

Graceful, Hilarious Kingdom Giving
2 Corinthians 9.1-15
May 20

Hilarity and grace characterize Christian kingdom giving. "For God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Cor. 9.7 CSB). The Greek term translated "cheerful" is "hilaros" or hilarious giver. Furthermore, in his discussion of a benevolent offering in 1 Corinthians 8-9, Paul used the term "grace" six times (1 Cor. 8.1, 6, 7, 9; 9.8, 14). Paul challenged the Corinthians to be graceful, hilarious givers.

In 1 Corinthians 8-9, Paul invited the Corinthians to join with other gentile churches in an offering for the poor saints in Jerusalem. The economy of the Jerusalem suffered from famine. Because Christians Jews were no longer supported by the Jewish relief system, they no longer had a support system. In Paul's mind, the offering served as more than mere benevolence. For Paul, the offering of the Gentiles to the Jerusalem saints visibly demonstrated the unity of Jews and Gentiles into the one people of God. The offering expressed profound theological truths. New Testament scholar David Garland brought together a helpful list of theological terms Paul used in discussing the offering in chapters 8-9: grace /privilege (8:4,6,7,19; 9.8,14), fellowship/partnership (8:4), ministry (8:4; 9:1,12,13), love (8:7, 8,24), liberality, (8:20) blessing (9:5), harvest of righteousness (9:10), and priestly service (9:12).

What principles and life lessons may the twenty-first century Christians learn about graceful, hilarious giving?

First, Paul described three principal attitudes of eager enthusiasm, contagiousness, and integrity required for graceful, hilarious giving (1 Cor. 9.1-5). Other than one occasion in the New Testament, the Greek term translated "eagerness" only occurs in Paul's discussion of giving in 2 Corinthians 8-9 (2 Cor. 8.11, 12, 19; 9.2). Paul highlighted the contagiousness nature of mutual encouragement in kingdom giving. In 1 Corinthians 8.1-5, Paul used the example of the financially poor Macedonians to encourage the believers at Corinth to participate in the kingdom offering. Further, Paul boasted of the Corinthians eagerness to participate in the offering. As a result of the Corinthians giving, the Macedonians became more zealous in supporting the offering (2 Cor. 9.2). Furthermore, Paul challenged believers to handle kingdom finances with absolute integrity. Paul created a system of accountability to ensure integrity. First, Paul entrusted Titus (2 Cor. 8.6, 16,23), one of his most trustworthy ministry associates, as well as other brothers (2 Cor. 9.3) to watch over the collection. When Paul traveled to Jerusalem to deliver the offering, he was accompanied on his journey to Jerusalem by representatives from the churches that participated in the offering (Acts 20.4). While the church at Corinth did not have a representative, Titus probably represented the church at Corinth. In his discussion of the offering, Paul describes Titus as "As for Titus, he is my partner and coworker for you (2 Cor. 8.23).

Second, Paul provided four guidelines for kingdom giving. First, kingdom giving is a matter of the heart rather than compulsion (2 Cor. 8.7). As a heart issue, kingdom giving requires a resolve to give and a plan to give. A believer demonstrates resolve by the doing – "each person should do" (2 Cor. 9.7). Paul detailed the plan in 1 Corinthians 16 as one of regular, systematic kingdom giving. "On the first day of the week, each of you is to set something aside and save in keeping with how he is prospering..." (1 Cor. 16.2). Third, Christians should give generously (2 Cor. 9.5-6). Fourth, God gives grace to enable Christians to give; thus, kingdom giving is grace giving. Paul utilized an analogy from farming of sowing and reaping. The point of the analogy is God's grace to provide for the needs of a believer faithful in giving. God is the provider that gives us our resources, but He is also able to meet the needs of believers that practice faithful kingdom giving (2 Cor. 9.8).

Third, Paul emphasized four types of blessing resulting from kingdom giving (2 Cor. 9.8-14). First, God blesses the faithful kingdom giver as God enriches the believer - so that in every way, always having everything you need (2 Cor. 9.8). Second, the recipients of kingdom ministry are blessed as God supplies their needs are (2 Cor. 9.12). Third, God is blessed as faithful giving results in thanksgiving and glory being given to God (2 Cor. 9.11-13). Fourth, the church is blessed through kingdom giving. Faithful giving produces faithful prayer, deep affection, and unity within the church.

