

## 2,12,26 2 Cor. 9:1-15, Bountiful Grace & The Importance of Theology

In 2 Cor. 9 Paul again stresses the importance of the grace of God being the atmosphere of all Christian service. The Lord's ultimate goal in any sacrifice we make by helping others is that people realize what Paul meant in 2 Cor. 5:14 when he wrote, "... ‘It’s the love of Christ that compels us.’" It’s much more important that people know how much the *Lord* loves them than that they know how much *we* love them. They need to have what Christ does through us draw them to Him, not just to us.

(2 Cor. 9:1-5) Now concerning the ministering to the saints, it is superfluous for me to write to you; for I know your willingness, about which I boast of you to the Macedonians, that Achaia was ready a year ago; and your zeal has stirred up the majority. Yet I have sent the brethren, lest our boasting of you should be in vain in this respect, that, as I said, you may be ready; lest if some Macedonians come with me and find you unprepared, we (not to mention you!) should be ashamed of this confident boasting. Therefore, I thought it necessary to exhort the brethren to go to you ahead of time, and prepare your generous gift beforehand, which you had previously promised, that it may be ready as a matter of generosity and not as a grudging obligation.

At first, this felt a little like Paul was manipulating them, but the reality is (as we saw in chapter 8) all he's *really* doing is using his apostolic authority to hold them accountable for what *they* had already promised to do- but didn't do it yet.

Paul had been boasting to other churches about the promise the Corinthians had made a year ago, and he told the Corinthians that that promise had "stirred up others" to also help the saints in Jerusalem. (Just as an FYI – "Achaia" in vs. 2 was a province of Greece and Corinth was its capital city; so, when Paul wrote about the 'zeal of Achaia', he's talking about the Church at Corinth).

One thing I need to mention is that to fully understand Paul's letters we need to do what we can to get a feel for the real-life situations that *motivated* what Paul wrote. Sometime in the past, I remember reading through all his epistles with just

one thought in mind. I wasn't trying at that time to interpret everything, I just wanted to see if I'd be correct in thinking that all of the New Testament epistles were responses to some situation in the churches the letters were written to. Kind of like the seven churches in Rev. 2 & 3. None of the epistles were only meant to be conversational letters. In the heart of the apostles, every letter they wrote had a very important reason to be written to either correct or encourage the church. There wasn't anything 'casual' about any of them.

It was the circumstances and life-experiences that the Lord took the early churches into that drew out what we have now in the New Testament epistles.

This may seem obvious, but what makes it important is that it's often a lack of knowing the specifics of *why* a particular letter was written that causes so much misinterpretation of individual passages inside the epistles.

Just as one example: James wrote his letter because those he sent it to had become proud, self-sufficient, wealthy, and arrogant. They were dominated by the flesh. So, when James says that "faith without works is dead" he's not talking about determining whether a person is saved or not by looking at their lifestyle, he's questioning the health, not the existence, of their faith. Their profession isn't matching their words and actions. They're being hypocrites and he's calling them out on that. The fact that there were no works to verify their professed faith didn't mean they were unregenerate; it meant their faith was either weak or, for all practical purposes, dead.

We have to do the same thing with the letters to the Corinthians. To really understand Paul's message to them we have to know the spiritual condition of the readers (the Corinthians). We have to understand *why* an epistle was written before we can understand *what* was written.

The Bible isn't just a devotional book or a blueprint of the best way to live life – everything in the scriptures is the response of a person who is experiencing something that has deeply affected them and caused them to sit down and write a letter with that concern driving them.

The Old Testament prophets were sharing the burden of the Lord in very personal ways; the New Testament writers were reacting to the enemy's attempts to destroy the purity of the churches being planted throughout Asia Minor.

In your personal study of the books of the Bible, if you start with determining who the audience was, what their spiritual and moral condition was, and what the author's purpose was, things will make a lot more sense. The Bible is a living Book and unless we are able to see, and to some extent share the lives of those who wrote it, we will miss the real meaning of the most important messages it contains.

Ok, back to our passage in 2 Corinthians. We've already seen that the circumstances and context is support for Christians who are suffering poverty and persecution, so Paul does what anyone would do who truly empathizes with these saints – he reminds them that the Lord's gift of Himself to all of us should be a sufficient incentive for the Corinthians to have that same mind when it comes to their brothers and sisters in Jerusalem; (2 Cor. 9:15) "Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!"

People who are like Christ will feel and do what Christ did. Not because they tried to figure out "WWJD", but because they, themselves, are seeing life through His eyes as their souls are being shaped into His image.

Now, in this next section of 2 Cor. 9, Paul reassures them about what I guess we could call, the *safety* of taking this action on behalf of the Jerusalem church;

(2 Cor. 9:6-9) But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. So let each one give as he purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or of obligation; for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work. As it is written: "He has dispersed abroad; He has given to the poor; His righteousness endures forever."

Paul realizes that the Corinthians (just like all of us) would hesitate to give their finances thinking, "I'd love to help, but what about me? If I give my money to someone else, I risk my own financial safety".

This is another example of how practical these epistles are. Paul is aware that we struggle with faith when self-sacrifice is staring us in the face because of some need we're confronted with. We all know that God is with us; but that may not be the first thing that comes to mind when we're faced with giving up something important to us for the sake of someone else. Sometimes we seem to forget all about what we say we believe. It's just an unfortunate fact that we don't always believe our beliefs, and Paul wasn't afraid to bring that up. It happens. So, a quick reminder of God's love, His provision, His faithfulness to us is often something we need to remember and hold onto so that we won't hesitate to help when we can.

When Paul talks about sowing and reaping sparingly or bountifully, he's not trying to push them beyond what they're willing or able to do, he's trying to convince them that they can follow their hearts without fear. Courage is a vital element of faith.

*Wanting* to do something, either because it's the right thing to do, or because the need in front of us is very real (or both), is sometimes not enough to move us into action. Besides wanting to act, we have to also have the kind of courage that comes from faith in God as our Father *enabling us* to act without fear of the cost to us personally.

Like Paul said in vs. 7, it's to be "as we purpose in our heart", not as we weigh everything in the balances of helping someone else versus the risk to ourselves of how that might impact us. Paul is simply saying that if we want to help someone, we don't have to worry about whether God will take care of us if we do.

That's where the idea of a "cheerful giver" comes in. "Cheerful" and "terrified" are not synonyms. But "cheerful" and "confident" *are* synonyms. It's more blessed to give than receive, but only if the giving is not out of either guilt or compulsion. And *only* if we aren't worried about the implications of our sacrifice to *us* – the faithfulness of God, if believed in, can free us from that kind of worry.

Remember last time, when we saw that the Macedonians were also suffering poverty to some degree, but in spite of that, they were "begging" Paul to allow them the honor of giving to the persecuted saints in Jerusalem. They had put

those Christians ahead of themselves knowing and believing that God would provide for them even if they gave what little they had. And apparently the Macedonians were overjoyed when Paul said “yes”. In the Greek the word “Cheerful” is actually “hilarious” or “ecstatic”. Here’s a breakdown of that word by Gilbrant in his work, “The Complete Biblical Library Set”:

This word denotes a happy, glad or cheerful state of mind but not one overcome with laughter or mirth, or one humorously affected. In classical Greek, hilaros consistently means “glad, merry, cheerful.” It is used to describe daylight, songs, hope, and a message. It is from a root word meaning “to laugh” or “to shine.” In the Septuagint hilaros has two related senses. The first sense is an attitude of benevolence. This sense can also be seen in Proverbs 18:22 where it carries the idea “kindly disposed.” In the second sense a countenance of cheer is described by hilaros as in Esther 5:1, 2. The seemingly cheerful outward appearance of Esther as she entered the king’s chamber. These two senses (benevolence and cheer) are related in that a smiling face is usually indication of an attitude of benevolence.

Author Brian Bell wrote this about his experience in a church in Ghana;

At the offering, they let the people dance. That's a part of African culture in spiritual worship. They let the people dance as they bring their offerings forward. The music is going, and they individually turn it into a production as they bring that offering to the offering plate. They take their time, too. The offering could go on for a long time because they are dancing all the way down the aisle. Interestingly, the only time in the service when they smile is when they're giving away their money!

That's not the American approach to giving, but it *is* the Lord's approach. And Ironside added this;

If you take the right attitude toward God and His Word, He will take a wonderfully benevolent attitude toward you. In Psalm 112:9 we read; “He has dispersed abroad; he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever.” In that psalm God is depicting the righteous man. One characteristic

is, he is interested in other people. He disperses abroad. He gives to the poor. Righteousness means consistency in the relationships in which we stand. Now, how can we act consistently if we are neglectful of our attitude toward the servants of Christ?

Again, you can see in how, in the way Paul worded all this, that he's keeping everything in the realm of grace and the Christlikeness of personal sacrifice – he wants them to experience generosity, not religious obligation. Grace not Law.

In the last section of 2 Cor. 9 (vs's 10-15) Paul draws in the *testimony* that results from giving – the way in which love expressed glorifies God;

Now may He who supplies seed to the Sower, and bread for food, supply and multiply the seed you have sown and increase the fruits of your righteousness, while you are enriched in everything for all liberality, which causes thanksgiving through us to God. For the administration of this service not only supplies the needs of the saints, but also is abounding through many thanksgivings to God, while, through the proof of this ministry, they glorify God for the obedience of your confession to the gospel of Christ, and for your liberal sharing with them and all men, and by their prayer for you, who long for you because of the exceeding grace of God in you. Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!

It is natural for us to think that helping others is an isolated event; that it affects the one we helped and that it pleases the Lord. But Paul tells us that there is *much more* than that is involved.

We have to remember that we live engulfed in an invisible world filled with beings we can't see, but who are watching every move we make. Some of them are trying to discredit and destroy us; others are observing us to learn more about what the Lord is doing with this mystery called the "Church."

(Eph. 3:9-11) (My desire is to) make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ; to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and

powers in the heavenly places, according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Our actions, even something as simple as giving a cup of water to someone, is included in “The eternal purpose which (God) accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Not a sparrow falls to the ground unseen by our Father in heaven. In God’s eyes, there is no such thing as a “*small* act of kindness”. Everything we do for His glory reverberates throughout the entire universe.

Our actions not only “educate” the principalities and powers; they abound to “many thanksgivings to God”. The inhabitants of the invisible world, as well as billions of people over the last 2000 years in the visible world, have become aware of the “unspeakable gift of God”. “For God so loved the world that He *gave* His only begotten Son . . .” No greater gift has ever been given. And in those whose minds are renewed; whose souls are increasingly conformed to the image of Christ, a natural outflow of that personal transformation is self-sacrifice for others.

The degree to which God has been willing to go in Christ to reveal this gracious element of His character is something that angels are continually in awe of. Through us, they are seeing an unveiling of the God they worship. Whatever they may have known of God from eternity past, they now know a great deal more because of the Cross and because of the fruit of the Cross being ingrafted into, and then worked out of, those who are filled with the Spirit of God’s Son. As Phil. 2:13 shows us: “It is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.”

God was revealed in Christ for 33 years in Israel, and for the last 20 centuries He is being continually revealed, now globally, in Christ’s Second Body. The grace and love of God is being slowly, steadily, and progressively disclosed to all who have eyes to see.

Ironside sums it up like this;

From the beginning of the world this mystery was hidden in God “who created all things by Jesus Christ” (Ephesians 3:9). Observe, it was not simply hidden in the Bible, as though the Old Testament contained this message and we only needed to ferret it out. But it was hidden in God, and could not

have been understood by man until it was made known by divine revelation. When the Lord Jesus Christ was rejected by Israel, and the Holy Spirit descended to bear witness to the perfection of Christ's finished work, it pleased God to make known this mystery. Even angels, whether good or bad, had no knowledge of it until it was given to God's saints on earth. This, I understand, is the meaning of the remarkable statement in Ephesians 3:10, "To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known [through] the church, the manifold wisdom of God." That is, the unseen hosts of glorious beings in Heaven, as well as the vast armies of fallen spirits dominated by Satan, are learning the many-sided wisdom of God. As they observe what God is doing here on earth in His Church they are learning, "the purpose [of the ages] which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord."

We are living in the Age of God's ultimate self-disclosure. Before Christ came, God only revealed bits and pieces of Who He was. This is the Amplified Version of Heb. 1:1-2;

In many separate revelations (each of which set forth a portion of the Truth) and in different ways God spoke of old to [our] forefathers in and by the prophets; [But] in the last of these days, He has spoken to us in [the person of His] Son . . .

This is the Age in which God is fully revealing the mystery of His eternal purpose in Christ, both theologically in the scriptures and visibly in the obedience of His children. It's the wonder of what God had revealed to Paul regarding the true meaning of "the Christ" that motivated everything Paul did in service to God. It became his mission, even his obsession, to make this known to all who would hear him.

(Col. 1:25-29) I became a minister according to the stewardship from God which was given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God, the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints. To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you,

the hope of glory. Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. To this end I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily.

This was Paul's calling and it's the calling of all who name the Name of Christ- to do everything we can to both present and clarify to all who will listen, this once-hidden mystery of God and the eternal purpose that our union with Christ brings us into.

This is not the Age of Israel or the future Age of Israel's millennial kingdom; it's the dispensation of the calling out of humanity a people whose citizenship is in heaven and whose destiny is the governance of God's never-ending creation.

Another author put it this way;

The humble student of the Word of God can see unfolded in the New Testament the great purpose that God had in mind. He created the universe and man and counseled with Himself to take out of that world from the children of Adam a vast company who would be united to His blessed Son throughout eternity. All will work out for the glory of Christ Jesus, our Lord. In Him we now have immediate access with fullest confidence into the presence of God (Ephesians 3:12). We are so intimately linked up with Him, so truly one with Him, that we can approach the throne of grace without dread or fear, knowing that all we ask in His name or by His authority, the Father delights to do.

The extent to which we accept these precious truths for ourselves, will determine our practical sanctification. To profess to believe the truth is one thing. To be governed by this belief is quite another.

I realize that most of us would not have connected a thing as simple as giving water to someone who is thirsty as having such immense universal and eternal implications; but Paul makes it clear that it does. Everything we do, however small it may seem to us, impacts realms beyond our imagination and brings both glory and thanksgiving to God.

Look what the single act of the sacrificial death of a Criminal on a Roman Cross accomplished. If it weren't for 120 disciples who, empowered by the Holy Spirit, published that sacrifice every place they went, it would have been forgotten and simply included in the countless crucifixions that took place during the reign of Pontus Pilate.

I wish, somehow, we could begin to see that there is nothing in God's Word or in our own lives as His children that is "small" or that is without vast and immeasurable spiritual implications.

When we study the scriptures it's crucial that we pray for God to open more than a surface meaning to us. For our minds to be fully renewed to be able to comprehend the great truths of the Bible, we need the indwelling Spirit to illuminate our hearts and minds and show us what can't be seen by our own reasoning.

Here's an historical example we touched on in a different context a few weeks ago of what has to happen to each of us, as often as possible;

(Luke 24:30 to the end of that chapter) Now it came to pass, as He sat at the table with them, that He took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. *Then their eyes were opened* and they knew Him; and He vanished from their sight. And they said to one another, *"Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?"*

(Then) He said unto them, 'These are the words which I spoke unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me.' *Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures.*

And he led them out as far as to Bethany, and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them. And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven. And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy: And were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God.

The key passages I wanted us to see are 31,32,44 & 45;

Then their eyes were opened and they knew Him . . . And they said to one another, “Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?” All things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me. Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures.

Only when the Spirit “opens our understanding” will we know the true meaning of what we are reading; and He *only* opens the minds of those who pray that He will; those who search for Him with all their hearts;

(Jer. 29:13-14) You will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with *all* your heart. I will be found by you, says the Lord. . .

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We don’t have time to move into chapter 10 tonight, so I want to do something that’s been weighing on me for a while – something that I think is becoming even more important as time goes on. It centers around a question all of us may have had as we’ve watched friends and family start well and then peel off into some form of Christianity that is a million miles from where we know we should all be going. Why do some go on and others either stop or take a road that leads to spiritual stagnation or even full-on deception?

Around 30 to 40 years ago (I’m bad with timing), I co-pastored a church with a guy who had his Master’s from Talbot Seminary, which was a solid seminary. Eventually, he moved and he got his own church in Seattle which became a mega-church (several thousand people). Now, he’s contemplating retirement, but he’s leaning toward continuing to travel for speaking engagements, and he said that one of the biggest motivators he has for doing this is the incredible dedication and commitment he sees in Barak and Michelle Obama. They’re his heroes.

At some point, for some reason, he went off the rails.

So, at first, what I'm going to share may seem obvious, but what has become increasingly clear over time are the *implications* of what I'm going to talk about. In other words, we all probably know the importance of what we'll look at, but we might not have fully realized how crucial this to our spiritual survival.

So, here goes. One thing that's consistent at the end of each of the Ages or dispensations is that God closes out each period with two very deliberate actions; the first one is to send out one or more people to bring about a recovery of what has been lost during that dispensation.

The Old Testament prophets were all involved in a work of recovery and clarification to Israel in the dispensation of the Law. According to the Lord, the greatest of these was John the Baptist, who sought to recover the spiritual reality of the Mosaic Covenant with Israel that had been lost and had been transformed into a religious imitation that ultimately stood against the divine Author of that covenant. John was sent to prepare a way for the coming of the Messiah by calling the nation to repentance, warning them to recover the purity and truth of what God brought to them through Moses.

Any recovery that occurred in the Age of Israel that was successful (and there were several, like Nehemiah and others), it always involved the response of a remnant rather than the majority. And then through men like Ezra (as another example) the *clarification* of what God had originally intended was re-taught to the people so they could return to what the Lord initially desired in the covenant He had made with them.

Now that we're at the end of the Church Age, God is sending his word throughout the world again to bring about a recovery – to prepare His people for His coming, to awaken those willing to listen, and to clarify his original purpose for the church. The clarification aspect of this would only be received by those with ears to hear, those who responded to the call to come back to original intent.

Within that clarification and instruction that has to happen to bring about a full recovery, there is a need for the kind of scriptural framework that allows the

people of God to see both what's been lost, as well as identify the imitation or the "form of godliness" that has replaced it.

And the only way that can be successful is if devotional style messages focused on self-help sermons are replaced by serious theological instruction in the Word of God.

As we've seen in Matthew 24, and in numerous places in the New Testament epistles, the number one danger this generation faces is deception, and the *only* safeguard against deception is knowing the truth.

The only way out, the only way to restore what's been lost and to live the full reality of spiritual life as God intended for the Church, is to be able to see life through the lens of the Bible; what Paul calls "the mind of Christ", and that can't happen unless the major theological themes of God's Word are taught, applied, and acted on.

Satan has almost completely removed theology from the pulpits of 21<sup>st</sup> Century churches. We touched on this briefly when I read the following comments by Chafer a few months ago;

Theology is the study of God's thoughts. Theology, the greatest of the sciences, has fallen upon evil days. Between the rejection and ridicule of it by so-called progressives and the neglect and abridgment of it by the orthodox, it, as a potent influence, is approaching the point of extinction. . . The unchanging emphasis in the Scriptures upon doctrine, which subject is referred to in the New Testament more than forty times and is that to which a Christian is to 'take heed' stands as a silent rebuke, whether heeded or not, to all modern notions which belittle the importance of dogmatic theology, and also stands as a corrective to those who neglect any part of it. No substitute will ever be found for the knowledge of the Word of God. That Word alone deals with things eternal and infinite, and it alone has power to convert the soul and to develop a God-honoring spiritual life. There is a limitless yet hidden spiritual content within the Bible which

contributes much to its supernatural character. . . Acquiring the knowledge of the spiritual content of the Bible is a lifelong task.

People now tend to see theological instruction as boring and irrelevant. Our attention span is limited to immediate personal application. As prophesied in 2 Tim. 4:3, for our generation; Christians “...no longer endure sound doctrine”.

But theology and doctrine affect the deepest part of our soul – of our lives; whether we realize it or not. For example, what would it be like to try to live the Christian life without the assurance of Eternal Security, never knowing for sure if you could lose your salvation?

And what is happening now because of the neglect of *dispensational* teaching? The Church is said to have replaced Israel; and the purpose of the Church is to reshape society and culture. But we aren’t here to convert or conquer the world. As Chafer states it; “This Age is not the time of the salvation of society; that great undertaking is clearly in the purpose of God, but it is reserved for the Age which is yet to come – the Millennial kingdom of Christ.”

This world won’t be reborn until Christ returns. But without a thorough understanding of dispensations enabling us to “rightly divide the Word of Truth” we will be drawn into movements like Christian Nationalism, Turning Point USA and the NAR. We will be spiritual children, (quote)“tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine.” It won’t be stability and steady endurance that characterizes us, it will be confusion, divisions, fear, legalism, and deception; all of which were prophesied to characterize the generation we are living in now.

The answer, the protection, is in the increased understanding of the theological distinctions in God’s Word. The Holy Spirit placed them there to be studied and they are intended to protect us and allow us to walk in the light no matter what’s happening around us. But if we don’t put in the time and prayer that’s needed to study God’s thoughts, His purpose, and His ways, then we will find ourselves, like Laodicea, being completely unaware of our true spiritual condition. God has provided everything we need in His Word to overcome all these things, but we have to take hold of His provision and make it ours.

I can't even guess at how many believers, especially in the West, are either Calvinists or Charismatics, or simply locked firmly into some version of a popular Christianity that lacks an understanding of the Church as it was originally intended to be – which is the corporate, visible expression of Christ. God is involved in recovering what's recoverable, but the decision to put in the time and effort to go Berean on all that exists is completely up to us.

Every day of our lives we take action based on what we believe. Our lives are literally shaped by what we believe to be true. (Prov. 23:7) "As (a man) thinks in his heart, so is he . . . ". If that which we think is true, *isn't* true, then we will be included in the fulfillment of Hosea 4:6 which says, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge." It was not for lack of sincerity, or lack of commitment, or lack of religious duties; it was lack of knowledge – the knowledge of the Truth.

I'll resend a recommended reading list I sent last year that you can consider when time allows.

The bottom-line is 2 Tim. 2:14-15;

Remind everyone of these things, charging them before the Lord . . . to be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a workman who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

So, there's our challenge for 2026. If we want to survive spiritually in the midst of the massive amount of confusion and deception around us, we will have to become seriously committed to the study of the doctrines in God's Word that define and explain the Age we are living in.

#### RECOMMENDED RESOURCES:

"The Mystery of Godliness" Major Ian Thomas

"The Kneeling Christian" An Unknown Christian

"The Great Transition from One Humanity to Another" T. Austin Sparks

“The School of Christ” T. Austin Sparks

“The Strombeck Collection” J.F. Strombeck

“The Greatness of the Kingdom” Alva McLain

“The Ultimate Intention” DeVern Fromke

“The Torch of the Testimony” John W. Kennedy

“Notes on the Pentateuch” C.H. Mackintosh