

Ready to Bless both God and Others

Small Group Follow-up Study for 2 Corinthians 9:1-7

RE-READ

[1] Now it is superfluous for me to write to you about the ministry for the saints, [2] for I know your **readiness**, of which I boast about you to the people of Macedonia, saying that Achaia has been **ready** since last year. And your zeal has stirred up most of them. [3] But I am sending the brothers so that our boasting about you may not prove empty in this matter, so that you may be **ready**, as I said you would be. [4] Otherwise, if some Macedonians come with me and find that you are **not ready**, we would be humiliated—to say nothing of you—for being so confident. [5] So I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to go on ahead to you and arrange in advance for the gift you have promised, so that it may be **ready** as a willing gift, not as an exaction.

[6] The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. [7] Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

RECAP

Five times in the first five verses we hear about the importance of being ready to give. But there's another word repeated here that gets lost in the translation and that's the word "blessing." According to the ESV footnotes, it appears twice in verse 5 and then twice more in verse 6. To give you a feel for how this might have sounded to the original audience, listen, now, to Young's Literal Translation:

Necessary, therefore, I thought {it} to exhort the brethren, that they may go before to you, and may make up before your formerly announced blessing, that this be ready, as a blessing, and not as covetousness. And this: He who is sowing sparingly, sparingly also shall reap; and he who is sowing in blessings, in blessings also shall reap.

What we need to talk about, then, goes beyond simply giving to the broader category of blessing. Are we ready—are we prepared—to bless both God and others?

What does it mean to be ready? Three different Greek words are used here to speak of being ready. One speaks of being ready in the sense of being willing, eager, passionate or resolute about engaging in the task while the other two speak about being ready in the sense of having made the right preparations to give.

What is a blessing? Interestingly, the Greek word that appears four times in our text is *eulogia* from which we get our word eulogy. Etymologically, it refers to a *good word* spoken about somebody. Oftentimes, the good word spoken carried with it the power to strengthen and encourage the downhearted. As such, *eulogia* was the word of choice for translating the Hebrew term *barak*. *Barak* meant to endow someone with beneficial power. That power could take the form of an encouraging word, a financial boost, an army or reinforcements or what have you. Certainly, given our context, a financial boost is in view but, in hearing that, don't miss how this financial boost was meant to serve as a beneficial power, something that would strengthen and encourage the recipient.

Are you ready to sow in blessings? If not, then consider putting in place some accountability the way Paul did for the Corinthians in verses 3 to 5. Also, consider the motivators provided for us in verses 6 and 7. There are two. First, there is the motivation that sowing in blessings leads to reaping in blessings. Second, there is the motivation that God loves a cheerful giver.

RESPOND

1. What caught your attention from Sunday's sermon? What are you still thinking about/mulling over? What questions did Sunday's sermon raise that remain unanswered in your mind?
2. Why did Paul care so much about the Corinthians being ready before he arrived?
3. What are the two types of giving that Paul contrasts in verse 5? How would you characterize each one? What are the two types of giving that Paul contrasts in verse 7? How would you distinguish them in light of the difference between "have to" and "want to"?
4. How can giving be both something that God doesn't need and something that God loves? Discuss the illustration used in the sermon. Have you ever been aware of a time when your giving or any other obedience on your part was pleasing to God? When?
5. Can God really be pleased with our obedience and grieved with our disobedience? Doesn't that contradict justification by faith alone? Why does God love a cheerful giver?
6. Given our discussion tonight, what sort of things should we be praying for our church?