

AF A9 BIBLE STUDY: II Corinthians 9

Scripture of Lesson: II Corinthians 9:1-15

In this chapter Apostle Paul continues to encourage the Corinthian Christians to take part in the charity contribution for the afflicted in Israel in cheerfulness and assures them that God blesses the Christians in abundance so that they may abound in fruits of good works.

1. God's Blessings to His people and Principles of Christian Charity

A question that is often debated about God's blessings is whether He blesses His people with material blessings. The Bible leaves no question that He blesses them with many blessings including material things. Does God bless only His people with material and physical blessings? Although God blesses His people so that they need not worry about what to eat and what clothes to wear [Matt 6: 25], God has not withheld material blessings to those who are not His people. A Psalmist sang about the abundance of the wicked, "*For I was envious of the boastful, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked* [Psalm 73:3]." In Luke 12 Jesus speaks of a rich fool who had no regard for God and yet had a rich harvest that exceeded the storage capacity of his barns. While God blessed Adam and Eve and their offspring [Gen 5:2], Noah [Gen. 9:1], Abraham [Gen. 12:2; 22:17; 24:35] and his wife, Sarah [Gen. 17:16], Isaac [Gen. 25:11] and Job [Job 42:12], God also blessed Ishmael specifically [Gen. 17:20]. Thus, His blessings are not limited to His people but to all humanity through His "general blessings" as well as "specific blessings." And that is why there are many rich and powerful people in this world who are ungodly. God does so to fulfill His will for the universe and the humanity. We, who are of limited capacity of understanding all of God's plan and will, do not know why He blesses the wicked and the ungodly. However, we need to remember the following principles associated with God's material blessings:

First, God created all things for His good pleasure and that includes both spiritual and physical creatures and things. All increases in the nature, agriculture and human endeavors occur as a result of God's providence and good will [Gen. 8:22]. So we owe giving of thanks and glory to such gracious God. As we show kindness to another, we expect to be thanked by the recipient of the kindness. Likewise, God expects us to render Him honor, glory and gratitude in sincerity and humility. People of Israel knew of this obligation.

Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, And into His courts with praise. Be thankful to Him, and bless His name. [Psalm 100:4]

Second, when God blesses with physical/material abundance, He wants us to use it to show His kindness to the needy world around us. When God blessed Abraham, He expressed His will that all the nations of the world be blessed through Abraham's descendants: "*In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice* [Gen. 22:18]." Christians in the NT era are children of Abraham as adopted through Jesus Christ [Gal. 3:29]. In other words, we are the channels of God's blessings to this world. When our lives show kindness to the needy world, we are fulfilling God's will. And the Lord God will be mindful of those who show kindness and mercy to the needy:

Blessed is he who considers the poor; The Lord will deliver him in time of trouble. The Lord will preserve him and keep him alive, and he will be blessed on the earth; You will not deliver him to the will of his enemies. The Lord will strengthen him on his bed of illness; You will sustain him on his sickbed. [Psalm 41:1-3]

Thirdly, our Lord Jesus was often critical of those who fail to consider the poor, widows, orphans and the sick. He criticized the Pharisees who failed to show "justice, mercy and faith which are weightier matters of the law [Matt. 23:23]." We need to remember that our material abundance comes with the responsibility to use it for the sake of God's justice, mercy and faith. Our family and public policies and programs should be

formulated and implemented in consideration of the needy in this country as well as in the world as practicable so that there is greater measure of God's justice, mercy and true faith in the world. To enable more "faith" in the world, we ought to make contributions to the evangelic endeavors so that the gospel of Christ be spread around the world.

2. Christian Attitude toward Giving

Apostle Paul commends the following attitude regarding contributions for Christian charity:

First, Christians should give "bountifully" because "*he who sows sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he who sows bountifully shall reap also bountifully* [9:6]." When farmers spread seeds to his field, he does so plentifully with his eyes toward a bounteous harvest. When God has blessed us richly, it is only right that we give richly in return so as to shed His blessings through us.

Second, Paul encourages us to become "cheerful givers," who give out of ready, willing mind and not out of grudge or obligation [9:7]. In Luke 21 Jesus praised the poor widow's giving of two mites, a very small sum but all she had, into the temple treasury over large sums given by rich donors. The widow, although poor, had a yearning to be a part of God's blessing by giving all she had. She knew what she pitched in was worth very little towards maintenance of the temple and the worship system of the day. But the Lord God saw the yearning in her heart and valued it much greater than the large sums of the rich. So let us give as our hearts' gratitude and yearning for God dictate in cheerfulness.

Lastly, Apostle Paul clarifies what such cheerful givers who give bountifully can expect from God:

First, "*God is able to make all grace (blessings) abound toward you so that you will have all sufficiency in all things to abound to every good works* [9:8]." God can bring in greater richness to your life so that you may have enough, materially and spiritually, to abound in good works. Note, Paul does not say God "will" make all grace abound, but "is able to." It is God's good pleasure and will to choose the "right" Christians whom He uses for the good works, not all Christians. So, if God has not blessed you bounteously in material richness, perhaps you have been chosen for sharing spiritual riches with others but not physical things. However, the obligation to give cheerfully and bountifully out of what we have, just like the poor widow did, remains with us.

Secondly, God will multiply the means we use for His work so that our fruits for His kingdom may increase. Verse 9:10 manifests Paul's confidence in God's provision for His people as he trusted and depended wholly to it during his itinerant ministry of moving from one town to another while suffering many troubles and afflictions:

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 [9:10].

This prayer of Paul is reminiscent of God's promise of blessing to the people of Israel during the wilderness journey:

So you shall serve the Lord your God, and He will bless your bread and your water. And I will take sickness away from the midst of you. [Exo. 23:25]

As our Lord God has blessed you, both spiritually and physically, let us share His blessings with others.

Discussion topics:

1. How has God blessed you materially and physically? How have you shared God's blessings with others?