

August 22, 2021

THE PROFILE OF A CHEERFUL GIVER  
2 Corinthians 8:16-9:5  
*(18 of 22 in a series through 2 Corinthians)*

I had a moment of understanding and insight about my own life while watching a documentary a few years back. Here's what I'm talking about. All my upbringing, if I ever saw a box, maybe sitting in a parking lot or maybe on a bench somewhere, I would think to myself, "I don't need to go near that package; it might be a bomb." As I say it out loud right now it sounds a bit odd to me, and it may sound quite odd to you as well. But it seemed as natural to me as thinking that someone shouldn't drink poison. And for most of my life I assumed that it's just something we're all taught, something we all know, and something we all live by. Don't approach abandoned packages. They're most likely bombs. It was so normal to me, I'd basically forgotten about it. Then, I watched this documentary.

The documentary was about a man named Ted Kaczynski, who was more commonly known as the "Unabomber." Between 1978 and 1996, Kaczynski made homemade explosive devices and sent them through the mail or on occasion simply abandoned them in areas so that when some innocent bystander approached the package and picked it up, it would explode. And as I mentioned, Kaczynski was active in this horrendous practice from 1978-1996—the precise time from my birth until I graduated high school. In other words, throughout my entire pre-adult life Kaczynski was at large. So you can imagine that though I don't have memory of it, my parents (and every other authority at that time) was sending the message loud and clear—don't approach an abandoned package because it was possibly (or even likely) a bomb. However, it happened, it became part of my normal thinking, and maybe if you're in your early to mid-forties, you can relate, having grown up thinking the same way.

Now, as I noted, it was only when I watched a documentary on Kaczynski a few years ago that these details of my childhood started coming together and making sense. But what was most fascinating about the documentary was how the FBI went about trying to catch him. It wasn't through the successful examination of evidence from one of his bombs or the like. He was careful never to leave fingerprints or any other such evidence. Their first step was to develop a profile of this man they'd never met and didn't know. And though they later abandoned it, their first profile in 1980 was that he was a man of above-average intelligence, connected to academia, with a degree in the hard sciences—things that ended up being exactly right. Later, they examined his writings after he anonymously published a 35,000-word essay in *The Washington Post* and compared them to his earlier writings with a tip from his brother.<sup>1</sup> As I watched this, I was gripped, thinking about how you can look at a man's work, examine his writings, and get a good picture—an accurate profile—of who he is.

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<sup>1</sup> Although I can't remember the documentary title or how it can be accessed, you can find the details of the investigation, etc. at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ted\\_Kaczynski](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ted_Kaczynski).

But, really, that's not altogether unlike what we're able to do when we look at the letter of 2 Corinthians and consider its author—the apostle Paul. In some ways, this specific letter that we've been studying may give us our clearest picture of who Paul is, what drives him, and why he does what he does. It gives us a profile of who he is. And there's a reason for that. We've noted throughout this letter that Paul has been attacked by men whom he'll sarcastically refer to as "super-apostles" in 11:5, and so he has written in such a way to expose what drives him in ministry. He's shown us his goals, motives, and his methods. Largely this has been a defense of his apostleship so that the Corinthians might not listen to the voices calling them to dismiss Paul. But it's also been exemplary. In other words, as Paul invites the Corinthians to take a look at his life, his motives, his heart, and his methods, he is engaging in discipleship. He's showing them what it looks like to live in such a way that you can say, "For me to live is Christ." He is giving them a profile of what one who follows Christ looks like. And he does this in a very apparent way in the text we're looking at this morning—2 Corinthians 8:16-9:5.

As we mentioned when we started chapter 8, we're in the midst of Paul's letter where he deals with a collection of money he hoped to take from the Corinthians to the church in Jerusalem. In 8:1-15 we were able to see how giving works in the life of a believer, and in the last part of chapter 9 (that we'll look at next week) we'll see what cheerful giving looks like. And in the middle of those two sections we see Paul outlining how he's going about collecting the offering, why he's going about it this way, and what is driving him along the way. In other words, I think we get to see in these verses is the profile of the kind of person who functions as the cheerful giver that Paul will launch into in our next section, and it's this profile that I want to highlight. How then do we describe the life of one who is a cheerful giver? Let me list a few things. First, it is a life oriented toward God.

### **A life oriented toward God**

One of the things that is apparent in Paul's writings is that his life is oriented toward God. He presses on to know God more, prays that others will comprehend the love of God, and directs his energies toward pleasing God. And what he reveals in these verses is no exception. Paul starts out this section in 2 Corinthians by outlining for the Corinthians the group that they are sending to collect the offering and transport it to Jerusalem. And as unexciting as that may sound, notice how Paul's Godward orientation spills out of him in his writing.

Instead of simply starting with the note that Titus will be among the caravan, he writes, "But thanks be to God, who put in to the heart of Titus the same earnest care I have for you. For he not only accepted our appeal, but being himself very earnest he is going to you of his own accord" (8:16-17). Now, what's interesting about these two verses is that Paul seems to want to stress Titus's responsibility and even eagerness in this action. He tells them that Titus is coming because he has the same earnest care that Paul has for the Corinthians. He assures them that Titus wasn't forced into coming, but was earnest and is coming "of his own accord." This is a text we might say that speaks very well of the character of Titus, doesn't it? And yet, look who

Paul ultimately credits for this work? He writes, “But thanks be to God, who put into the heart of Titus the same earnest care I have for you” (8:16).

Now, before we stumble over this, let’s remind ourselves that Paul isn’t saying that Titus isn’t acting from the desires of his heart and, by doing so, demonstrating glorious Christian character. He is. He is going “of his own accord” and is “himself very earnest,” demonstrating the “same earnest care” that Paul has for them. Paul clearly recognizes that we make significant choices for which we’re responsible. But in Paul’s mind, everything good is in us and done through us is due to gracious working of our God. Therefore, Paul thanks *God* for what he sees *Titus* doing. And he credits God with putting the good desires that he sees being played out with Titus.

And we might be tempted to argue that we’re seeing too much in this opening verse if this were the only time Paul spoke this way, but it isn’t. In 2 Thessalonians 1:3 Paul says that God should be thanked because the Thessalonian believers were growing in faith and love. In Ephesians 1:15-16, Paul notes that he has not stopped thanking God for the faith and love that the Ephesian believers were demonstrating. And I could demonstrate example after example where the Scripture credits God as the giver of all good things in our lives and credits God with our good works. So we might say that Paul’s Godward focus extends to the beginning of all things in the sense that he credits and thanks God as the source of every single good thing that he sees everywhere and in everyone.

But he also sees God as the end or goal of all things. After mentioning that Titus is being sent for the collection in 8:16-17, he mentions another of the party, though not by name, in verses 18-19. He writes, “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 good will.”

Now, it seems natural that Paul would note that giving a financial gift demonstrates their good will (as he does). After all, he wants them to know that they are loved. He delights in the imagery of a Jewish congregation being blessed by the gifts of numerous Gentile congregations, as it shows the unity that is brought about in Christ. But *mere* person-to-person benefits are never sufficient for Paul. After all, he is the one who earlier told the Corinthians, “Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor 10:31). And so here Paul includes the reality that the giving of this gift is aimed at “the glory of the Lord himself.”

And so we see that Paul sees God at the source of all good things, and thus the one to whom thanksgiving should ultimately be directed for all good things. And he sees the Lord as the end or goal of all things. All things are done for the glory of the Lord himself. In other words, Paul entire life and worldview—from beginning to end—was oriented toward God. And in showing us this, Paul is holding up his heart and motives as exemplary. He does nothing by accident, and he’s already called on the churches to imitate him as he imitates Christ. Thus, this is a model for us. As we long to be cheerful givers (which, again, will be fleshed out in the rest of chapter 9), we need to first examine our lives to see if they are oriented toward God. Do we respond like

Paul, thanking God for all good and aiming for his glory in all things? This should be characteristic for all believers, and so—maybe even starting today—we can begin self-consciously orienting our lives toward thanksgiving to God as the source of all good and the glory to God as the goal of all things. So, first, we see a life oriented toward God. Second, we see a life intertwined with the good of the church.

### **A life intertwined with the good of the church**

One obvious thread that runs through this section is that Paul (and others mentioned by him) have their lives intertwined with the good of the church. Again, what may make us miss this when we read a section like this is just how obvious it is (and thus easily assumed and ignored), but let's take time to state this obvious reality. First, when Paul notes that Titus is coming, he mentions in 8:16 that Titus has the "same earnest care I have for you." Similarly, in verse 22, Paul mentions another unnamed brother who is coming to get the collection, and he mentions his earnestness as well rooted in his confidence in the Corinthians. In other words, Paul didn't see his earnest care for the churches as something unique but something that others should display as well. He saw an earnest care for the church as something basic to being a believer. But this focus on the church doesn't stop there.

We've already noted in verses 18-19 that one brother famous for preaching the gospel is coming to them to get the collection, but notice that he says in verse 19 that this brother "has been appointed by the churches." This may seem to be an easily dismissed note, but we must not ignore it. One of the things that can happen with believers—especially with gifted believers (as this brother obviously was)—is that they can be tempted to live their lives without exercising any submission to a local church. Perhaps they think that their ministry transcends what any church is doing or that what they perceive as God's calling on their life trumps any commitment or submission to a local congregation. But that's not God's design, and it's a dangerous road to travel down. Paul, after all, who had been as clearly called to be an apostle to the Gentiles went out on his mission journeys *after being sent out by the church at Antioch* (Acts 13:1-3). And here we see that this brother obviously submits himself to the will of the churches, being "appointed" by them for this mission. We see earnest care and love for the churches. And now we see a commitment and submission to the church. But that's not all.

We also see labors for the growth and edification of the church. In verse 23 Paul returns to Titus. He's been describing these other brothers in an unnamed fashion, but now he comes back to Titus. And Titus is dear to Paul, you can tell. Paul refers to him as "my partner and fellow worker." In other words, Paul and Titus are aimed at the same thing and working to the same end. But what is that end? Paul continues, "He is my partner and fellow worker *for your benefit.*" Paul's aim is what benefits the churches. And he further demonstrates that in 8:24-9:5. In a very practical way, he tells the Corinthians that he is sending some brothers on ahead to prepare them for the collection. He writes, "But I am sending the brothers so that our boasting about you may not prove empty in this matter, so that you may be ready, as I said you would be. Otherwise, if some Macedonians come with me and find that you are not ready, we would be humiliated—to say nothing of you—for being so confident. So I thought it necessary to

urge the brothers to go on ahead to you and arrange in advance for the gift you have promised, so that it may be ready as a willing gift, not as an exaction" (9:3-5). Paul doesn't get his kicks in humiliating the church or speaking ill of her. He loves the church. Here, he is making sure they're ready and *not* humiliated because he cares about their reputation, edification, and growth. He wants their good. He wants their benefit.

Now, when we put all of this together—the love for the church, commitment to the church, submission to the church, and desire to edify the church and see her grow and benefit—it is easy to say that what we're seeing in these verses is a brother whose life is intertwined with the church, always thinking about what is best for Christ's bride. And we can say the same about Paul's companions as well.

But if you've been paying attention carefully, you might be thinking, "I think there's a contradiction in this sermon." After all, I said earlier that the end or goal of Paul's labors is the glory of God. And now I'm saying that he makes his aim the benefit of the church. So, which is it? Well, I think these two things aren't contradictory but actually fit together. Notice what Paul writes in verse 23: "As for Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker for your benefit. As for our brothers, they are messengers of the churches, *the glory of Christ*." You see, when Paul thinks about his life aiming to the end of glorifying Jesus Christ, he knows that there is one sure way Christ will be glorified, and that is in and through his church. The church is the glory of Christ. We are the fruit of his work. Therefore a life aimed at the glory of God is a life intertwined with the church, the glory of Christ.

Let us then examine ourselves this morning and see if this is descriptive of us. Do we love the church? Do we labor for the good of the church? Are we workers for the benefit of the local church? Are we willing to commit ourselves to the church and submit our lives to brothers and sisters who walk alongside of us? The Lord did not save us in order to have us live the Christian life apart from the church. He saved us so that we might invest ourselves in the church. So let's make sure that's us. The life of a cheerful giver is a life intertwined with the church. And finally we see a life of holiness and integrity.

### **A life of holiness and integrity**

Perhaps the question we're asking as we read this is why Paul and the churches are sending so many individuals and Paul is walking through the credentials of each. Paul answers, telling us in verses 20-21, "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."

You see, when dealing with money—especially large amounts of money (see "generous gift")—it can create a temptation to handle it in an improper way. And Paul has been the object of attack by these so-called "super apostles" who oppose him. One way they may have even opposed him is by suggesting that Paul doesn't charge the Corinthians for his labors because his design this whole time has been to steal from the collection they contribute to. So Paul wants to make clear

that he is a man of holiness and integrity. This is why he's outlining who's coming and how the collection will go. Everything is above board and done properly and with oversight and accountability because Paul is aiming at what is honorable before God and man.

And I want to speak to this specifically for a moment with us. I've noted this in the past, but as a church, we not only have two individuals count the money and sign off on it each week, but a third has to validate that count separately. Then, we give quarterly reports of how money is spent, what the balances are, etc. Nothing is hidden, and that is not because we suspect anyone of anything improper, but it is because we want to guard everyone who handles the money against any accusations. We want to aim at what is honorable in the Lord's sight and in the sight of man, as Paul says.

Now, back to Paul, see how this flows out of who Paul is. In other words, his desire to live honorably before God and man is what informs how he handles this collection. In other words, it's not his dealing with money that triggers in him a desire to aim at what is honorable. It's, rather, his life that aims at what is honorable that leads him to make sure they're handling this collection in a specific way. Who we are drives what we do and how we do it.

This, too, then is informative for us. The profile of a cheerful giver contains the element of holiness and integrity. After all, no one looks over our shoulder when we give, do we? We don't post someone at the offering box to nudge people to give or to examine their generosity in comparison to income. As we noted in 8:1-15, giving flows out of a heart that is overwhelmed at the joy and delight and grace we know from God. It is an act of grace that demonstrates that we understand the grace we've been shown in Christ. And so it can't be compelled. It must be motivated from one's heart. And that's why Paul shows us a heart that aims at holiness and integrity, for the heart that doesn't care about holiness and is willing to let integrity slide will most certainly not fall into the category of being a cheerful giver, for where our heart is there is our treasure.

And so this morning, let's examine ourselves to see if we fit the profile of a cheerful giver. Is ours a life with a Godward orientation, intertwined with the good of the church, and aimed at holiness and integrity? If not, let's repent this morning and rest in the grace and mercy that is ours because of Christ's life, death, and resurrection. And then let's pray that one fruit of our repentant heart will be an overflow of grace, even as we've been shown more grace than we could ever tell. Let's give now our thanksgiving to the one who does these works in our hearts as we come to the table. Amen.