

'Οὐ κατ' ἐπιταγὴν λέγω.' Paul's Fundraising Appeal in 2 Corinthians 8:7-12 and Implications for the Church Today



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ABSTRACT

At a time when Christian preachers employ all forms of gimmicks to persuade people to give, examining Paul's model of appeal in the collection for the saints, particularly 2 Corinthians 8:7–12, would prove helpful. Paul avows that he is not commanding the Corinthians and takes pains to demonstrate that. This paper, therefore, employed a lexico-grammatical method of exegesis to explore Paul's preferred approach and what it portends for the church's rhetoric at fundraising towards ensuring results, on one hand, and integrity, on the other hand. It discovered that for Paul and Christian giving in general, sounding authoritative while calling for funds would inadvertently compromise the ethics of freewill giving, which is at the core of Christian generosity. Rather an appeal to the people's gracious endowments, the earnestness of their love, free will and proportionate giving would be more fruitful and girded with integrity; the kind of giving acceptable to God.

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Publication History

Received 31st January, 2022

Accepted 15th February, 2022

Published online 2nd March, 2022

Keywords: *Corinthians, Freewill Giving, Fundraising, Paul's Collection, Proportionate Giving*

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INTRODUCTION

While appealing to the Corinthians to contribute to the collection for the saints in Jerusalem, Paul takes pains to avoid being misconstrued by the Achaians as using his apostolic authority to hoodwink them into giving to the project.¹ In 2 Corinthians 8:8, he avows that he is not commanding them but is rather testing the sincerity of their love. But why would Paul not command, but test? What does this portend for the church's rhetoric at fundraising towards ensuring results, on one hand, and integrity, on the other hand? These are the main hermeneutical questions that drive this paper. The presupposition is that at a time when prosperity gospel preachers employ all forms of gimmicks to persuade people to give, examining Paul's appeal in the collection for the saints would prove helpful. This paper employs a lexico-grammatical method of exegesis to explore Paul's appeal to the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians 8:7–12, with the goal of developing, for the church, a fundraising approach that is girded with integrity.

EXEGETICAL STUDY OF PAUL'S APPEAL IN 2 CORINTHIANS 8:7–12

Paul has taken the pains in 2 Corinthians 8:1–6 to extol the virtues of the Macedonians in an intriguing demonstration of generosity towards the poor believers in Jerusalem, by which he would send Titus to come

¹ Linda L. Belleville, *2 Corinthians* (The IVP New Testament Commentary Series 8), (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1996), 215.

to the Corinthians and complete what was suspended. Having prepared the ground, it is now appropriate for him to directly engage the Corinthians. Nevertheless, there is still a need to apply some tact in voicing out his purpose. Consequently, even though he clearly wants them to give, he would find appropriate means to call them to this task. As a result, here in verses 7–12, he rather makes an appeal than place an authoritative command before them.

In verse 7, he hinges his appeal on the weight of the profusion of the graces they have received from God. Thus, he writes ἀλλ' ὡσπερ ἐν παντὶ περισσεύετε... ἵνα καὶ ἐν ταύτῃ τῇ χάριτι περισσεύητε (But just as you abound in everything ... that also you should abound in this generosity). It seems rather weird that he has painstakingly described the generosity of the Macedonians to them only to turn around and ask them to give on the basis of the fact that they abounded in some gifts. On a number of occasions (for example 1 Cor 1:5; 12:8, 9; 13:2, 8; 14:6, 9) Paul speaks of the Corinthians as abounding in the spiritual gifts πίστις (faith), λόγος (speech), and γνῶσις (knowledge). Matera notes that while σπουδῆ (earnestness or zeal) is not explicitly mentioned anywhere by Paul as a gift, its usage in 8:16 to speak of God enduing Titus with it suggests that even it is equally a bestowal of grace from God.² Although the apostle does not discuss these spiritual bestowals here, he adapts his discussion to fit with an area the Corinthians are evidently obsessed with.³ Their pride in possessing all the spiritual gifts (1 Cor 1:5, 7)—and in abundance too—is evident.⁴

There is also a statement about their abounding in that which Paul, in 1 Corinthians 13:13, calls the greatest of virtues: ἀγάπη (love). The awkwardness of the preferred expression τῇ ἐξ ἡμῶν ἐν ὑμῖν ἀγάπη (literally, our love in you) makes some scholars adopt the very likely emended variant τῇ ἐξ ὑμῶν ἐν ἡμῖν ἀγάπη (literally, your love in us), which seems clearer. Thus, it appears that the sense borne by this variant is actually what Paul has in mind. However, it could also be that Paul essentially speaks of the love the Corinthians have received from him and his colleagues in abundance or the one the co-ministers have ignited in them.⁵ In this case, he would expect them to now showcase the outworking of this love. Whatever the point, he is not in doubt as to their richness in love, and would soon, in verse 8, make it a thrust of his appeal to them.

In the meantime, Paul takes them to the task. He exhorts them to allow such spiritual richness to be equally demonstrated in material generosity. He appeals to them, in light of the abundance of the spiritual gifts they possess, 'for a similar performance in the grace of giving'.⁶ It is such stylistic language of extolling of virtues, as employed by Paul, that Collins considers flattery.⁷ Although Paul may not have voiced it, it is not unlikely that flattery is intended in his praise of the superfluity of the Corinthians in matters of spiritual endowment. Obviously, even without clearly stating it, there is a task for them to emulate the Macedonians who abounded in extravagant generosity in spite of their extreme poverty. Thus, the Corinthians are expected to act in a manner appropriate to the measure of grace they have received from God or risk becoming ashamed of themselves in the face of the tremendous acclaim already lavished on the poor Macedonians by Paul.

Paul employs the example of the Macedonians to challenge the Corinthians to allow their own grace to work out generosity for them.⁸ Perhaps, by projecting the generosity of the Macedonians, Paul is cleverly playing into honour-shame trajectories prevalent in the Greco-Roman sociocultural landscapes. Honour was a critical 'social value' in the Greco-Roman environment where people show great concern about their 'own worth' and how they were 'rated by a relevant social group'; to not live up to one's endowment or being regarded with inferior assessment when measured with others of one's class or below is a most dishonourable

² Frank J. Matera, *II Corinthians*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003), 190.

³ Viateur Habarurema, *Christian Generosity According to 2 Corinthians 8-9. Its Exegesis, Reception, and Interpretation Today in Dialogue with the Prosperity Gospel in Sub-Sahara Africa* (Carlisle: Langham, 2017), 95.

⁴ Belleville, *2 Corinthians*, 214.

⁵ Philip W. Comfort, *New Testament and Translation Commentary*, (Carol Stream: Tyndale, 2008), 546.

⁶ Habarurema, *Christian Generosity*, 97.

⁷ Raymond F. Collins, *Second Corinthians* (Paideia Commentaries on the New Testament), (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 170.

⁸ Verlyn D. Verbrugge and Keith R. Krell. *Paul and Money: A Biblical and Theological Analysis of the Apostle's Teachings and Practices* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 167.

experience.⁹ Indeed, even without his asking, the Corinthians should know that it is necessary for them to equally abound in this gracious giving as an honourable response to the many graces they have received.

The force of this appeal is a bit tricky. The subjunctive *περισσεύητε* acts as the main verb of the sentence. Although it can be interpreted as a mere wish, Wallace rightly informs that *ἵνα καὶ ἐν ταύτῃ τῇ χάριτι περισσεύητε* (that also you should abound in this generosity) should rather be read as demonstrating an ‘imperatival ἵνα’ whereby it expresses a ‘command’,¹⁰ even though it may not be clearly translated as such. Thus, Paul uses an expression that would conceal such a commanding tone without obscuring the intent of the appeal.

The notion of Paul using imperatival ἵνα in the construct could be corroborated by his painstaking attempt, in verse 8, to immediately exonerate himself from any semblance of being imposing in his appeal. In all likelihood, he fears that the Corinthians may still suspect the subtlety of his appeal and misread him as presenting a commanding tone. He, therefore, puts up not only a defence of his style, but also an explanation of his approach.

Οὐ κατ’ ἐπιταγὴν λέγω (I do not speak as a command), the apostle avows. Why is he visibly uneasy about being misunderstood as commanding them to give? In 1 Corinthians 16:1-2, he could address them imperatively, as he had confidence that they would obey him as their leader. However, in the interim, they have started listening to his opponents, which stalled the collection in Corinth. Verbrugge and Krell believe that this turn of events between him and the Corinthians now places him in a state of uneasiness.¹¹ Others argue that even though the strained relationship has already received some form of healing, considering Paul’s expression of restored confidence in them in 2 Corinthians 7:16, it would still not be proper for him to sound authoritative while employing ‘deliberative rhetoric’ to court people’s act of kindness.¹² It is also possible that avoiding a tone of command is Paul’s deliberate effort to not be regarded by his audience as being domineering, which would be ‘counter-productive’ to the project.¹³ Most importantly, a commanding tone would betray the model of voluntary giving, which he extols in the discourse on the collection (8:3, 12; 9:5, 7).¹⁴ Thus, Paul is careful and intentional about his choice of words and wants to be clearly understood as not being forceful.

So, if he does not speak as a command, how else? He calls it *δοκιμάζων*, a present participial expression of *δοκιμάζω*, which means to test. He explains that he is testing them by comparing them with others. Belleville notes that the word has a positive connotation of ‘examining something to prove its worth or authenticity’.¹⁵ Harris equally clarifies that although it can rightly be interpreted testing, it is a testing that hopes for a ‘positive outcome’, unlike *πειράζω*, which refers to mere testing with no emphasis on the result.¹⁶ Consequently, *δοκιμάζω* implies proof-testing.

This approach adopted here by Paul may be rightly interpreted as a *synkrisis*, a ‘conventional rhetorical strategy of comparison’.¹⁷ Some exegetes regard this *synkrisis* employed by Paul as intending to evoke ‘competition’ between the Macedonians and the Corinthians.¹⁸ This notion is based on the evident ‘natural rivalry’ between the two geographical regions, which fed on the ‘civic pride and rivalry’ prevalent in the Greco-Roman world.¹⁹ While this is plausible, the suggestion of competition is a bit overstretched.

⁹ Philip F. Esler, *The First Christians in their Social Worlds: Social-scientific Approaches to New Testament Interpretation* (London: Routledge, 1994), 24.

¹⁰ Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 476.

¹¹ Verbrugge and Krell, *Paul and Money*, 157.

¹² Craig S. Keener, *1-2 Corinthians*. New Cambridge Bible Commentary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 204.

¹³ Margaret. E. Thrall, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Second Epistle of the Corinthians*. (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 531.

¹⁴ Habarurema, *Christian Generosity*, 97.

¹⁵ Belleville, *2 Corinthians*, 215.

¹⁶ Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 576.

¹⁷ Keener, *1-2 Corinthians*, 203.

¹⁸ Verbrugge and Krell, *Paul and Money*, 157; Keener, *1-2 Corinthians*, 203.

¹⁹ Keener, *1-2 Corinthians*, 203. See also Hans Dieter Betz, *2 Corinthians 8 and 9: A Commentary on Two Administrative Letters of the Apostle Paul*. Hermeneia. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 48–49; and Stephan Joubert, *Paul as Benefactor: Reciprocity, Strategy and Theological Reflection in Paul’s Collection*. (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2016), 174.

Although Paul surely desires that the exemplary giving of the Macedonians would challenge the Corinthians to give, he never intends it to become a competition. He does not envisage the anticipated generosity of the Corinthians in turn challenging the Macedonians to give again nor does he set both parties on the path of one striving to out-give the other. It is a one-off string of motivation he pulls on the Corinthians from the end of the Macedonians' extravagant generosity and the Corinthians' own gifting of the Spirit. Although he has stated the superfluity of their bestowals from God, it is on the basis of only one of those virtues that Paul would test them in comparison with others. Meanwhile, their financial status is not one of the things considered valuable in this matter of giving. This is important to highlight given the mistaken notion by some to the effect that the appeal of Paul has much to do with the Corinthians' economic standing. For instance, Verbrugge and Krell note that the Corinthians are economically better-off than the Macedonians and that Paul invokes the example of the Macedonians liberality to evoke a sense of shame in the Corinthians to the effect that 'their material and spiritual richness' has not produced a proportionate measure of generosity as the Macedonians.²⁰ While the Corinthian believers may truly be better off than their Macedonian counterparts, research has insightfully demonstrated that all the churches of Paul's mission were within the same economic range and that even the Corinthians' financial situation was equally 'precarious'.²¹ Whatever was their condition, Paul deliberately steers off economic indices. In the matter of contributing to the collection. For him, there are more effective elements to test the people he expects to give.

He writes, '... τὸ τῆς ὑμετέρας ἀγάπης γνήσιον δοκιμάζων' (... I am testing the genuineness of your love). The implication is that while all their abundant virtues are important for Christian living, the genuineness of their love is the one that is of the essence in the matter of giving to the Jerusalemites. For him, contributing to the collection for the poor would be a valid demonstration by the Corinthians that their love is genuine.²² The reason for according this level of pre-eminence to love in this wise is not difficult to deduce. In 1 Corinthians 13:3, he warns that even the greatest form of generosity to the poor will amount to nothing if it is not motivated by love. Thus, he emphasises that every form of charity should be tested by the litmus of love. Here in 2 Corinthians 8:8, he enforces that thought.

But who are the objects of this love which genuineness is being tested: Christ, Paul, the Jerusalem brethren, or all Christians? Paul leaves out this information, perhaps certain that his audience would surely understand him. Expectedly, however, scholars' views are variegated, as usual. Kistemaker opines that Paul here refers to the Corinthians' 'love not to him but to the needy saints in Jerusalem'.²³ This view is reasonable and seems to fit in well with the concern of contributing to the collection meant for the poor brethren in Jerusalem. Yet it is not without difficulties. Consequently, Baker, on the contrary, persuasively argues that the love in view is their love for Christ, which is suggested in the Macedonians' self-giving first to the Lord, in verse 5.²⁴ Baker's contention is, nevertheless, unsatisfactory still. It is not clear that verse 5 speaks of their giving themselves first to the Lord and then second to Paul or how it relates to the love of the Corinthians being demonstrated in giving.

More so, is it not equally plausible that Paul is referring to their love for him (and possibly his colleagues), since in verse 7 he speaks of the abundance of 'our (not 'your') love in you' (τῆ ἐξ ἡμῶν ἐν ὑμῖν ἀγάπη)?²⁵ Could it not then be that Paul here brings himself in clear view as the initiator of the project, thereby expecting the Corinthians to prove the richness of the love they have for him by contributing to his project? Whatever the case, the central place of love in this collection for the poor is hereby emphasised.

So, Paul expects the Corinthians to prove their love and contribute to the collection without waiting for him to compel them. This proof of the genuineness of their love would be measured *διὰ τῆς ἐτέρων σπουδῆς* (through the earnestness of others). What does this suggest? Jennings believes that by this Paul makes the

²⁰ Verbrugge and Krell, *Paul and Money*, 169, 179.

²¹ Justin J. Meggit, *Paul, Poverty and Survival* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1998), 153; Steven J. Friesen, 'Poverty in Pauline Studies: Beyond the so-called New Consensus.' *Journal of the Study of the New Testament* 26, (2004), 351.

²² Roman Garrison, *Redemptive Almsgiving in Early Christianity*. JSNTSup. 77. (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 141.

²³ Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 280.

²⁴ William R. Baker, *2 Corinthians*. The College Press NIV Commentary. (Joplin: College Press, 1999), 299.

²⁵ The difficulty in making an informed choice between the variants in the Greek text and the reason for preferring the reading here has already been earlier acknowledged.

demonstrated zeal of the Macedonians ‘the lead’ that the Corinthians are required to take after in line with the demands of ‘their place in the network’ of patronage relationship involving the believers in Jerusalem, Macedonia, and Achaia, and including Paul himself.²⁶ While this position is not implausible, the context shows that Paul does not make any requirement of patronage relationship the basis for his comparison. The only focus is on practical demonstration of love, notwithstanding whatever patronage expects.

In another vein, Paul has spoken about the intensity of the Macedonians’ eagerness to contribute to the collection. Collins asserts that the apostle’s purpose in recounting such enthusiasm is clearly to provoke the Corinthians to comply,²⁷ thus making the earnestness of the Macedonians the gauge for weighing the authenticity of the Corinthians’ love. Indeed, he expects that the Corinthians would, on their own, emulate the Macedonians and contribute to the collection project in commensurate measure with the superfluity of their virtues.

In verse 8 Paul has made a disclaimer to the effect that he was not commanding the Corinthians to give to the project. Having presented, in verse 9, the χάρις²⁸ (generosity) of Jesus Christ as the ultimate motivation for giving to the collection, in verse 10, he gives advice or opinion (γνώμη) concerning the matter of contributing to the collection. Invariably he still insists on not giving a command, but only stating his considered position. But the word γνώμη conveys more than just a piece of advice; it rather bears ‘more the sense of a decision after considerable thought’.²⁹ It is, therefore, apparent that while Paul is giving his advice on the matter, he has confidence they would oblige, and actually expects them to heed the counsel. Thus, continuing in the light of the admonition of verse 8, he presents his calculated opinion, only meticulously short of an apostolic command that he is hesitant to employ. His expression, in verse 9, on the place of Christ in the web of Christian generosity, reveals a ‘motivational climax’ that makes commands completely uncalled for in the discourse.³⁰ So, he would still not command them, but would only advise.

The advice is clear. Something is appropriate (συμφέρει) for them. The word συμφέρει literally translates to ‘bears together’, but is rendered markedly different by scholars, which also affects interpretation. Thrall believes that it refers to something beneficial, and goes on to infer that it would be so because in giving to the collection the Corinthians’ act would be ‘well-pleasing to God’.³¹ Paul may also be referring to something that would bring blessings to them.³² However, bringing fresh insight into the hermeneutic of the word in its context, Harris agrees that it refers to something expedient, but explains that the suitability Paul refers to is not about what would benefit the Corinthians but the advantageousness of his own action.³³ Thus, the advice he is giving them is the very thing that is appropriate and beneficial to them. This would relate with τοῦτο as demonstrative pointing back to the subjective action of giving advice.

While the various propositions are acknowledged as meaningful, something critical is still missing. One may need to reconsider if there is no possibility of correlating the two τοῦτο in this verse. If this line is adopted, it would mean that this matter of giving—not necessarily the advice—is expedient for the Corinthians. In this regard, he would show the fittingness when he eventually informs them of the need to complete what they started the previous year when they not only began the doing but also had the willingness. The Greek construct is ambiguous and deserves closer attention. The first challenge is the use of the article τὸ (the) before each of the infinitives ποιεῖν (to do) and θελεῖν (to will). Translating the article substantivally as may be naturally expected would make for a clumsy reading. The solution is to recognise the construct as carrying ‘articular substantival infinitives’ wherein the article does not necessarily ‘nominalize the infinitive’,

²⁶ Mark A. Jennings, ‘Patronage and Rebuke in Paul’s Persuasion in 2 Corinthians 8–9.’ *Journal of Greco-Roman Christianity and Judaism* 6 (2009), 113.

²⁷ Collins, *Second Corinthians*, 171.

²⁸ Although many scholars and Bible versions translate χάρις in this verse as ‘grace’, this work joins the others who render it ‘generosity’. This is believed to be more fitting with the context of the discourse and the thought expressed in this particular verse.

²⁹ Baker, *2 Corinthians*, 302.

³⁰ Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 581.

³¹ Thrall, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 534.

³² Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 284.

³³ Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 581.

which ‘can also function substantively without the article’.³⁴ Thus, it can be correctly translated ‘the doing and the willing’ or ‘to do and to will’. Either way, the thought is maintained: they did not only begin to do (that is, contributing), but also to will to do so.³⁵

The second difficulty lies in the thought-flow of the expression τὸ ποιῆσαι ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ θέλειν (to do but also to will), which might suggest that the Corinthians did the ‘doing’ before the ‘willing’.³⁶ Here Paul’s statement clearly does not follow the natural order of willing something before doing it. Kistemaker suggests that Paul reverses this natural arrangement in order to call their attention back to how they started contributing to the collection and to reawaken in them that initial willingness.³⁷ Kistemaker’s suggestion, however, remains unsatisfactory insofar as it does not show concretely how the reversal in order works to achieve what he supposes is aimed by Paul. Following the natural order of arrangement would still achieve that supposed aim. A more convincing explanation would be that Paul is intentional in emphasising the place of their willingness in the whole process, thereby placing τὸ θέλειν second in the construct.³⁸ By this Paul draws attention to the fact that the Corinthians did not only participate in the collection at its initial stage; they did so quite willingly.

Contemplating the zeal of the Macedonians, Verbrugge and Krell have charged the Corinthians of being ‘reluctant to part with their money’.³⁹ This conclusion is fraught with inconsistency that makes it unfair in the light of Paul’s acknowledgment of their willingness in giving to the project. Of course, the break in the contribution reveals some measure of hesitancy. Yet that is not enough to accuse them of reluctance in giving. As Baker convincingly surmises, they stopped the collection not because they were reluctant, but for reasons that bordered on the strained relationship with the apostle.⁴⁰ Now that the relationship has been mended, Paul knows that they could resume the contribution with the same measure of earnestness as was evident the previous year.

With this renewed confidence, Paul could now issue the only clear imperative in this discourse on the collection: *Νυνὶ ... ἐπιτελέσατε* (Now ... complete!). This is an imperative declaration that bears the sense of encouraging one both to do ‘what one has intended’ and to complete ‘what one has begun’.⁴¹ It is not an order to start, but an ‘exhortation to finish’.⁴² The idea is that they should take their willingness—which has always been there—together with the initial action of contributing to the collection to its logical conclusion. Thus, he extols their *προθυμία* and challenges them to match it with action.⁴³ The expression *ἡ προθυμία τοῦ θέλειν* (literally, the zeal of willingness) implies willing zeal. This ‘clumsy and difficult’ rendering reflects Paul’s care to not ‘compel’ while insisting on their carrying through their resolution.⁴⁴ With all tact, he exhorts them to make their willing zeal manifest by finishing what they had earlier begun.

As part of that care to make them understand the spontaneity expected of them and to know that their contribution to the collection ought to be without duress, Paul adds that they are to give *ἐκ τοῦ ἔχειν* (literally, out of the having); that is, according to their means. This exhortation sits well with that on willingness. Perhaps, Paul perceives the possibility of their giving becoming injurious to them, considering their very low economic standing too, and so informs them that the face value of their contribution is not as important as the willingness behind the giving⁴⁵ if the gift is proportionate to one’s income.

³⁴ Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 234–235.

³⁵ Baker, (*2 Corinthians*, 302), highlights that ‘the infinitive of “will” or “desire”’ can equally be properly rendered ‘willingness’.

³⁶ Thrall, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 535.

³⁷ Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 285.

³⁸ Thrall, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 535; Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 581.

³⁹ Verbrugge and Krell, *Paul and Money*, p. 169.

⁴⁰ Baker, *2 Corinthians*, 302.

⁴¹ Thrall, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 537.

⁴² Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 583.

⁴³ Keener (*1–2 Corinthians*, 205), informs that *προθυμία* is a concept ‘linked with generosity in Greek and found in willing sacrifices in the LXX’.

⁴⁴ Karl Heinrich Rengstorff, ‘*πρόθυμος, προθυμία*’, in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1968), VI:699.

⁴⁵ Friesen, ‘Poverty in Pauline Studies’, 351.

This instruction, however, seems incongruous vis-à-vis the apostle's laud, in verse 3, of the Macedonians' extraordinary generosity in giving beyond their ability. One, therefore, wonders why Paul would now ask the Corinthians to give according to their means. Is it a case of different strokes for different folks? Matera thinks it might be that the Corinthian believers have made excuses to be exempted from further participation in the project, as a result of their inability to raise a sufficiently large amount.⁴⁶ That is probable, but clearly not the case. The point is that even in 1 Corinthians 16:1 this principle of proportionate giving is inferred, and it is not likely that such an excuse would have been made before that time. Thus, proportionate giving is rather the apostle's benchmark, without inferring that they could not give beyond their means, like the Macedonians, if they so wished. No wonder, he speaks first of the Macedonians' giving according to their ability before asserting that they also gave beyond their ability. In any instance, Paul is clear that the collection is not a competition, and so there is no need for any party to try to outshine the other or to impoverish self in order to give.⁴⁷ The giving must be done proportionately to one's resources.

The apostle stresses that one should give willingly and according to what one has and adds that it should not be according to what one does not have. His reason for insisting on this is acceptability before God. In order to spur the Corinthians to complete what they began the previous year and contribute generously to the collection for the poor saints in Jerusalem, Paul employs the 'intersecting elements' of motivating willingness, acceptability, and 'material means' in his exhortation rhetoric.⁴⁸ Thus, these elements have an uncompromising stance in the enterprise of Christian generosity. It is, therefore, clear why Paul—though an apostle—would not command the Corinthians, but appeal to them to give to the collection.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUNDRAISING IN THE CHURCH TODAY

Paul's approach in calling the Corinthians to give, as explored in the exegesis, holds some import to the fundraising activities of the church today. Without mincing words, Paul models that those who invite people to give should do so without any undue duress on the audience. It should be clear to the audience that they are not being commanded. Preachers ought to show tact when they call on believers to give. Paul also offers a principle that should guide those who give to any cause in the church.

The foregoing is predicated on the overriding principle of willing and proportionate giving. Paul is concerned that those who give to the poor in society 'should feel free to decide in faith on the amount of a gift'.⁴⁹ Furthermore, he takes care to highlight, again and again, that the giving should be proportionate to what one has, and not what one does not have. The emphasis is, therefore, on the freedom of the giver to decide what to give, without undue external duress. The church is challenged to heed this principle.

The moral implication of not commanding people to give vis-à-vis the principle of willing and proportionate giving that Paul emphasises contrasts sharply with what now obtains in many Christian circles today. There is evidence that some preachers now employ all sorts of lies, gimmicks, and other unethical means to persuade and even command people to give.⁵⁰ In many instances, worshippers are told unverifiable testimonies to cajole them into giving their hard-earned resources to the 'work of God', even when there is no identifiable work of God to be done with the funds. In some cases, preachers even employ foul means and practices such as fake miracles and wonders to entice gullible worshippers to bring money.⁵¹ In the end, the parishioners give as they are cajoled into, not as they are rather able. It is in addressing such current trends of fundraising or 'seed-sowing'—as it is referred to in contemporary parlance—that Perriman polemically contends: 'The unrelenting pressure on people to give that characterizes much of Word of Faith ministry certainly has no precedence in the New Testament'.⁵²

⁴⁶ Matera, *II Corinthians*, 192.

⁴⁷ Baker, *2 Corinthians*, 303.

⁴⁸ V. George Shillington, *2 Corinthians*. Believers Church Bible Commentary (Scottsdale: Herald, 1998), 180.

⁴⁹ J. A. Davis, '1 and 2 Corinthians', in *The Baker Illustrated Bible Commentary*, ed. Gary M. Burge and Andrew E. Hill, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 1320.

⁵⁰ Jim Opakirite, Interview, Hugh Goldie Theological Inst. Arochukwu, 23/10/2021.

⁵¹ Chioma Adjai, Hugh Goldie Theol. Inst. Arochukwu, 23/10/2021.

⁵² Andrew Perriman, ed., *Faith, Health and Prosperity: A Report on Word of Faith and Positive Confession Theologies by Alliance on Christian Unity and Truth among Evangelicals (ACUTE)*, (Cumbria: Paternoster, 2003), 193.

Scriptural passages are deliberately given skewed hermeneutics to influence vulnerable congregants to give. For instance, the model of the Macedonians who gave even beyond their ability (2 Cor 8:3) is usually highlighted without corresponding balance with the didactic of Paul in verses 11 and 12 regarding willingness and proportionate giving. Paul's painstaking efforts to not appear as cajoling the people to give calls to question the moral justification in the common practice today whereby preachers even mandate worshippers to go and borrow money to fulfil the demands of levied seed, claiming that God would reward them in hundred and thousand folds.⁵³ Decrying the influence of such prosperity messages over the poor, Blomberg writes, 'unfortunately, such theologies at times actually garner significant followings and offer great hope in contexts of impoverishment, precisely because people's circumstances are so drastic'.⁵⁴ However, as Olford wisely cautions, 'Consecrated and consistent giving never results from arm-twisting and browbeating appeals. Now and again such methods might work, but in the long run, they are doomed to failure.'⁵⁵ Contemporary preachers need to learn this lesson and adopt Paul's approach of not commanding, but appealing, to the people to give to a noble course of the church.

CONCLUSION

While Paul encourages generosity, this study has revealed that he expects it to be done in a principled manner. This principle holds for both the one who initiates such projects and the one who responds to them. The emphasis is on the freedom of the giver to decide without undue external duress. The reason for this is that if the resources would be accepted before God, then it must come as a freewill gift offered according to one's ability. It is just the way Paul states it: 'For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what he does not have' (2 Cor 8:12). However, if the people would give willingly and according to their means, then it is imperative for those who call them to give to do so with no semblance of authoritative disposition or commanding tone in their appeal. For Paul, it is a moral obligation to not be seen as conning people to give to a project against their free will or beyond their means. The need for the church today to imbibe this concern and adopt Paul's model has been demonstrated to be both urgent and imperative.

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⁵³ Paul Agwu, Interview, St Paul's Presbyterian Church of Nigeria, Abiriba, 27/12/2021.

⁵⁴ Craig L. Blomberg, *Neither Poverty nor Riches: A Biblical Theology of Possessions*, (Leicester: Apollos, 1999), 25.

⁵⁵ Stephen. F. Olford, *The Grace of Giving*, (London: Zondervan, 1972), 11.

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