

2 Corinthians 9

Written by K B Napier

Wednesday, 15 February 2017 11:44

“...soweth bountifully....”

In this chapter we find Paul doing something he would be hated for today – he is testing the churches and getting them to prove the truth of their Christian claims. Without a doubt, the majority of churches in this present age would become very angry if a minister called on them to prove their claim to being Christian!

Why is this, when God Himself tells us to do this as a matter of common practice? Note how in Exodus 16:4, God says to Moses “... *Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a certain rate every day, that I may prove them, whether they will walk in my law, or no.*”

Later, Moses told the people that God was coming to prove them “... *and that his fear may be before your faces, that ye sin not.*”

(Exodus 20:20). The point of the proving, then, is to ensure that we are what we claim to be. There must be proof, tangible and obvious, that even the world can see. Are you obviously a Christian to all around you? Those who smile sweetly and say their faith is “*between me and God*”

are being silly and covert – we are to tell people by word and deed, and by our characters, that we are saved. People who say their faith is secret have no faith to speak of, hence their statement, made to stop others from finding out the truth.

This maxim is repeated in Deuteronomy 8:2 & 16. It is also found in Judges 2:22 and 3:4. In 1 Kings 10:1 we read of the Queen of Sheba coming to Solomon “... *to prove him with hard words.*”

In essence this is the same as Paul saying ‘I want to see

your power, not just hear you say you have it’. The Queen heard of Solomon’s wisdom, but she wanted to hear and see it for herself, through testing him with ‘hard questions’, *chiydah*

– riddles (obscure queries and statements), complex questions.

Job agonised over being tested, for he knew that if he said one thing, it would condemn him, but if he did not say it, he would still be condemned, but for another reason (Job 9:20). David, in Psalm 26:2, called on God to test him to see if he was genuine in his faith and practices. Do we dare to ask God to do this?

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Romans 12:2 echoes the same tests of old... do not be like the people of the world, but show that you have changed, thereby proving to God and to men that God's will is the rule of your lives. In Galatians 6:4, we are told that every Christian must provide proof of his standing before God. We must also test what everyone else says and does (1 Thessalonians 5:21).

So, do not suggest we must not prove our allegiance to Jesus Christ! Scripture says otherwise. Every day we must prove we are what we claim to be. If we are Christians, then we must act like it, as we read in Romans 12:2. It is when we obey and pass this test, that God showers us with blessings, abundantly and without restraint.

Why do we often think we are alone and everything is so tough? It is because we do not prove ourselves before God and men. A reluctance creeps into our hearts and we start to hide away or slow down in our proclamation of faith in God. It is Satan's way of trying to defeat God's influence in our lives. By doing it he prevents us from testifying to God's will in the world.

To be tested, as we see in the texts above, is not just to rise to the occasion after being prompted to do so – it is also to *ask* God to send us opportunities to prove our allegiance. It is like the athlete who does not just run at the games, but practices every day, whether or not anyone else sees him do it. He thus remains fit and alert, ready to run at any time, proving his athletic abilities. ALL Christians must be 'ready and willing'!

The active Christian is not afraid to be tested and questioned. He welcomes it. If he tries to avoid being proved, then something is amiss. The Christian who says his faith is secret, between him and God, is really saying he has no faith and wishes you would stop trusting him, or you will discover his 'faith' is only a thin veneer. Even worse, testing might prove he is not even saved.

Paul is telling the Corinthians he has boasted to the Macedonians of their intention, declared a year previously, to give generously to Christians in need. The Macedonians, though in dire straits and in poverty, were so enthused by the aim of the Corinthians, that they gave all they had to help the poor. (Note: 'poor' need not mean destitute – it can refer to those who have a need at the time they cannot deal with). Now, Paul is telling them to act out what they said they would do, so that he did not look stupid in front of the Macedonians. He boasted of their spiritual growth – now they had to prove this was so.

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Today, we have every right to say “prove it” to anyone who claims to be a Christian. All he has to do is live as a Believer. This means according to scripture. Time and again I challenge people to supply this proof – all I ask is that they believe and live according to God’s word. I make the same demand of myself. I know both they and I will fail at times. But, I do expect to see an adherence to scripture. But, charismatics do not obey scripture – they invent their own version of it. The same goes for many others of course, partially or fully. In refusing to adhere to scripture as it is written, they prove their own demise, falsity, and spiritual destitution.

Verses 1-4

1.

“For as touching the ministering to the saints, it is superfluous for me to write to you:

2.

For I know the forwardness of your mind, for which I boast of you to them of Macedonia, that Achaia was ready a year ago; and your zeal hath provoked very many.

3.

Yet have I sent the brethren, lest our boasting of you should be in vain in this behalf; that, as I said, ye may be ready:

4.

Lest haply if they of Macedonia come with me, and find you unprepared, we (that we say not, ye) should be ashamed in this same confident boasting.”

Paul encourages the Corinthians and hints that perhaps he was putting on some pressure to get them started. Yet, he says, concerning giving to other Christians, it is “*superfluous... to write*”. It is

perissos

, not really necessary. He says he is very sure of his ground, but maybe the Corinthians needed a prompter, just in case! “It is not necessary for me to write, but...”

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Very often pastors have to remind the congregation of their duties and beliefs. Not because they are deliberately sinful, but because sometimes we all miss the mark. Maybe we have become tired of so many trials, or we have known sudden changes that temporarily cause us to stumble, or we have slowly grown cool toward God by way of modern life and its many demands. A little jolt in the right direction at the right time will rekindle the spark, and life starts to become joyous again. As God says, He holds out His arm still, even when we fail Him.

Paul is genuinely persuaded the Corinthians are not fakes. Titus reported to him that they are genuine and zealous for the things of God. That is why he says *"I know the forwardness of your mind"*.

They display
'forwardness', *prothumia*
– a readiness of mind, a zeal, a constant inclination to do God's will. I have a lot of time for Christians who are in this condition, because, despite their failures, their hearts and minds are rooted firmly in Christ. Sadly, many are not like this; they refuse to be obedient to God and reject the preaching and teaching of God's appointed ministers.

Why, says Paul, I have already boasted to the Macedonians your intention to give generously was stated a year ago! In this text Corinth is included under the generalised name 'Achaia ('trouble')', an old name for Greece. Though Paul's statement might suggest Macedonia and Greece were separate, in his day both countries were controlled as one province by the Romans. So, Paul was more or less saying: 'I told those of Northern Greece what you intended to do in Southern Greece.'

After Paul told the Macedonians of the zeal of the Corinthians, the Macedonians were 'provoked', *erethizo*, stirred up and excited enough to mimic Corinthian generosity. We usually forget that we are not private individuals in the kingdom of God, but are emissaries of God. We are watched and listened to, even if in distaste. What we say and do can influence many, many people. In the first flush of the vile 'Toronto Blessing' every person I counselled spread the truth of its satanic foundation and activities to many more. In some cases, information given to one person was passed on to hundreds and "provoked very many". Never think we can do or say whatever we like!

Though he had already boasted of the Corinthian intent to everyone in northern Greece, Paul wanted to make sure his boast would be upheld. That is why he now sent other apostles as 'forward runners', to see if all was well. He sent them to the Corinthians so that when representatives of the Macedonian churches arrived in Corinth, there should be no running about at the last minute trying to collect funds together. He wanted them to be ready, so as not to make his word appear to be false, or that their own claims should not be ridiculed or found to

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be vain. More than that, it would make him ashamed he had been so confident.

Verses 5-9

1.

“Therefore I thought it necessary to exhort the brethren, that they would go before unto you, and make up beforehand your bounty, whereof ye had notice before, that the same might be ready, as a matter of bounty, and not as of covetousness.

2.

But this I say, he which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully.

3.

Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver.

4.

And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work:

5.

(As it is written, He hath dispersed abroad; he hath given to the poor; his righteousness remaineth for ever.”

Paul was sending the apostles and others to help prepare the Corinthians. If the Macedonians came to find them rushing around without being organised, they would rightly assume Paul's boast was just hot air. It can be very embarrassing for someone to witness slowness or flustered responses when seeking help, for such responses show an unwillingness to help at all.

Paul was asking the Corinthians to “*make up beforehand (their) bounty*”. The word for ‘bounty’

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is *eulogia*, which is interesting. It is not a direct reference to money, but to the 'concrete' blessings it will give. In the past, when I was in dire need and true poverty, no Christian (apart from my mother) helped. Instead, from the comfort of their homes and incomes, they gave me advice to 'pray'! There was no concrete help, not even a cup of tea. Paul was far more direct. He wanted the Corinthians to collect of their incomes, so that the resultant monies could bring a blessing to those who needed it.

It is a truism that when a man has nothing, not even food, any talk of betterment is above his head, for his whole energy is given to finding food and shelter. Debt, too, is like a noose around the neck, and the man experiencing it is always waiting for the noose to tighten. His whole mind is thus made anxious, and this can cause him to lose sight of God's grace, or even to become ill. At such times the simple act of giving of what is extra in our finances, though a small sacrifice to us, can turn a person's life around dramatically. That person can then get back to spiritual truths and regain in strength, maybe even giving back far more in other kinds of blessings.

Paul then warns them – if they give mean amounts they will be rewarded likewise. We should not give in order to get something back. But, when we do give, we must do so without stint. When we give lovingly, without wanting anything back, God will reward us a hundredfold. In giving, the most important factor is not the amount, but the state of our hearts. There is a direct relationship, then, between giving and receiving. Those who give willingly (and eagerly) and with real love, will be given far more in return by God.

So, Paul wants the Corinthians to gather up the monies in advance, so there is no undignified rush when he got there. By collecting in advance, it showed they cared and were not showing off or giving reluctantly.

There is a suggestion here that they had already received a communication about the matter, *pr okataggello* – an announcement beforehand, possibly referring to their own declaration a year before. He also wanted them to give plenteously from their plenty (or lack of it), and not reluctantly or in order to get back a huge reward from God, proving greed, *pleonexia*

.

Strictly speaking, this text is not primarily about money, but about willingness to give all for God.

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When Christ told the rich young man to give away all of his wealth if he wanted to follow Him, the issue was not about the money, but about the thing that mattered the most to the young man. He surpassed in his religious zeal, but his one ruling passion was his wealth, and he refused to give that up, even for Christ and salvation.

The issue with the Corinthians was the same, but on a larger scale. Would they be willing to give away what they had worked for and saved? Paul did not wish to make anyone poor. He only wanted to see they would be willing to give away everything they had for God. By giving away what had thus far mattered the most to them, they proved their acceptance of God's will and their true spiritual state. Even so, it is still a standard Christian virtue to be ready to give to any fellow believer who needs it, without reluctance and in greatness of heart.

Each of us must give "*according as he purposeth in his heart*". If God says to give it all away, then do so. Usually, though (if the heart is right anyway) He will only ask for smaller amounts. The *willingness* is what He requires, rather than the actual amount. How many claim to be willing – until someone is actually in need? Then they make all kinds of excuses... 'er, um, sorry but it is all in savings', or 'I have a particularly heavy list of payments this month', or 'I don't really have money you know'... I have heard it all!

The true Christian heart will give straight away without thinking of the consequences. You might think this is irresponsible. But, remember it is *God* Who tells us to give (or has someone put before us who is in need), and if He does that, He will ensure that when we give we will not suffer as a result. Indeed, those who give freely and abundantly are often rewarded straight away. The key, then, is to give as your heart sees fit (assuming the Holy Spirit is your companion and not mere emotion – or lack of it!).

This is to give "*not grudgingly*", *lupe* – with sorrow or even being secretly annoyed because you feel forced into the situation, like when collectors come up to you in the street! In fact, this ought to remind us never to be grudging about *anything* in life – we should be direct and honest and not do things we do not wish to do, just because others expect it (*anagke*, 'of necessity, imposed upon us). Otherwise we build up resentment within and this affects our Christian walk. Far better to be upfront and open.

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Paul then assures us that “*God loveth a cheerful giver*” (verse 7). This is almost a jolly thing to say! It means God is *agapao* – well

pleased with, and fond of, those who are ‘cheerful’,

hilaros

, joyous and prompt to respond, in their giving. This reinforces what has been said above. I encourage all who read this to be cheerful givers, for God will love you! Please God, and do not harbour base thoughts of greed and self-interest.

In verse 8 Paul says that if the Corinthians comply, God will give back to them more than they had hoped for. He will give them ‘all grace’ abundantly, to such an extent they will have no need themselves, *autarkeia* – a state of life that is perfect, needing no aid or support, having sufficient for necessary things in life, and, contentment with one’s lot, even if what we have is the barest required, *autarkes*. A root meaning is *arkeo*, to have unflinching strength and to be satisfied. This promise is superb! So, why do we not adhere to it?

Paul continues: if the Corinthians take up this promise, they will then go on to do even more good works for God, thus attracting even more grace and benefits of God. Just as ‘success breeds success’, so obedience in everything produces more rewards from God. The more we obey the greater become His rewards.

You might think, knowing this, some will do it just to gain rewards. But, this does not happen. How many do you know, who obey to this degree? Very few! Yes, some who are greedy will try to superficially give plentifully, expecting a huge pay-out from God. But, because their hearts are not right and God did not ask them to give, they will fail. Only if we give out of hearts full of love and care will God give us more back.

Giving to those who are in need is a sign of God’s righteousness, not ours (verse 9). We must give not to gain a reputation for our holiness, but in order to obey God. It is He Who gives to those in need, not us. This should not puzzle you – God owns the universe! He created everything that we now use to gain money and products. If we earn small wages or huge salaries, it is only because He allows it or gives it. Therefore, when we give, even generously, we give from what God has already given us in the first place. It is not ours to give, but His. So, it is His righteousness that shines, not our own.

Verses 10-15

1.

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“Now he that ministereth seed to the sower both minister bread for (your) food, and multiply your seed sown, and increase the fruits of your righteousness;)

2.

Being enriched in every thing to all bountifulness, which causeth through us thanksgiving to God.

3.

For the administration of this service not only supplieth the want of the saints, but is abundant also by many thanksgivings unto God;

4.

Whiles by the experiment of this ministration they glorify God for your professed subjection unto the gospel of Christ, and for your liberal distribution unto them, and unto all (men);

5.

And by their prayer for you, which long after you for the exceeding grace of God in you.

6.

Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift.”

Paul ends this section of his letter with a benediction, as he requests that God gives blessings to the Corinthians as they give to others abundantly. God gives seed to the sower – a probable allusion to the way God sends out preachers and gives the desired results. God will surely, says Paul, not just give them food to live on, but He will also give them good results when they preach and witness to the world.

Thus, when we are obedient in one part of our Christian lives, it has ‘spin-off’ effects on other parts of our lives. Generally speaking, when we obey spiritually God will reward us both spiritually and materially. Remember, though, that to gain such blessings we must obey without

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thought of reward! This is the 'catch'! God, then, rewards those whose hearts are pure and driven only by love for God's will.

Indeed, those who obey will be "*enriched in every thing to all bountifulness*". This statement refers to spiritual blessings,

ploutizo

, which will be given in such abundance that everyone will notice. The 'spin-off' is God will also give material blessings,

ploutos

. Paul praises God for all these blessings.

The administration or promotion of this 'service', *leitourgia* (ministry of giving to those in need), provides what is necessary for the sai
nts, but it also causes them to give grateful thanks to God, also in abundance. When those in need have their needs met by God, they will praise Him and be encouraged to continue in ministry and good works (verse 12).

Through this 'experiment', *dokime*, experience or proof of God's work, everyone helped by the generosity will praise God for the way the Corinthians obey Him. They have a "*professed subjection unto the gospel of Christ*"

that is proved to be real. The 'profession' is in word, but the 'subjection',

hupotage

, is the putting of the claimed obedience into action. Many Christians say they will do this or that, but few do it in practice. So, their profession is without power and reaps no rewards. Do you

claim

to be a Christian – or can you

prove

it by your righteousness and obedience to God's will, as found in His word?

They will firstly praise God for the spiritual state of the Corinthians, and, secondly, they will thank them for their generosity with money, which they have given as a 'liberal distribution', *haplototes*

, simply with honesty, a sign of their open hearts. The 'distribution' speaks of their communion with other saints. By giving so well, they show they truly are brethren.

(The 'all men' in verse 13 refers to brethren, not to the unsaved. We know this because the

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entire chapter talks of brethren, not the whole world. This is a basis for giving today. We do not have a mandate to give to all who ask, or to all in need (particularly by charities), but must do so when led by God... Who will cause us to give to the saved first. Do not be misled by emotional appeals with pictures of children! Listen instead to the Holy Spirit, Who demands that we give to the *brethren* as a priority).

The glory continues, as those we help then pray for us as their love for us grows, and as they pray God's grace will abound in us. Let God be thanked for His 'unspeakable gift' – a gift so holy it cannot be described, *anekdiegetos*. This does not just refer to money, but to the ultimate gift of salvation, the basis of all spiritual good and gifts.

So, the whole chapter is about salvation and what follows from it, including giving help to the saints. Giving is a result of our salvation, which leads to living holy lives, which include wanting to help brethren in need. If we do not give, it questions our claim to salvation.

You might ask if we may ever give to the unsaved. I believe scripture says that we give in this order:

Firstly, to our parents (or, rather, we must not give to others if we do not help our parents first, if they need it, as a priority)

Secondly, to our immediate family (but not for sinful use, or If the need is not urgent)

Thirdly, to other brethren

Fourthly, to others who are unsaved, though this would be very rare.

Note that God does not wish us to give to those who oppose Him. This means we must be careful when giving to charities that help, say, Muslims, or those who are terrorists. We should also not help those who will not help themselves even if they have an opportunity (for God says

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we must not give to those who will not work).

Very often, charities produce slick, professional pieces of marketing that aim straight for emotions. That is why they always show wide eyes and beautiful children! Do not be fooled. In the Old Testament we find God impervious to such tactics. He saw wicked people, and those who rejected His name and will. These He put to death or left in their own mess. Think carefully before giving to causes constantly put before us in such graphic ways, and remember the order of giving suggested above. I would further suggest that if we give as we ought there will be little left, if anything, to help those who oppose God!

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