

Sha'ul of Tarsus & His Letters ~ Part 104

2 Corinthians ~ Part 11

Note: To examine the graphics in this series, click on them for a pop-up version.

As I emphasized in my previous posts, we are delving into the profound significance of **Sha'ul's Letters to the Corinthians**, a crucial cornerstone of our **faith**. This significance is not to be taken lightly but to be deeply understood and appreciated, invoking a sense of the weight of this text's importance in our **faith**. We must grasp the depth of its meaning and its impact on our spiritual journey.

We examine a new topic **Regarding Collection for the Brethren in Judea**, which covers 2 Corinthians 8:1 to 9:15.

Are you struggling to trust God with your finances and future, fearing scarcity and lack of provision? Why not start a gratitude journal to record how **God** has provided for you in the past? Pray for faith to trust **God's** promises of provision and practice contentment in all circumstances, knowing that **God** is faithful to provide for your needs.

Chapters 8 and 9 appeal to the **Corinthians** to give generously to the brothers in **Judea**, based on 1 Corinthians 16:1–4. This section relates to two themes enunciated elsewhere in this letter: the importance of the **Corinthians** not receiving the grace of **God** in vain (6:1b–2) and **Sha'ul's** defense of his ministry (10:1). The occasion for moving into the subject is **Macedonia** (v. 1), which he began discussing at 7:5. **Sha'ul's** fundraising methods have much in common with those of today. But notice that although he has plenty of **sekhel** about practical matters, he brings everything—the gift itself, the motivations for giving, the remarks about the “fundraising committee,” the allusions to the reactions of the recipients, even the “*Jewish mother guilt trips*” which he lays on the **Corinthians**—into the service of glorifying **God**.

Liberality of Macedonians

8¹ Now, brothers, we must tell you about the grace God has given the congregations in Macedonia. ² Despite severe trials, and even though they are desperately poor, their joy has overflowed in a wealth of generosity. ³ I tell you they have not merely given according to their means, but of their own free will; they have given beyond their means. ⁴ They begged and pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service for God's people. ⁵ Also, they didn't do this in the way we had expected, but first, they gave themselves to the Lord, which means, by God's will, to us.

He stirs up the **Corinthians'** envy of virtue by presenting the **congregations in** nearby but competitive **Macedonia** (v. 1) as a standard of comparison (v. 8). **Despite severe trials** and **poverty**, they have been generous **beyond their means** without being nagged (vv. 2–3). They even **pleaded for the privilege** of giving (v. 4); their giving was not casual but an act of devotion **to the Lord** (v. 5).

Gift a Proof of Love

6 All this has led us to urge Titus to bring this same gracious gift to completion among you since he has already made a beginning of it. ⁷ Just as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in diligence of every kind, and in your love for us—see that you excel in this gift, too. ⁸ I am not issuing an order; rather, I am testing the genuineness of your love against the diligence of others. ⁹ For you know how generous our Lord Yeshua the Messiah was—for your sakes, He impoverished Himself, even though He was rich so that He might make you rich by means of His poverty.

Sha'ul's follow-up of his earlier nudging (1 Corinthians 16:1–4) is to be carried out by an experienced man in the field, **Titus** (v. 6). **Sha'ul** again compliments the good qualities of the potential givers (v. 7) but says, in effect, *"Put your money where your mouth is"* (v. 8). I don't know about you, but that is a powerful *"guilt trip"* he is laying on the **Corinthians**. Here is a motivation for giving unique to **Believers in our Lord Yeshua the Messiah**. **He was rich** in that He had divine *"glory ... before the world existed"* (Yochanan 17:5) and was *"in the form of God,"* so that *"equality with God"* was available to Him (Philippians 2:6), yet *for your sakes he impoverished Himself* (Philippians 2:5–11) *so that He might make you rich* with the righteousness of **God** credited to you.

Liberality Makes Equality

¹⁰ As I say, in regard to this matter, I am only giving an opinion. A year ago, you were not only the first to take action but the first to want to do so. Now, it would be to your advantage ¹¹ to finish what you started so that your eagerness in wanting to commence the project may be matched by your eagerness to complete it, as you contribute from what you have. ¹² For if the eagerness to give is there, the acceptability of the gift will be measured by what you have, not by what you don't have. ¹³ It is not that relief for others should cause trouble for you, but that there should be a kind of reciprocity: ¹⁴ at present your abundance can help those in need; so that when you are in need, their abundance can help you—thus there is reciprocity. ¹⁵ It is as the Tanakh says,

*"He who gathered much had nothing extra,
and he who gathered little had nothing lacking."¹*

It is tempting to see **Sha'ul** as a **Jewish** mother, *"only giving an opinion"* as he urges mature expression of initial zeal as being *to your advantage* (vv. 10–11a). You should not be dissuaded by poverty or fear that your gift will be inadequate (vv. 11b–12). And *relief for others should* not *cause trouble for you*; rather, there should be *reciprocity* (vv. 13–14), as when the **Israelites** were in the desert, and each gathered just as much manna as he needed (v. 15).

Busyness puts us all under a load of pressure. When the pressure on you mounts, how do you decide which way to go and which priorities you will pursue? How do you choose when there is job pressure, financial pressure, family pressure, pressure to do church and ministry work, and pressure to take some time off? How about pressure to compromise, to get angry, to lead a secret thought to life? Or the pressure that takes you away from walking closely with God?

~ Patrick M Morley
Walking with Christ in the Details of Life

In our next post, we will continue to examine **Sha'ul's Second Letter to the Corinthians**. Stay tuned for more insights and revelations.

¹ 2 Corinthians 8:1–15.