

Paul continues his encouragement to the Corinthians to unitedly go forward with preparing the gift they had promised to have ready for him to send to Jerusalem more than a year before. He again cites their willing hearts to give and asks them to now get it ready so that when visitors from other assemblies carrying gifts for Jerusalem arrive they will be ready with theirs. He openly expresses concern that they would be ashamed (embarrassed) if they weren't ready. And that he would be embarrassed also because he had boasted to these other assemblies of their generosity. This might seem like coercion but taken in the light of grace it is simply genuine concern for their faithfulness to God and their reputation among their peers. Reputation? We shouldn't worry about reputations! Or should we? Probably the Corinthians didn't have a very good reputation among other assemblies given the universal report that had gone abroad of their harboring a man living in fornication (1Corinthians 5:1). Perhaps reports of other difficulties there had also reached other ears as they had Paul's. These assemblies would have been very concerned about the spiritual well being of their brethren at Corinth. (They weren't independent from one another, but brothers and sisters gathered unto the name of the Lord, separated only by distance, and by sin let go in Corinth.) Now the Corinthians had cleared themselves of the open wickedness they had allowed among them. He wants to be sure they not discredit their real repentance through careless neglect of a public promise they had made earlier. Paul had unabashedly used their heartily promised generosity as an example to neighboring assemblies. It was an encouragement to them, to see this manifestation of spirituality in the young assembly at Corinth. Selfless giving characterizes new assemblies and new believers. It sets them apart from the world more than any thing else they might do. It shows a real change has occurred in the heart. Now Paul wants to begin the process of regaining the confidence of their neighboring assemblies.

Forgiveness is a gift, given from those injured and offended to the offender. A gift of grace and mercy. It is not deserved but commanded by the Lord who has forgiven us.

Ephesians 4:32 And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you

But we need to be aware of the need of healing of relationships when we sin and dishonor God and harm others. One may have confessed and owned his or her sin and has repented before God and man. We may have been forgiven by those we harmed. But we need to realize other's confidence in us has been shaken (sometimes destroyed). Broken trust takes time to heal.

Respect and confidence once violated must be earned back. Witnessing positive signs of change of heart helps heal wounds and restore confidence. So here Paul goes about helping them restore their own sense of usefulness to the Lord and the joy of giving, and reawaken the love that had been shed abroad in their hearts. They would also begin to regain the confidence of their brethren and restore a positive testimony before those around them in the world. He doesn't just help them put on a good appearance. He helps them do something really good and unselfish. They had been totally wrapped up in themselves, engrossed with their different leaders and showy gifts, etc. Paul picks something that will pull them out of this ingrown focus as he moves them toward giving as they had promised. There is a hint that their original promise to send a gift had perhaps been an exciting effort to show off their generosity rather than a loving sense of real, enthusiastic concern for the needy somewhere far away.

1Corinthians 13:3 And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor,... and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.

Otherwise Paul shouldn't have had to put so much effort into moving them along with it here.

There is another aspect to what Paul is doing here. This is a test. A test of whether their repentance is genuine. Were they going to slide back into their former pattern of behavior, each trying to out do the other, or on the other side perhaps being stingy, selfish and unfeeling toward those in need? Remember how Joseph tested his brethren using his preferential treatment of Benjamin to see if they had changed from the jealousy they had shown him years before. Similarly, God tests our repentance to demonstrate to ourselves and others it is real and not hypocritical.

We can't demand a repentant sinner earn back our respect, or test him as God does, to prove his repentance before we accept him back. There is no indication of that in Paul's letter to the Corinthians. We don't intentionally hold back or hold out on one seeking to return. Paul didn't. He was very positive in his attitude toward them and in his support of them. Here he takes advantage of an unfulfilled previous promise to him to give them an outlet for their new found liberty from former attitudes and conduct. This both tries them and lifts them out of the previous mold to begin anew. Will they respond? Will they like it? I believe they did. And we learn, not just about the necessity and joy of giving but about our role in the process of restoring a fallen saint into active, serving, faithful, loving, brothers and sisters indeed..

Now at the end of his comments on giving Paul reveals a wonderful cycle operating between heaven and earth. We sing some times "the blessing will come down

as the prayers go up.” This is based upon this scripture among others. As the prayers go up the Father responds with both temporal blessings and spiritual blessings. We respond with thanksgiving. This cycle of prayer, blessing, thanksgiving and glory to God has a physical counterpart on the created earth. Men call it the Hydrological Cycle. The rain comes down and invigorates the land, vegetation and creatures on it.

Psalm 65:9 Thou visitest the earth, and waterest it: thou greatly enrichest it with the river of God, which is full of water: thou preparest them corn, when thou hast so provided for it. 10 Thou waterest the ridges thereof abundantly: thou settlest the furrows thereof: thou makest it soft with showers: thou blessest the springing thereof. 11 Thou crownest the year with thy goodness; and thy paths drop fatness. 12 They drop upon the pastures of the wilderness: and the little hills rejoice on every side. 13 The pastures are clothed with flocks; the valleys also are covered over with corn; they shout for joy, they also sing.

Then it returns to the skies through evaporation from surface waters and, through transpiration, breath and sweat, etc. from living things that need to live. From there it falls again.

But Paul tells us there is more. God uses people to give and to deliver the blessings He sends. We sing, “Make me a blessing.” We are blest to be used by God as “channels of blessing.” Not often does God make the delivery directly as He did with the Manna, but He can and does occasionally. He also uses angels and sometimes He even moves unbelievers, or creatures such as ravens, to provide for needs of the saints.

But there is more to notice within the cycle. The love shown by the one used of God to deliver His blessings awakens love in the hearts of the recipients, love for the giver and love for the Giver. Then there is thanksgiving generated. Thanksgiving to the one delivering the gift and thanksgiving directly to God. This completes the cycle. God brings need, the Spirit moves the needy to prayer. The Spirit directs the prayer.

Romans 8:26 Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.

The Son receives the prayer and intercedes for blessing from the Father.

Romans 8:34 It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.

The Father is delighted to respond, and conveys the blessing to the Son (the Lord Jesus Christ seated at His right hand). The Son of Man moves heaven and earth to

provide and deliver the needed blessing through the Spirit to the saints on earth whom He will use to deliver it to the needy one. Complicated? Yes! Wonderful? Yes!

God is a “people Person.” He delights in shedding and spreading blessings through others. First He seems to always includes the THREE of the Trinity in every such transaction. And He wonderfully wraps us saints on earth into the process all along the way. Yet every instance seems to be different, having unique and individual marks of beauty and delight. Like the rain that falls from the clouds of the sky. Rain may come in warm light showers, or sprinkles with blue sky in between, or steady grey “all day rains,” or in spectacular thunderstorms with heavy downpours and marvelously beauteous rainbows and sunsets following. But all comes from above. As each rain is unique in some way so each blessing from the Father is too. Watch for the beauty of the light and life flowing out from God’s Love.

Someone once said “don’t attempt to use God as a marvelous big vending machine.” Yes our loving Father may deliver but He may give more than we ask for. Note the children of Israel in the wilderness who are noted for their discontent and murmuring spirit. At the first, after leaving the Red Sea, God simply provides for their needs when they murmured and when Moses prayed. But they couldn’t seem to learn to trust Him and continued to murmur and lust after things He preferred not to give them. How like us! We read of this in the Psalms.

Psalm 106:15 And he gave them their request; but sent leanness into their soul.

Read the whole Psalm for insights into God’s ways.

When we give, we are reflecting God’s generosity and love. And Paul calls to mind the most generous gift of all:

Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift.

The term “unspeakable” means indescribable. By contrast in chapter 12 what Paul heard when transported to heaven that he says was unspeakable, was unutterable, impossible to put in humanly speakable and understandable words. The “unspeakable gift” is Christ Himself. His Eternal Being as Son, His becoming Man, His birth, life, death, resurrection, ascension, priestly intercession and coming again are part of that Gift. It will take us eternity to fully describe it. Yes, **Thanks be to God!**

By Ron Canner, July 28,2004