

2 Corinthians 8

Faithful Giving

Christians are often hesitant to be open about giving, and churches are careful not to “talk too much about money”. Do you think this is true, and if so why? Do you think such hesitancy is a good thing?

In 2 Corinthians 7 we see that Titus had brought good news to Paul about the Corinthian response to his last letter. It seems however, that there were also some ongoing problems. Having therefore affirmed his love for the Corinthians, explained his ministry to them and called for ongoing acceptance (Ch 1-7), in chapter 8 Paul begins to address some specific issues. The first concerns the completion of a collection for poor Christians in Jerusalem (also mentioned in 1 Corinthians 16:1-4 & Romans 15:25-28).

Read 2 Corinthians 8.

1. In 8:1-7 Paul urges the Corinthians to excel in the grace of generous giving.
 - a. What is impressive about the giving of the Macedonian Christians?
 - b. How does Paul view/describe the opportunity to give money to fellow Christians?
 - c. How do these verses challenge common attitudes we might have to giving?
2. In 8:8-15 Paul takes care to ensure that he is not misunderstood.
 - a. Rather than being a command, how does Paul view his appeal? Why do you think he points to the example of Jesus here? (v 8-9)
 - b. What key principles of giving are described in v10-11 & v12?
 - c. Do you think verses 13-15 promote a kind of Christian communism? What attitudes of our hearts are challenged or commended here?
3. From 8:16-24 what steps does Paul take to administer the collection? Why does he do this?
4. What steps does our church take to faithfully administer money collected for ministry? Is there more that could/should be done to give confidence and ensure that we are ‘beyond reproach’?
5. How can we help each other and our children to follow Jesus in generous giving? What do think helps or hinders growth in this area of Christian living?
6. How does this passage speak to those of us who are or feel financially ‘stretched’? How does it speak to those of us who are ‘comfortable’ with discretionary income?
7. (In the spirit of our culture of privacy about money, you might like to ponder and pray about this at home!) To what extent does your giving reflect the genuineness of your love, and the pattern of Jesus and the Macedonians?

2 Corinthians 9

Cheerful Giving

An 'appeal' for the Corinthians to complete a collection of money for impoverished Christians (the "saints" in Jerusalem was the theme of 2 Corinthians 8. The same subject is continued in chapter 9.

1. Why do you think we are not always as generous as we could be in our giving? What might hold us back?

Read 2 Corinthians 9.

2. Why does Paul send the brothers ahead to ensure that the collection from the Corinthians is ready to go when he arrives? Do you think he is being 'manipulative' here, or does he have higher concerns than raising a lot of money? (Note that Paul is writing from 'Macedonia', and 'Achaia' is the area where Corinth is located.)

3. In verses 6-15 Paul provides a series of motivations for the Corinthians to give generously. For each verse try and understand and summarize the motivation he gives...

- a. Verse 6 (This is a general principle for wise living in God's world.)
- b. Verse 7 (Note also what this verse says about how to give.)
- c. Verses 8-9 (How does this help us when fear stops us from being generous?)
- d. Verse 10 (Note the focus here is on the "harvest" of a righteous life, not on earning a right standing with God by generous giving!)
- e. Verse 11 (How will we be 'enriched' v11-14?)
- f. Verse 12-13 & 15 (Could there be a better reason to give!)

4. Looking back through both chapters 8 & 9, in what ways does God's "grace", "gift" or "generosity" shape our giving? (See 8:1, 6, 7, 9, 19, 9:5, 6, 8, 11, 14 & 15). How might understanding and appreciating God's grace help us when we are feeling stingy, or when we are feeling proud of our giving?

5. What might it actually look like (in practice) for us to have the kind of generosity commended in this chapter?

6. There are so many needs and worthy causes in the world. The number of 'appeals' on our resources can be overwhelming. What principles from 2 Corinthians 8 & 9 might help us to be generous in this situation?

7. Pray together that God will help us to be generous givers, following the example of Jesus, so that thanks and glory will go to God for his grace to us and through us to others.

2 Corinthians 10:1-11:15 Christian Boasting

In 2 Corinthians 10-13 Paul prepares the way to once again visit Corinth. Here he is passionate and direct in addressing some serious threats to their acceptance of him, and to the maturity of the faith.

This however, is not easy. How can Paul defend himself against the criticism of those who boast in themselves, without engaging in the same boasting as they do? At the centre of this section (11:16-33) is a bold, yet brilliant, solution. Paul announces that he will speak as a fool (11:1 & 16-21), and then proceeds to boast about his weaknesses. Instead of boasting about himself, Paul will only boast in the Lord.

1. In what ways have you seen religious leaders (or even you yourself) 'boasting' (even in subtle, acceptable ways) in order to gain acceptance?

Read 2 Corinthians 10.

2. In verses 1-11 Paul addresses the charge that he is humble and weak when with them in person, but bold and strong in his letters (when he is far away).
 - a. What does Paul say in response?
 - b. What do we learn here about the source & power of true Christian ministry?
3. From verses 12-18 how is the boasting of Paul's opponents different to the way Paul commends himself?

Read 2 Corinthians 11:1-15.

4. From verses 1-4, what motivates Paul to resort to 'foolishness' (which he will come back to in verse 16)? What is at stake? What do we learn here about the goal of true gospel ministry?
5. In verses 5-11, Paul defends himself against 2 charges. What are the two charges, and how does he answer them? (v 5-6 & 7-11)
6. What does Paul really think about the 'super-apostles'? (v 12-15)
7. What lessons can we learn from this whole section (10:1-11:15) about how to evaluate Christian leaders?
8. It is said that we live in a generation that "listens with its eyes and thinks with its feelings". Do you think we are in more danger of being deceived by outwardly impressive people who claim to be Christian, or of being too narrow and 'hard line'? Why?
9. What can we do to guard ourselves against being deceived by false teaching that leads us away from Jesus?
10. Pray together that we would only boast in the Lord, and that we would not be deceived by those who boast in themselves. Pray also for Christians you know who have been, or are in danger of being seduced away from pure devotion to Christ.

2 Corinthians 11:16-12:13 Power in Weakness

In 2 Corinthians 10-13 Paul prepares the way to once again visit Corinth. He makes a personal appeal to the Corinthians to accept him and his ministry rather than following the 'super apostles' who boast in outward appearances, preach a false gospel and are ultimately servants of Satan (5:12 & 11:12-15). To undermine their boasting, Paul dares to 'play them at their own game' by doing some foolish boasting of his own.

Read 2 Corinthians 11:16-12:13.

1. From verses 16-21a...
 - a. Who do you think are the biggest 'fools' (Paul, the super-apostles or the Corinthians)? Why?
 - b. Why will Paul resort to 'boasting' (even though he is reluctant to do so)?
2. In v 21b-33, after establishing that he shares the same Jewish credentials as others, Paul lists his general sufferings, 'dices' with death, dangers, deprivations and the stresses of his ministry. How does Paul's boasting about these things undermine the claims of those who boast about outward strength and success?
3. In what ways does reading this challenge our values, expectations and lifestyles?
4. In chapter 12, Paul moves on to boasting about "visions and revelations from the Lord". After describing the experience of 'a man in Christ', it seems that this man was probably Paul himself (v 5-7). Why is Paul so reluctant to speak of this experience? What might we learn from this?
5. Along with the extraordinary experience, God also gave Paul "a thorn in the flesh". Paul prayed repeatedly for the 'thorn' to be removed, but God had other plans. What do we learn from this passage (esp v 7) about the nature and purpose of this 'thorn'?
6. What vital lessons did Paul learn from the 'thorn' not being removed (v 8-10)? How might this help us to respond to weakness and suffering, when experienced ourselves or by others?
7. If you were in Corinth at the time, do you think you would be persuaded to reject the super-apostles and return to Paul as your apostle? Why or why not?
8. What might it look like in practice for you (and us as a church) to seek and rely upon the power of Christ, rather than my/our own strength?

(For personal reflection: To what extent is your life characterised by priorities/decisions/actions that promote Christ and his gospel, at the expense of your own security, leisure, lifestyle or image? Are there changes you need to make? Pray that God will help you to 'deny yourself, take up your cross and follow Jesus'.)

2 Corinthians 12:14-13:13 Test Yourself

In the closing section of the letter Paul prepares the Corinthians for his forthcoming visit. He urges them to deal with disharmony and repent of immorality so that when he comes he won't have to be 'severe' with them. Although his words are a warning, we also see Paul's love for the Corinthians and his longing for them to be mature in Christ.

1. Are you more likely to be under or over confident about being a true Christian? Why?

Read 2 Corinthians 12:14-13:13.

How would you summarize what Paul says in this section?	What do we learn here of Paul's motives & character?
12:14-18 (Note: The 'burden' seems to be financial 11:8-11 & 12:13)	
12:19-21 (What does Paul fear?)	
13:1-4 (What is the warning?)	
13:5-10	
13:11-14	

2. "Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith. Examine yourselves." Does this imply that wrong thinking or living means we are not true Christians? Why or why not? (If so, how do we reconcile this with being saved by Christ?)
3. We are not expecting a visit from the Apostle Paul, but we are expecting someone much greater! Are there aspects of our church life, or your personal life, which are inconsistent with recognizing "Christ Jesus in you"? Try to name one or two. (What can you do to actually change this?)
4. Considering what you have seen about the Apostle Paul's motives and character, what might it look like (in practice) for us to love our fellow Christians – to "be spent" (v 15) for them?
5. What do each of the phrases of verse 13 mean? In what way is this a fitting end to the letter?
6. Turn this passage into a prayer for yourselves, for our church and for other churches and Christians you know.

2 Corinthians Wrap Up

We have read 2 Corinthians over 13 weeks. This study reflects on the letter as a whole and on what you have heard.

1. The first study introduced the letter with these words....

2 Corinthians is a personal and passionate appeal for the church at Corinth to accept the apostle Paul (6:11-13 & 7:2). The church seems to have been seduced by people called "super apostles" to value what is strong and impressive in the eyes of the world and distance themselves from what seems weak and unimpressive. Paul defends himself against charges that his extensive suffering, ordinary public speaking, refusal to take money from his hearers and his changing travel plans are signs that he is not worth following. Although the matter is deeply personal for Paul, his main concern is not for his own feelings, but for the Corinthian's relationship with Jesus.

From your reading of the letter, how accurate is this summary? What would you add/change?

2. Look back over the letter. What are the major sections? Which parts have 'stood out' for you?

3. How have you felt as you've read the letter? Comforted? Unsettled? Bored? Excited? Challenged?

4. What do we learn from this letter (in 'big picture' terms) about

a. God and how he saves us?

b. Weakness and Power in the Christian life?

c. The nature of authentic Christian ministry?

d. Motives and methods for giving?

e. Dealing with sin in the life of the church and in individual members?

5. In what ways do you see this letter having particular application for our time and context?

6. What changes to your thinking or living has God called on you to make through reading this letter?

7. Pray together about what you have heard from each other and from 2 Corinthians.