

May 17: 2nd Corinthians 8-10

Chapter 8

This passage begins a new, separate letter to the church about the Participatory Partnership collection for the church in Jerusalem.

Paul is writing to the church as a follow up to the letter of the previous chapter. The natural outflow of faithful living and zeal for the ministry of the gospel is generosity. Paul is writing this not to produce guilt, but to instruct. Stewardship education is important, and Paul begins his instruction to the Corinthian church by offering the example of the Macedonian churches. The Macedonian church endured serious affliction, and God's faithfulness through that affliction produced joy and generosity – even in spite of their extreme poverty. The church's experience of God's activity deepened their faith which led to their desire to give generously, even sacrificially. Paul speaks of stewardship as a matter of fair balance: the gentile churches give to the Jewish churches out of their financial abundance, and the Jewish churches give to the gentile churches out of their spiritual abundance. Paul is describing the reality of need within the 1st century church, and sharing our needs and allowing our needs to be met is still one way to build community and relationship, which is precisely how this collection functioned. Paul lays out the plan for the “campaign” and collections and who will be travelling to them as part of this ministry.

Chapter 9

Paul speaks of the collection for the saints (in Jerusalem) in somewhat competitive terms between the three communities. It's best to think of this as “inspiration.” This is not unlike today when we hear inspiring stories through the larger church, how it stirs up our faith and our desire to contribute to those ministry efforts of the whole. Paul makes very clear that the collection for the saints must come from pure intentions as the fruits of faith, not through extortion or guilt. Vs. 6-15 is a famous stewardship passage, but has been twisted by some to promote the prosperity gospel. This isn't saying that if you give financially God will give you a million dollar jet, but rather that through giving faithfully God will supply all needs and increase ALL gifts (most specifically spiritual gifts). The discipline of financial stewardship is first and foremost a faith practice. Our faith leads us to give to God in the first place, but our giving of our resources to God's ministry then serves to increase our faith and our awareness of God's blessings as we are fully “invested” in our community of faith, the mission we do together, and in our personal discipleship. Paul makes clear the

importance of giving from the heart, with joy, not through compulsion and guilt. In vs. 12 Paul writes that our ministry of stewardship, of financial giving, not only supplies the needs of our community of faith, but also overflows into thanksgiving and glory to God for the ministry that our gifts provide for. Stewardship not only increases our faith, but increases the faith of those who are touched by this ministry we share in.

Chapter 10

Chapters 10-13 are Paul's "severe letter" that led the Corinthians to repentance, and that Paul writes about subsequently from chapters 1-7.

Vs. 7 is excellent advice for anyone facing a disagreement in Christian community: remember that your brother or sister also belongs to Christ. Paul says that the authority God gave him was for building up and not tearing down the community of faith. Some have suggested that Paul's physical presence does not measure up to the power of his words. Paul has been accused of "preaching only about himself" and has been ridiculed for his poor speaking ability. The "super apostles" have also accused Paul of travelling beyond the natural boundaries of his territory, while Paul regarded Achaia and Macedonia as the territories to which God called him and gave him authority over. Paul sees the "super apostles" as impinging on his territory, and asserts that his motives and actions in that region have been faithful and true to God's mission for him. Vs. 18, Paul defers to God's judgment in the matter.