, by which they meant the poor Christians in Jerusalem.

And Paul tells us in Galatians chapter 2 verse 10, that that was the very thing that he was eager to do. And in all the years that followed, as Paul traveled around the Mediterranean area, planting churches in Gentile cities, he never forgot his undertaking to remember the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem, many of whom were very poor.

There's also an interesting moment that comes in the final few verses of Acts chapter 11. And Acts chapter 11 comes before Paul has even begun his missionary journeys. Paul is still living at Antioch in Syria, which was really his home church.

[ 8 : 27 ] And at that point, some Christians come down from Jerusalem to Antioch, and one of them, a man named Agabus, stands up and gives a prophecy that there is soon to be a great famine all over the world, which duly happened.

So, writes Luke, at the end of Acts 11, the disciples at Antioch determined, everyone according to his ability, to send relief to the brothers living in Judea.

And they did so, sending it to the elders, the elders in Jerusalem, by the hand of Barnabas and Saul. Saul, of course, was Paul's name originally.

So, before Paul even began his missionary travels, he was involved in taking a gift of money, no doubt a substantial gift, from the large and quite wealthy church in Antioch, which had both Jews and Gentiles in its congregation.

He took this gift to the poor Jewish Christians in Jerusalem. So, you might say that Paul had form. It was deep in his heart, this desire to encourage Christians from the Gentile world to support their poorer brothers and sisters in Jerusalem and Judea.

[ 9 : 33 ] And when Paul came to send his letter to the Romans, some years later, he wrote this in Romans 15. He's telling the Romans about his travel plans and how he's hoping to stop by and stay with them for some time before he goes on to Spain.

But he says, at present, before I come to you, I'm going to Jerusalem bringing aid to the saints. For Macedonia and Achaia, and I should just say that Macedonia and Achaia were the northern and southern provinces of Greece within the Roman Empire in those days.

So, Paul says, for Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem. They were pleased to do it and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings, they ought also to be of service to them in material blessings. And what Paul means by that is that the Gentiles owe everything to the Jews.

They owe their salvation to the Jews. The gospel comes from Jerusalem. So, it's only right, Paul is saying, for the Gentile Christians to repay some of their debt to the Jewish Christians by supporting them out of their greater financial means.

[10:48] And wrapped up in all this is one of Paul's greatest concerns of all. And that was his concern to help the Jewish Christians in the churches and the Gentile Christians in the churches to love each other, to understand each other, to welcome and accept each other, and to be deeply united as one Christian church.

There were considerable pressures in the first century to force Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians apart, even to have two Christian churches, a kind of apartheid.

But Paul could see that that pressure had to be resisted. And one of the greatest legacies that Paul has left to the Christian church is his insistence that Jew and Gentile belong together once they become Christians in the Church of Christ.

And they can only come to Christ on the same basis, the basis of being justified through faith in the Lord Jesus. So turning back to 2 Corinthians 8 and 9, there's a lot of thought and experience that lies behind these two chapters.

They arise out of Paul's deep concern to keep the Jewish Christians and the Gentile Christians together. And they're all part of Paul fulfilling his undertaking to remember the poor Christians of Jerusalem.

[12:04] So you'll see in chapter 8, verse 4, that Paul speaks of taking part in the relief of the saints. And it's the same thing in chapter 9, verse 1, where he mentions the ministry for the saints.

So he's not just writing there about the saints in general. What he means is the poor Jewish Christians in Jerusalem. So the contents of these two chapters, 8 and 9, are not just stuck into the letter by Paul for fun.

It's not as though he gets to the end of chapter 7 and then chews the end of his pen and says, I wonder what I'll stick in now for the Corinthians. Ah, I know. Let's have a few thoughts on Christian giving.

No, not at all. The needs of the poor saints in Jerusalem have been on his mind and heart for the best part of 20 years. And you'll see that Paul is not opening up this subject with the Corinthians for the first time.

Just look with me at verse 10 in chapter 8, where he says, and in this matter I give my judgment. This benefits you who a year ago started not only to do this work but also to desire to do it.

[13:14] So now finish doing it as well so that your readiness in desiring it may be matched by your completing it out of what you have. So the Corinthians, a year previously, had begun to get their relief fund together and it's Titus who has been instrumental in helping to set the project up and get it going.

Look at verse 6 in chapter 8. Accordingly, we urge Titus that as he had started so he should complete among you this act of grace.

And then if you turn back a page or three to 1 Corinthians 16, 1 Corinthians 16, you'll see what Paul had said to the Corinthians a year or perhaps 18 months earlier when he wrote this first letter to them.

So 1 Corinthians 16, verse 1, now concerning the collection for the saints. Clearly, this is not a new topic. It's something which already they've been discussing together.

Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do on the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up as he may prosper so that there will be no collecting when I come.

[14:30] And when I arrive, I will send those whom you accredit by letter to carry your gift to Jerusalem. If it seems advisable that I should go also, they will accompany me. So you see, 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 are part of a much bigger story.

And if you ask the question, did Paul ever get to Jerusalem with this money? The answer is, yes, he did. And the story of how he got to Jerusalem with it is told in Acts chapters 20 and 21, if you want to follow that up with a bit of reading on your own.

All right, well, let's get into the text of chapter 8. And my title this evening is Learning the Grace of Giving. And I use the word learning because we all need to learn to give.

Isn't it true that all of us by nature love money and are tight-fisted? Think back to when you were a child and you used to play Monopoly. Perhaps you still do.

And didn't you used to crow with joy when you owned hotels on Park Lane and Mayfair and your fellow player landed on them and you used to rake in the cash?

[15:41] Wahey, you said. I'm a millionaire. Now that's deep in our system, isn't it? Wonderful to have all this money. That's the idea. So it's against that tendency that we need to hear Paul's teaching about generous, gracious giving to support poorer Christians.

Now what I want to do is to set the teaching of the chapter out in the form of five main guidelines or instructions. But before I do that, let's notice how Paul begins his appeal.

Look at chapter 8 verse 1. We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia. For in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part.

Now as I said earlier, Macedonia was northern Greece and the main churches in Macedonia were the churches of Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea, all churches that Paul had planted himself.

It was the southern part of Greece that was known as Achaia and the strongest church there would have been the church at Corinth. Athens is also in Achaia, only about 50 miles away, though there's not much evidence there was much of a church there at this stage.

[16:55] Now apparently, and this may lie behind these first verses here in chapter 8, apparently the people of Achaia tended to regard the Macedonians, the northern Greeks, as a bit inferior.

Now we know that syndrome, don't we? In Britain, we know that. Londoners, for example, can look down their noses at Yorkshire people, isn't that right? And vice versa.

Oh yes, vice versa too, soft southerners. I've been told that even in Scotland, Edinburgh people and Glasgow people can regard each other as a little bit quaint.

Now the Macedonians were obviously poor, you see how Paul speaks in verse 2 of their extreme poverty. The Corinthians, however, were almost certainly wealthier because Corinth was a very big city in those days.

It was a great center of trade and commerce. So the average Corinthian Christian will have had a deeper pocket than the average Macedonian Christian. So there may be some gentle ironic humor playing around these early verses.

[18:07] Brothers, we want you to know how extraordinarily generous the Macedonian Christians are proving to be. They're severely afflicted, verse 2, which is perhaps a reference to persecution, and they're extremely poor, but their great joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part.

For, verse 3, they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own free will, begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints.

Now, isn't verse 4 extraordinary? If somebody comes to you and says, do us a favor, pal, you expect the next words to be, will you give me a fiver?

But the Macedonian Christians were saying to Paul, do us a favor, Paul, let us give you money for our poor brothers and sisters in Jerusalem. So they had come to see that it was an honor and a privilege to give money, even though they were so poor they hardly had two brass farthings to rub together.

No wonder that Paul should see this, as he puts it in verse 1, as the grace of God. It's a touch of grace from heaven, when a group of people long to be givers rather than receivers.

[19:27] And that's the complete reversal of our usual mindset. Our natural mindset is to want a rake the money in, but when God's grace is at work in us, we long to shell the money out, and we regard it as a favor and a privilege to be able to do it.

So Paul may be gently playing on the snobbishness of the Achaeans over the Macedonians. Brothers, here's a thing. The Macedonians, who we all know are as poor as church mice, are overflowing with generosity towards the poor Christians of Judea.

Surely, brothers, you can follow their example. Well, let's look on to the rest of the chapter and we'll see these main guidelines that Paul gives the Corinthians in order to teach them about their giving. First, healthy Christian giving is part of a bigger picture of the Christian life. It's one part in a bigger picture.

It's not just an isolated thing. It's one facet amongst other facets of a developing and healthy Christian life. Look how Paul puts it in verse 7. But as you excel in everything, notice these few aspects here, in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you or your love for us, see that you excel in this act of grace also.

[ 20 : 52 ] So in verse 7, Paul is holding up a standard of excellence. In other words, he's encouraging them to develop and live the Christian life to the full. And he mentions five other aspects of godly living which he encourages them to keep persevering in.

He mentions faith, learning to trust God's fatherly care for them even in the midst of trying circumstances, learning to believe God's promises of eternal life, even in the face of approaching death.

Paul has said back in chapter 5 of this same letter, we walk by faith, not by sight. Secondly, he mentions speech. They're learning to speak, they're learning to articulate the gospel, they're developing answers to the questions that their non-Christian friends put to them, they're learning to speak for Christ.

Thirdly, knowledge. They're not only speaking, they're growing in understanding. Now Jesus speaks of knowledge in a very characteristic way. He says to God the Father in John chapter 17, this is eternal life, that they should know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

That's the true knowledge, to know God and to know Jesus Christ. So these Corinthians are coming to know and understand the Lord and the gospel. Next, Paul mentions earnestness.

[ 22 : 17 ] earnest doesn't mean fierce or ferocious. I think it means vigorously engaged in all sorts of Christian service. Many of us start the Christian life as limp as a lettuce leaf, but we can grow in vigor, and it's the earnest Christian, the one who's serious about serving the Lord, who makes a real contribution to the work of the gospel.

And then fifth, and in our love for you or your love for us, Paul may well mean both of those things. In fact, one of my commentaries says, the literal meaning of the Greek suggests the love which originates with you and finds a permanent home in us.

I think what Paul is really saying is what a blessing and joy it is to discover and experience the love that Christians have for each other. Are we beginning to discover something of that in our church, the love that Christians have for each other?

I think we are. But the thrust of verse 7 is to say, see that you excel not only in these five qualities but also in this act of grace, this grace of giving.

In other words, if your Christian life has not yet learned generous financial giving, it is sadly incomplete. So generous giving is seen to be one element amongst several elements in a well-developed Christian life.

[ 23 : 41 ] life. And Paul has already said a similar thing back in verse 5, where he's still talking about the lovely example of the Macedonians. They begged for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints.

And this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us. There was something about the Macedonians that Paul simply did not expect.

it surprised him and delighted him. And that was that before they gave their money, first of all, meaning really first in importance, not first in time, first of all, first and foremost, they surrendered themselves to the Lord Jesus to serve him in any way possible, and they gave themselves to Paul and his colleagues.

We're at your service, Paul. You're the Lord's envoy. You're the Lord's ambassador. Direct us in any way that you wish to. So the giving up of their money was part of the giving up of their whole lives and selves to serve the Lord at the direction of his apostles.

And if that is not wholehearted self-surrender, I don't know what is. I suppose it's possible for a Christian to give money while withholding self.

[ 24 : 56 ] But Paul is teaching us that financial surrender is part of self-surrender. It's part of what it means to say to the Lord Jesus, I am yours. Everything I have, everything I am, is at your disposal, including my money.

So there's the first thing. Healthy Christian giving is part of a bigger picture of the Christian life. Secondly, Paul teaches the Corinthians that generous giving is regular and planned, that there's a consistency and a persevering quality about it.

Look again at verse 10 here. This benefits you who a year ago started not only to do this work but also to desire to do it.

So now finish doing it as well so that your readiness in desiring it may be matched by your completing it out of what you have. You started the work, he's saying, now complete it.

So Paul sees their giving to the poor Christians as a long-term steady commitment. And in those verses I quoted a few minutes ago from 1 Corinthians 16, he says, on the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and to store it up as he may prosper so that there'll be no collecting when I come.

[ 26 : 17 ] You see, Paul doesn't want to have to gather the Corinthians together when he comes and then bring out a great big bucket wrapped in silver foil and then say to them, now friends, now friends, see this bucket.

While Jessica plays the organ, in the background, I want to ask you to take out your wallets and to be as generous as you can. Think of a figure and then double it, then double it again.

You see, he doesn't want to have to make an emotional appeal like that. Have you ever been in a church meeting when that kind of appeal has been made? I have and it makes me squirm. It's not Paul's way.

Paul says each of you is to set aside something every week and store it up as he may prosper. As he may prosper. In other words, if you have a good week at your trade and your income is good for that week, you'll have a bigger sum to set aside.

If you have a poor week, you'll have less to set aside. But set something aside so that when I come, you will have a healthy amount all stored up. It's all planned and regular week by week.

[ 27 : 22 ] So the encouragement here is to persevere in our giving and to plan it according to the way each of us prospers. Now, each of us will have times of greater prosperity and times of lesser prosperity.

That's what happens in any individual's life. So our giving may have to vary in different parts of our lives. But let's be regular. A weekly amount or a monthly amount and then let's stick to it as much as we're able to.

It's part of our glad commitment to Christ. And when we reach the autumn of life, when there are more silver threads amongst the gold, let's then plan to use our money not only to support our dependents, our children and grandchildren, which is a very good thing to do, but also to support gospel work after our death.

So a legacy left for the work of, say, the Delhi Bible Institute. Or the Tron Church. Or the Barnabas Fund. That sort of thing can be a great boost to the work of the kingdom.

Don't leave your money, friends, to the donkey sanctuary. Or the fund for saving the great crested newts of Dumbartonshire. Remember, Jesus counted one man's salvation and health more valuable than the lives of 2,000 pigs, which went over the cliff.

[ 28 : 47 ] Now, thirdly, Paul teaches the Corinthians that Christian giving is not some new legalism, but is rather a demonstration of genuine love.

Look at verse 8. I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine. It's important that we see Paul is not issuing legalistic commands.

And it's striking that nowhere in the New Testament are Christians put under obligation to tithe their income. In other words, to give a tenth, 10% of their income. Paul's guideline is according to an individual's prosperity.

Now, that means that wealthy Christians are able to give a great deal more than a tenth of their income. Whereas many Christians who are really poor, as many Christians are in many parts of the world, folk who are struggling to avoid malnutrition, they couldn't possibly give away a tenth of their income.

If your income is a dollar a day, you can't possibly spare 10 cents. So there's no fixed proportion, no legalistic proportion that is set for us. Where do we look then for a standard and an example?

[ 30 : 05 ] Well, Paul tells us in the very next verse, verse 9, Now, that is one of the most beautiful and profound things that Paul ever put into words.

And we can't explore its depths this evening, but we can at least see why Paul mentions Jesus in this fashion here. The key idea that Paul is thinking of throughout this chapter is the idea of grace. So he says in verse 7, see that you excel in this act of grace also. And you'll see grace is the subject of verse 9. Grace is the kind of undeserved mercy and kindness that simply takes your breath away.

And there's something deeply self-denying about it. And this is the case with Jesus. That though he was rich, well, that's an understatement, isn't it? He was heir to nothing less than the universe. Although he was rich, he was prepared to lay all that aside, to lay aside the wealth of heaven and all his glory. He laid aside his glory, the glory that since time immemorial, since before time began, he had known and enjoyed with his father before the foundation of the world.

[ 31 : 28 ] He laid it all aside so that those who were poor, that is the Corinthians and all of us, poor not so much in money terms, but in terms of our spiritual and moral bankruptcy, so that we might become rich.

We had no assets in the bank of heaven. We had nothing to recommend us to God or to plead with him for his favor and acceptance. Spiritually and morally speaking, we were in the red.

We were overdrawn without permission. We were hopelessly, endlessly in debt. And yet Jesus changed places with us. He laid aside all his assets and put them to our account so that we, through his willingness to become unbearably poor, might become unbelievably rich.

And he, says Paul, is our example. Look at what he has done for us, and you'll never be stingy. Verse 9 teaches gracious self-denial for the sake of helping others who are in great need.

And you'll see that this teaching of Paul is so different from the teaching of the modern so-called prosperity gospel, which is infecting so many churches these days.

[ 32 : 46 ] The prosperity gospel says, give and give and give, so that in the end you will receive and receive and get rich. Paul says, give and give and give, so that in the end other people are helped.

The example of Jesus is not that he gave and gave so as to become richer, but that he gave and gave so as to bring blessing to others. Then fourth, Paul teaches the Corinthians that Christian giving is a matter of fair sharing.

So he says in verse 13, I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened, but that as a matter of fairness, your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance at some future time may supply your need, that there may be fairness.

You'll see he twice uses that word of fairness to emphasize his point. He is saying, share your money around so that things will be evened up a little bit. The Corinthians are obviously enjoying a certain amount of prosperity because Paul speaks in verse 14 of your abundance at the present time.

But he knows that economics have swings and roundabouts, and in the second half of verse 14, he pictures a time in the future when the Corinthian stock exchange goes down and the Jerusalem economy comes up.

[ 34 : 10 ] And he says, should that happen, the boot will be on the other foot and your brothers and sisters in Jerusalem will be in a position to support you. Now let's carefully notice that what Paul is teaching here is the support of poorer Christians by wealthier Christians.

This collection of money is, in the words of verse 4, for the relief of the saints. And in chapter 9, verse 1, it's the ministry for the saints. There's no record that Paul ever organized a collection of money for poor people outside the church.

There's a verse in Galatians chapter 6, which perhaps helps us to see his position more clearly. He says this, Galatians 6, 10, So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.

Paul is revealing a scale of priorities there. He is concerned for needy people who are not Christians. But his priority lies with Christians who need help because they're the family.

They're our brothers and sisters, and we have a debt and obligation to look after them. And Jesus, too, reveals a very similar priority. Lord, when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you?

[ 35 : 29 ] When did we see you sick, or in prison and visit you? And the king will answer them, Truly I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, my brothers, you did it to me.

The brothers, the Christians, they're the priority. So it's not in the least bit inappropriate or wrong for Christians to give money to folk in need who are not Christians. But the priority of Paul is to help Christians.

And this is why, for example, we decided to send a significant sum of money to our Christian friends in Delhi a year or so ago to help them to buy a new property in Ranchi so as to develop their work of training pastors and church planters.

The fact is that most Christians in Britain have a lot more money than most Christians in India. Now, by Paul's teaching in verse 14, if the time should come when our finances go belly up and the Indian economy roars ahead, they will be in a position to help us.

I know that's not likely in the foreseeable future, but that's the principle that Paul is teaching here.

It's a matter of fair sharing. So, friends, let's keep on looking for ways, for new ways in which we can offer financial support to Christians who need it, and especially Christians who are doing good work for the cause of the gospel.

[ 36 : 54 ] We're now fifth and last, and this is what the final paragraph, verses 16 to 24, is all about. Paul is teaching here that Christian giving should always be carried out in a way that is impeccably above board.

In other words, that money should make its journey from A to B in such a way that the cleverest and nastiest opponent of the gospel should be completely unable to criticize the way in which funds are moved about.

Now, we can't look at every phrase here, but let's at least see how Paul makes his point. He reverts to Titus in verses 16 and 17. Now, he's already urged Titus back in verse 6 to go back to Corinth and complete the task that he started, the task of collecting the money.

But in verses 16 and 17, he reintroduces Titus as the leader of the group who are going to move the money from Corinth back to Paul and on to Jerusalem. And then you'll see Paul introduces somebody else in verse 18, another Christian brother whom he does not name.

Simply, Paul says that he's famous as a preacher. Almost certainly, the Corinthians would have immediately known from that brief description who Paul was talking about. And why did Paul choose this man?

[ 38 : 15 ] Because his integrity and trustworthiness were well known. And not only is he to travel with Titus to Corinth, but also, as verse 19 puts it, he's to travel with Paul on the next leg of the journey.

And then you'll see there's yet another person mentioned, again, an unnamed brother, in verse 22, a brother whom Paul says, we have often tested and found earnest in many matters.

In other words, another Christian whose integrity under pressure has been tried and has not been found wanting. It's when pressure is on that a person's integrity or lack of it is revealed.

So Paul says this is a brother who's been tested. So you can see Paul is gathering together a little team of faithful men whose integrity is recognized and well known.

He's not going to send any Tom, Dick, or Harry to transport this large sum of money. He's got to guard against the possibility of being criticized for acting without due care.

[ 39 : 18 ] And he explains his motive in verse 20. We take this course so that no one should blame us about this generous gift that is being administered by us.

For we aim at what is honorable, not only in the Lord's sight, but also in the sight of man. So he's saying it's not enough just to do the right thing by the Lord.

It's got to be beyond the reach of human criticism as well. Billy Graham, the well-known American evangelist, used to head up quite a large organization as he traveled around the world preaching the gospel.

Big Billy, as we used to call him, is about 95 now, and he's been long retired from his work. But I remember, going back 20 or 30 years, how scrupulously concerned he was that the financial dealings of his organization should always be seen to be handled with complete integrity.

Not simply that they should be handled with integrity, but that they should be seen to be handled with integrity. Those who oppose gospel work will often try to find fault with the way that Christians handle money.

[ 40 : 26 ] And that's why churches and other Christian organizations need to choose their financial officers with great care. It's no good saying at a church meeting, does anybody fancy the job of treasurer?

Hands up or form a queue afterwards? No, there has to be careful selection. Financial officers need to be not only honest, but experienced.

In other words, not naive. Money is a minefield, and Paul is recognizing and teaching that fact here. But let's also notice a very striking idea that Paul includes in this paragraph.

In verse 19, he speaks about this act of grace being ministered by us for the glory of the Lord. And look at verse 23 as well.

The men chosen to carry the money are the messengers of the churches, and as they do this work, they reflect the glory of Christ. So where a church commits itself to the loving use of money in support of poorer Christians, that commitment, that giving, that self-sacrifice, that impoverishing of self so as to enrich others, it demonstrates the glory of the Lord Jesus.

[ 41 : 41 ] Now, you wouldn't think, would you, that money and the Lord's glory would sit very closely together. But they do, in Paul's thinking, and he is our teacher.

What Paul is saying throughout chapters 8 and 9 is that our money and the way we use it is an indicator of how closely we identify with Jesus himself.

For, as verse 9 puts it, you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor so that you, by his poverty, might become rich.

And that, Paul is saying, is our supreme example. Let's pray together.

We remember with thankfulness, Lord Jesus, that you came down to earth from heaven.

[ 42 : 47 ] And for you, it was a very long journey and a great change from the glory to the poverty of a stable and then the poverty of those years, walking the dusty roads of Galilee and Judea.

And we think of the way in which ultimately you laid aside not only your glory but your life itself. You were prepared to become like a servant and give your hands and feet to the nails.

And at one level you lost everything for our sake. So we do pray, dear Lord, that something of that spirit of humbling and self-sacrifice will fill our hearts more and more.

That you'll help us to listen to your servant Paul and to follow his teaching. And we pray that there'll be great blessing to many because of our obedience to it.

And we ask it for the sake of your name and indeed your glory. Amen.