

Exegesis of 2 Corinthians 9:1–7

By Richard D. Balge

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In 2 Corinthians 8:24 Paul said, “In the presence of the churches indicate to them this indication of your love and of our boasting over you.” He used the participle ἐνδεικνύμενοι as an imperative with the cognate accusative τὴν ἔνδειξιν. The *NIV* renders 9:1, “There is no need for me to write to you about this service to the saints.” This suggests an asyndeton, as though Paul were beginning a new thought. Actually, the γάρ connects the thoughts of 9:1–3 with Paul’s exhortation in 8:24.

Why does Paul exhort the Corinthian believers as he does? Γάρ signals that an explanation follows:

Verse 1

Περὶ μὲν γὰρ τῆς διακονίας τῆς διακονίας τῆς εἰς τοὺς ἁγίους περισσὸν μοί ἐστιν τὸ γράφειν ὑμῖν.
For, on the one hand, it is superfluous for me to write you about that service, the one for the saints.

The μὲν has its corresponding δέ in verse 3: *On the other hand, I have sent the brothers*. It is superfluous for Paul (περισσὸν μοί ἐστιν) to write because his readers are already fully informed concerning the service for the saints in Jerusalem and Judea in which all the Gentile churches are involved. Paul’s use of διακονία reminds them that it is a Christian service and not something external. It involves money, but that does not mean it is unspiritual.

The article τῆς after διακονίας is resumptive and functions as a demonstrative: *that* service with which you are familiar. Paul used the same construction with the nominative in 8:4. In neither place did he find it necessary to elaborate on what the service was because his readers were all acquainted with it and had committed themselves to participate in it.

It is superfluous for Paul to write about it because they know about it, but there is another reason:

Verse 2

οἶδα γὰρ τὴν προθυμίαν ὑμῶν ἣν ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν καυχῶμαι Μακεδόσιν ὅτι Ἀχαΐα παρεσκευάσται ἀπὸ πέρυσι, καὶ τὸ ὑμῶν ζῆλος ηἰρέθισεν τοὺς πλείονας.

For I know your willingness, about which I boasted over you to the Macedonians: “Achaia has been ready since a year ago,” and your zeal aroused most of them.

Macedonia was the Roman senatorial province to the north of Greece. Today much of it is part of Yugoslavia. It was in Macedonia that Paul first preached the gospel in Europe in response to the vision at Troas (Ac 16:9–15). There were congregations at Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea. The Roman province of Achaia included the most important parts of Greece: Attica, Boeotia and the Peloponnesus.

Γάρ introduces an explanation of Paul’s statement in verse 1. He is objectively certain (οἶδα) of their willingness (τὴν προθυμίαν ὑμῶν) to participate in the service to the saints. Their commitment to the collection had not been extracted from them by legalistic compulsion. They had willingly resolved to take part.

Paul referred to their προθυμία in 8:11 in an admonitory context. There he urged them to let their προθυμία result in completing what they had determined to do.

Their willingness has been the object of boasting on his part: ἦν...καυχῶμαι. He had not done that to boost his image or extol his performance in the ministry. The boast was ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν, over or with reference to the church at Corinth. Such boasting over them did not in any way undermine or contradict his boasting in Christ. Rather, it was part of and in harmony with it. He and they were well aware that such willingness has its source in “the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ” (8:9).

Recitative ὅτι introduces the direct quotation of what Paul has been saying to various Macedonians: “Achaia has been ready since a year ago.” Ἀχαΐα refers to all the saints in all Achaia, the people to whom Paul addressed this letter (1:1). Corinth was the center and strong point of the church in Greece, but there were saints outside that city, too.

Παρασκευάζω means prepare. The perfect middle παρεσκευάσται is literally “has prepared itself.” “Achaia is ready” seems to be a good rendering. Grammatically it is possible to understand παρεσκευάσται as passive, with God as the agent of their preparation. Theologically that is certainly valid, but Bauer’s lexicon does not give the passive any philological support.

Ἀπὸ πέρυσι, from a year past, the saints of Achaia had been ready for the undertaking. They had made a beginning. They had not brought the collection to completion.

During the intervening year there had been problems of doctrine and practice which threatened the very existence of the church at Corinth. Preoccupied with those problems, they had fallen behind in their efforts to gather the offering. Paul’s ministry had been challenged as well, and that contributed to the sluggishness in doing what they had been ready to do a year before.

The zeal of the Christians in Achaia had aroused the zeal of most of the Macedonians. Τοὺς πλείονας, the comparative form of πολὺς, is used as a substantive here. It is not simply “the more,” but is used in the sense of “most.” Ἠρέθισεν (aorist of ἐρεθίζω) means to arouse or provoke in the good sense of setting an encouraging example. Paul had cited the good example of one group of believers and that encouraged other believers to imitate them.

Why was it not necessary to write about the διακονία (v 1)? Because the Corinthians were aware of the collection, had been ready for a year to participate in it, had begun to do so, and their zeal had aroused others to do the same.

Verse 3

ἔπεμψα δὲ τοὺς ἀδελφούς, ἵνα μὴ τὸ καύχημα ἡμῶν τὸ ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν κενωθῇ ἐν τῷ μέρει τούτῳ, ἵνα καθὼς ἔλεγον παρεσκευασμένοι ᾗτε.

On the other hand, I have sent these brothers in order that our boast, that boast over you, not be rendered empty in this matter, in order that you (as I kept saying) be prepared.

Δέ signals the completion of the thought introduced by μέν (vv 1, 2). It was not necessary, on the one hand, to write concerning the service for the saints, but, on the other hand, Paul was doing something else:

sending the brothers. The aorist ἔπεμψα anticipates the arrival of the brothers in Corinth. When the Corinthians read the letter which the brothers are delivering, their sending will be an accomplished and evident fact. The Corinthians had already been admonished to demonstrate to these brothers the proof of their love and the validity of Paul's and Timothy's boasting over them (8:23, 24).

Ἴνα μὴ introduces a negative purpose clause. We shall see that Paul restates his purpose in a positive way in a second ἵνα clause at the end of the sentence.

Καύχημα is the ground of boasting. Paul has stated what the ground is in verse 2: their willingness and their readiness. Ἡμῶν signals that not only Paul but his coworkers as well regarded that willingness and readiness as a ground of boasting. Τό specifies that the καύχημα is a boast over them and not something else. Paul does not want that boast to be emptied of its content, κενωθῆ, made a hollow boast.

Ἐν τῷ μέρει τούτῳ is literally "in this portion." It is an adverbial phrase modifying κενωθῆ. The *NIV*'s "in this matter" catches the sense and accords with other modern translations. The portion or matter is the completion of what the Corinthian church had begun.

The ἵνα clause restates in a positive way what the ἵνα μὴ clause has said. The *NEB* expresses this with "By that I mean." To avoid rendering Paul's boast empty means that the Corinthians must be ready. Ἦτε is subjunctive here in the purpose clause, and the construction with the middle perfect participle, παρεσκευασμένοι, is periphrastic. The meaning is, as in verse 2, "ready."

With great tact Paul has shown why it is superfluous to write, even as he writes. The words of the epistle and the presence of the brothers from Macedonia are complementary. In love, he believes all things and so he wants to believe that a reminder is not necessary. In the face of practical necessity he reminds, admonishes, encourages—even while he discounts the need to do so.

Verse 4 continues the thought of verse 3 with a second negative purpose clause dependent either on ἔπεμψα or ἵνα παρεσκευασμένοι ἦτε.

Verse 4

μή πως ἐάν ἔλθωσιν σὺν ἐμοὶ Μακεδόνες καὶ εὕρωσιν ὑμᾶς ἀπαρασκευάστους καταισχυθῶμεν ἡμεῖς, ἵνα μὴ λέγω ὑμεῖς, ἐν τῇ ὑποστάσει ταύτῃ.

...lest if some Macedonians come with me and find you unprepared we (I don't want to say you) will be thoroughly ashamed in this confidence.

Ἐάν with the aorist subjunctives ἔλθωσιν and εὕρωσιν allows the possibility of fulfillment. It could really happen that some Macedonians would come with Paul to Corinth and find the believers there not ready to add their contribution to the collection which Paul and the others were planning to deliver to Jerusalem. If it happened, Paul and his co-workers would be ashamed.

Paul uses ἡμεῖς with the verb to emphasize that he and his coworkers would be thoroughly ashamed (καταισχυθῶμεν). The Corinthians' unpreparedness, a real possibility, would make it seem as though Paul and his co-workers had not done their work, or that their boasting had been mere boasting, without any basis in reality.

The parenthetical ἵνα μὴ λέγω ὑμεῖς is a paralipsis. Paul is saying, "I say *we* would be ashamed, not *you*." Putting it that way, "he turns the reproach ostensibly against himself while making it clear that he is doing

so” (Blass-Debrunner, 495 [1]). Luther has “(will nicht sagen ihr).” The NIV’s “—not to say anything about you—” catches the ἵνα μή (negative purpose) of the Greek idiom but may be a bit harsher than Paul’s intent.

Paul is a master of rhetoric, but never for rhetoric’s sake. His rhetoric here is in the service of evangelical pastoral tact. If his work in Corinth had been done without positive results, without willingness on the part of the Corinthians to give their money to the relief collection, they themselves would have reason to be thoroughly ashamed. “But I won’t say that,” says Paul. Instead, he leaves them the opportunity to include themselves in the potential shame of potential failure to participate.

The UBS text reads λέγω where Nestle opts for λέγωμεν. Both are well attested. Λέγωμεν would agree with ἡμεῖς and that may account for a copyist’s editorial “correction.” Λέγω accords with Paul’s nonuse of the editorial plural, but the plural would accord with Timothy’s co-authorship of the letter (1:1). Perhaps the idiom itself, the paralipsis, decides in favor of λέγω.

Ἐν τῇ ὑποστάσει ταύτη is an adverbial clause modifying καταισχυθῶμεν. Ὑπόστασις is confidence and refers to the confidence of Paul and Timothy in the Corinthians’ preparedness. Neither Paul nor his associates nor the Corinthians want anyone to be disappointed in this confidence.

Here is another reason for the Corinthians to finish what they had begun. The motive is the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ (8:9). The need of the saints in Judea is an important consideration. Another, negative but real, is what Paul cites here. They should avoid discrediting the apostles (not to say themselves).

Verse 5

ἀναγκαῖον αὖν ἡγησάμην παρακαλέσαι τοὺς ἀδελφοὺς ἵνα προέλθωσιν εἰς ὑμᾶς καὶ προκαταρτίσωσιν τὴν προεπηγγελμένην εὐλογίαν ὑμῶν, ταύτην ἐτοίμην εἶναι οὕτως ὡς εὐλογίαν καὶ μὴ ὡς πλεονεξίαν.

Therefore I considered it necessary to urge these brothers that they come to you in advance and arrange in advance your promised-in-advance tangible expression of blessing, that it be ready in this way: as a tangible expression of blessing and not as something gathered out of covetousness.

Οὖν, “therefore,” bases a conclusion on the considerations which Paul has reviewed in verses 3 and 4: that neither the apostle nor his co-workers nor the Corinthians themselves want to be embarrassed by a failure to complete what was begun. In view of these considerations and regardless of any hurt feelings, resentment or sense of being pressured, Paul considered it necessary to send the brothers from Macedonia. He does not know how the Achaians will react. He hopes they will not react negatively. He must write what he writes and send the brothers as he is sending them.

It was a delicate matter and Paul is treating it delicately. But he is sure that there is no alternative:

ἀναγκαῖον ἡγησάμην, “I considered it necessary.” Ἠγησάμην is an epistolary aorist, the action being completed when the Corinthians read the letter which was delivered to them by those very brothers.

Paul made a judgment call, using his sanctified intelligence to decide what must be done about the delay in Corinth’s collection for Judea. His conclusion was that there were no alternatives, only one necessary action. That was to urge (παρακαλέσαι) these brothers (those delivering the letter, the article serving as demonstrative), to come in advance to the Corinthians.

Ἴνα in this instance introduces a double purpose clause. The first purpose, that they should come in advance of Paul and his party, is explained by the second, that they should arrange something in advance.

Προκαταρτίζω, prearrange, is one of the business terms found in papyri of the first century, a term used for secular transactions. Now, the collection for the needy in Jerusalem was not a secular transaction. Paul’s use of

words like *χάρις*, *ἀπλότης* and *διακονία* have made that clear. But this spiritual undertaking was to be carried out in a businesslike manner, in a practical way, according to orderly procedures.

The brothers would precede Paul to prearrange the pre-promised “tangible expression of blessing.”

There is another word to mark the spiritual character of the collection: *εὐλογία*. The foregoing phrase in quotation marks is too awkward to express *εὐλογία*. The *NIV*’s “generous gift” is adequate. *Εὐλογία* literally means blessing or benediction. In a transferred sense it came to mean bounty or bountiful gift. The Corinthians’ gift was to be a tangible way of saying to the Jerusalem church what they could not say in person: “God bless you. God bless you for your role in sharing the good news about Jesus with us Gentiles.”

Τάυτην is resumptive, renewing the reference to the *εὐλογία*. *Ἐτοίμην* modifies it. The infinitive clause explains and amplifies the purpose clause of verse 5a, *ἵνα προέλθωσιν...καὶ προκαταρτίσωσιν*.

How will the Corinthians’ participation be ready, as *εὐλογία* or as *πλεονεξία*? Will it be ready as a tangible expression of blessing or will it be ready as something gathered out of covetousness? It is clear that Paul regards the first possibility as desirable, the second as something to be avoided. Since *εὐλογία* in its transferred sense is a gift that expresses blessing, its opposite *πλεονεξία* must be a gift that expresses covetousness. The question is, “Covetousness on whose part?” If the blessing is on the part of the Corinthians, the covetousness would be on the part of someone else. It would be on the part of those with whom the Corinthians are in dialog: Paul, Timothy, the co-workers.

Paul is saying, “Don’t give as though you were responding to some covetousness on our part, as though we were avariciously pressuring you.” This seems to catch the apostle’s meaning more closely than the sense that the Achaian saints were covetous and therefore tightfisted and consequently giving every penny as though it were a drop of blood. The *NIV*’s “grudgingly” tends in the direction of the latter sense, but it is possible to understand it in the former sense. Other modern translations are similarly, if not intentionally, ambiguous. The *RSV* has, “not as an exaction but as a willing gift.” *Philips* says, “not money squeezed out of you by what I have said.” The *NEB* reads, “not as an extortion.”

Anyone who has heard variations on the theme, “The church wants our money,” can understand the attitude which Paul is trying to forestall or correct here.

Verse 6

Τοῦτο δέ, ὁ σπείρων φειδομένως φειδομένως καὶ θερίσει, καὶ ὁ σπείρων ἐπ’ εὐλογίαις ἐπ’ εὐλογίαις καὶ θερίσει.

Now consider this: he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly; and he who sows on the basis of anticipated blessings will also reap on the basis of anticipated blessings.

Δέ is continuative. *Τοῦτο* requires us to supply a verb. “Consider” is one of several possibilities, including the *NIV*’s “Remember.”

Paul is not quoting Proverbs 11:24 here, but his words are a kind of inverted paraphrase of the words written there:

One man gives freely, yet gains even more;
Another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty.

We might say that Paul tactfully avoids the “giving” terminology of the proverb and uses the analogy of farming in its place.

If a farmer thinks he is wasting good grain by scattering it on the field, he will plant accordingly. By his own action he determines that his harvest will be meager. The corollary is self-evident. Paul could use another word or expression to connote the opposite of *φειδομένως*. But he stays with the word he has just used, *εὐλογία*. For his Greek readers it was the same word he used in verse 5. Its specific connotation here they derived from the context. In English we need to paraphrase the word in our attempt to capture its special sense. In verse 5, in the context of the gift, we interpreted it as “tangible expression of blessing.” Here, in the context of planting a field, we interpret it as “anticipated blessings.”

Staying with Paul’s analogy for the moment, we can see that the translation “generously” (NIV) is adequate. The farmer anticipates generous blessings, and he plants on that basis, *ἐπ’ εὐλογίαις*. He will (future of certainty) harvest on the basis of generous blessings. The adverbial phrase *ἐπ’ εὐλογίαις* modifies the adjectival *σπείρων*, expresses manner and is in contrast to *φειδομένως*.

Paul leaves it to his readers to interpret the analogy in terms of the issue under discussion, the gift for the believers in the mother church. They had a supply of “seed” on hand, the material blessings with which God had endowed them. They had the opportunity to share those material blessings with brothers who were in need. By the way in which they shared, sparingly or on the basis of anticipated blessings, they would determine what further blessings would result.

This is in accord with another proverb: “A generous man will himself be blessed” (Pr 22:9). Not, “He will get rich, or richer,” but, “He will be blessed.” Let him trust God for what the blessings will be. Article III of the Apology (*Triglotta*, p 221) applies Paul’s words when it says: “Here clearly the measure of the reward is connected with the measure of the work.” Is it saying too much to say that Paul here adds another encouragement for participating generously and promptly in the relief collection? It is that blessing will ensue.

Verse 7

ἕκαστος καθὼς προήρηται τῇ καρδίᾳ, μὴ ἐκ λύπης ἐξ ἀνάγκης, ἰλαρόν γὰρ δότην ἀγαπᾷ ὁ θεός.

Let each one give according as he has freely chosen for himself in his heart, not out of grief or out of compulsion. For God loves a cheerful giver.

A second ellipsis in as many verses suggests the urgency of Paul’s admonition. Much is at stake and the time is short. Therefore, “Each one according...” One could choose to stay with Paul’s analogy of the farmer and translate, “Let each one *sow*...” But the practical point of the analogy as well as the *δότην* of this verse suggest, “Let each one *give*.”

What is to be the norm or measure (*καθὼς*) of giving? Free choice, made for oneself. That is the force of the middle perfect in the case of *προήρηται*.

This free choice is to be made for oneself *τῇ καρδίᾳ*, locative, in the heart. In the Scriptures the heart is where the will resides. With *καθὼς προήρηται τῇ καρδίᾳ* Paul is simply calling for freewill giving.

Let no one’s giving have its source (*ἐκ*) in grief or necessity. The phrase is not strictly in antithesis to the *καθὼς* phrase. The *μὴ* phrase excludes a false attitude in giving (out of grief at the loss of funds) and a false motive for giving (any kind of necessity or compulsion).

With regard to *ἀνάγκη* the *Formula of Concord, Thorough Declaration*, Article IV says: “That is termed ‘of necessity’ which is wrung from one against his will, by force or otherwise, so that he acts externally for appearance, but nevertheless without and against his will” (*Trigl.*, p 943). Paul and the Confession exclude every kind of arm-twisting, shaming, external pressure to force participation in a joint effort of the Christian

community. They also exclude the internal pressure which would compel a person to comply and conform “for appearance, but nevertheless without and against his will.”

Why? *Γάρ* is explanatory. God himself is a cheerful Giver. He wants his children to imitate him and loves them when they do. Paul’s words are an adaptation of the *Septuagint* rendering of Proverbs 22:18. The Masoretic text of the proverb is translated by the *NIV*:

He who serves wickedness reaps trouble,
and the rod of his fury will be destroyed.

The *Septuagint* adds: *ἀνδρα ἰλαρον καὶ δότην εὐλογεῖ ὁ Θεός*. Paul has changed *εὐλογεῖ* to *ἀγαπᾷ*.

What makes a man a cheerful giver is the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Cheerfulness in giving is a gift of his grace. God loves and blesses a person for what God himself has given to that person, a spirit of cheerful generosity. Everything in Paul always begins in and returns to “grace alone.”

Throughout these verses we have seen a masterful use of law and gospel on Paul’s part. Each plays a role in his admonition; and he does not confuse the two, even while he uses them in the same close context. Regenerate children of God need to hear both, and they will not be confused by the kind of admonition Paul uses here.

Basic to all that he writes is the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ (8:8, 9). His readers know that grace (8:8). Implied in all that he writes is the understanding that his readers are regenerate children of God, Paul’s brothers and sisters in Christ, all members with him of the same family.

Therefore Paul can write to them what he doesn’t really have to write (v 1). He can tactfully remind them of their initial eagerness and its effect on the believers in Macedonia (v 2). He can send brothers to help them get the collection ready and so avoid embarrassment to himself and his co-workers, not to mention the saints at Corinth themselves (vv 3–5). He can evangelically suggest that it is time now to finish what they had begun and express the confidence that their gift will not be grudging (v 5). He can remind them of what they already know (vv 6, 7): God’s dealing with his children in spiritual things is like his dealing with them in nature; he lets them decide the measure of his bounty.

In all this it is not necessary for Paul to say in an explicit way, “My concern is not primarily the needs of the Jerusalem church. My concern is not primarily that you do not embarrass me and Timothy and the others who boasted over you in your willingness of a year ago. My concern is not primarily that the Macedonians might suffer some blow to their morale if you fail to finish what you began. These are all concerns, and there are others, but they are secondary. My primary concern is that you grow and develop as saints of God.” That is implicit in all he writes.

What do these verses teach us about motivation in Christian giving and methods for encouraging it?

1. When a Christian joins his fellow Christians in giving money to support a common cause, that is service rendered to the Lord and his people. The fact that it involves money does not mean that it is less spiritual than other forms of service (v 1).
2. Christians may cite the good example of other believers to encourage their fellow Christians to imitate them (v 2).
3. Evangelical practice may include tactful but candid reminders that a commitment has been made (vv 3, 4).
4. Though the gathering of funds is a spiritual undertaking, this does not preclude its being carried out in an organized and practical way, according to orderly procedures (v 5a).
5. Evangelical practice stresses that Christian giving is a voluntary expression of thanksgiving, not something forced (v 5b).
6. It is proper to encourage Christians in their giving with the assurance that God will bless their generosity with further blessings (v 6).

7. Evangelical practice tries to prevent false attitudes and avoid false motivation in giving (v 7). All motivation, to be truly Christian, must have its roots in “the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ” (8:9). All methods, to be truly evangelical, must nurture such motivation and avoid whatever would tend to mingle it with base motives.