



# Preach 2 Corinthians introduction

## The collection and Paul's ministry

In Galatians 2:1-10 Paul tells of a visit to Jerusalem at which he met Peter and the other “pillar apostles” from the church at Jerusalem. During this visit the authenticity of Paul’s ministry to the Gentiles was affirmed and it was agreed that the Jewish practice of circumcision was not to be required of gentile converts to Christianity. Paul notes also that he fully agreed with their one request that he “remember the poor” (Gal 2:10). This, in all probability is the origin of a project which Paul undertook in the mid 50’s AD and which formed a key part of his apostolic ministry, namely the taking up of a collection of money destined for the Church in Jerusalem. The collection is mentioned again in 1 Corinthians 16:1-4 and Romans 15:22-28 and is treated extensively in 2 Corinthians 8-9. In Acts 24:17 Luke offers only a passing reference to Paul bringing alms to Jerusalem in his appearance before Felix in Acts 24:17. The collection was immensely significant to Paul and his writing about it teaches much about the relationship of money and the Gospel. One scholar has described Paul’s collection as “an illustrative model of his theology”.

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## The purpose of the collection

For Paul preaching the gospel of Jesus was everything so why would a *financial* collection be so important to him? Paul Schervisch writes extensively about the principles of fundraising. He refers to what

he calls the *demand* and *supply* sides of fundraising. We are most familiar with the demand side of fundraising. Comic Relief is a great example of how to present the need very effectively: the need we see “demands” our response, This demand side is absolutely crucial but Schervisch also talks about the “supply side” in fundraising, the *motivation* of you and I to give our money. Fundraising needs to bring together both the need (the demand side) and the motivation to give (the supply side).

This helps us to understand Paul’s approach in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9. We do not know why the financial basis of the Jerusalem church collapsed. It may have been persecution or possibly the economic strain of caring for the widows and orphans or the experiment in sharing goods in common in Acts 2:43. Whatever the cause the demand side of the collection was clear: the relief of the Jerusalem Christians from poverty.

This demand side never disappears from view but Paul’s emphasis in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 is upon the “supply side” of the equation – the spiritual motivation that should underlie our giving. Paul wants to grow mature, obedient givers not extract one off gifts from emotional givers moved by the plight of people far away. For Paul the collection is more than a charitable act.

- The discussions Paul had with the leaders in Jerusalem concerned the acceptance of gentile Christians without circumcision and defining areas of missionary responsibility. This suggests that caring for the poor through the collection was not considered an unimportant or un-spiritual matter.
- For Paul the collection has pastoral value in that it was a symbol of the unity of two wings of the



church, Jew and Gentile. Paul had experienced much tension between Jew and gentile and the collection offered a marvellous way of demonstrating unity and belonging. The collection was about much more than money; it was about relationships in the church.

- Underlying this is Paul’s own understanding of the relationship of Jew and Gentile. In Romans 15:22ff he says that it is right for Jerusalem to be blessed by the financial gift because the *spiritual* wealth of the Jerusalem church has blessed the Gentiles. The collection underlined the Jewish roots from which the Christian church grew.
- Some Old Testament passages pictured the Gentiles bringing gifts to Jerusalem in the Messianic age. Paul may have understood this collection in that way and a sign of the final conversion of Israel and the end of the ages.

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**Paul and the Corinthian church**

The Corinthian church had initially responded well to the collection but that enthusiasm had faded. There were internal problems in the church such as we find in 1 Corinthians; issues around sexual morality, food offered to idols, spiritual gifts and the nature of the resurrection. In fact we know from Paul’s own writings that Paul sent at least four letters to the Corinthian church although only two have survived.

Paul attempted to answer their questions but soon new problems arose. A group who Paul calls “false apostles” began to criticise Paul and question his status as an apostle. While no one knows exactly

what the problem was we do know that money was a factor. In 2 Cor 12 Paul angrily defended himself against any suggestion that he had taken financial advantage of anyone in Corinth. There is a key lesson about stewardship here; giving is always dependent upon the quality of relationships in a church. People do not just give, they give to something.

Paul’s second letter to the Corinthians is the most personal of all his letters to the churches. He is angry, passionate, encouraging and challenging to a church that caused him much joy and much pain. Many of the Corinthian Christians could not read so the letter was intended to be read out in church and Paul uses many of the public speaking techniques (called *rhetoric*) of his day to put his point across.

**Paul and money**

From 1 Corinthians 9:3-15 we know that Paul believed that it was *right in principle* for an evangelist or apostle like himself to receive financial support from his new converts. Paul chose not to do this and made his own living as a tentmaker. But once Paul was leaving a city he was happy to receive gifts so that they could send

him on his way to preach somewhere else (see Philippians 4:15-18).

Paul’s practice contains an important lesson about the nature of giving.

Those blessed spiritually

by faith in Jesus should share the blessing with others and that included financial sharing. The Greek word for send in 2 Cor 1:16 has the meaning of giving practical help.

**those blessed spiritually by faith in Jesus should to share financial blessing with others.**





## Patronage and problems for Paul

The principle that Paul lived by was important but it may have caused him problems in Corinth. One of the ways money was spent by wealthy people was in providing “patronage”. A wealthy person might become a patron to someone else and give a gift of money. In return the person receiving the money would speak well of his patron, would offer praise and honour. In patronage you gave money and in return you received honour. If honour was not given then the person who received the patronage was shamed. Honour and shame were both important ideas for the Greeks in Corinth.

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**practising generosity was vital to the spiritual growth and maturity of the Corinthian church**

So by working for a living as a tentmaker Paul may have refused to accept patronage. In doing so he may well have offended some key leaders in the Corinthian church. Or it might be that they may have looked down on Paul because he was someone who worked for a living. Whatever the situation money became an issue between Paul and the Corinthian church. Once again Paul’s practice teaches an important lesson. Paul decided to handle money in a way that was different from the way of the world.

## Why not let it drop?

Now if money was a problem between Paul and Corinth why did Paul insist on the Corinthians taking part in a collection he was making for the poor church in Jerusalem? It would have been easier for Paul to let such a sensitive matter drop. That is precisely what Paul does not do. We have already seen the importance of the collection to Paul’s ministry but

Paul also knew that practising generosity was vital to the spiritual growth and maturity of the Corinthian church.

Paul had already written briefly about the collection to the Corinthians in 1 Cor 16:1-4. The Greek word Paul uses there to describe the collection (*logeia*) is a financial word meaning a voluntary payment. There is no sense of any compulsion and Paul’s advice on the collection is practical and businesslike. In 2 Cor 8-9 Paul’s tone could hardly be more different. He is affirming, sensitive and encouraging, well aware of the need to tread gently with his audience. Money was a source of tension with the church at Corinth but Paul does not back off the subject. Indeed he dwells at some length on the collection. But in the whole of the two chapters Paul never uses the word “money” at all. Instead he uses a range of deeply religious words, notably grace (*charis*) to describe the collection. He appeals to the grace of God demonstrated in the generosity of the poor among Macedonian churches and to the grace of Christ in his incarnation. He draws

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on the Old Testament story of the manna in the desert as a new economy where the greedy do not profit and the vulnerable do not go without. Finally Paul promises a rich harvest of blessing from a generous sowing in giving. To

preach from 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 is not to preach about money but about grace. The need of the Corinthian church to give to Jerusalem, to complete what they had started and to share the blessings they had received was every bit as important as the need of the Jerusalem church to receive their financial gifts. Giving is crucial to our own spiritual growth and maturity.





## Planned giving

Paul's clear teaching in 1 Cor 16 and his emphasis in 2 Cor 9 on preparing the gift in advance suggests that the collection appears to have been substantially funded by the regular planned giving of the gentile Christians. Planned giving is more than a one off emotional response to perceived need; it engages the head as well as the heart, it is long term and requires decisions to upgrade the giving as commitment grows. Philanthropist Henry Drucker puts it like this:

*In this act [of giving] we disenthral ourselves by overcoming our slavery to possessions. We demonstrate that there are values in the world more important to us than our own selfish aggrandisement. True giving is an act of self-liberation. It becomes one of the major achievements of our life.*

## Understanding 2 Corinthians

Many scholars have argued that 2 Corinthians is not a single letter but contains a number of letters from Paul, which have been collected together. How else, they say, can we explain the change in tone and approach from the optimistic and affirming chapter 9 to the combative and defensive tone of chapters 10-13? Paul refers to a "tearful letter" (2 Cor 7:8), and some scholars have suggested that this might be chapters 10-13 of our existing letter. In like manner having written extensively about the collection in chapter 8 why does Paul start over again in chapter 9 declaring that it is unnecessary for him to write about the collection? Perhaps 8 and 9 are in fact two letters, the second written to a wider group of Christian in Achaia rather than Corinth. These are complicated issues but the position taken here is that 2 Corinthians is a unity as it stands. There is no

textual evidence for different letters and the words Paul uses and the themes he addresses are found right throughout the letter. Paul was familiar with the rhetoric of his day and in 2 Corinthians is making an argument using techniques from the law courts and public speech to defend himself against accusations of his opponents that would deny his apostolic credentials. The apparent mismatch of chapters 8 and 9 and the defensive tone of chapter 10-13 is not due to several letters but a sustained piece of rhetorical argument. ■

