

Faith and Sacrifice

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Bible Text: 2 Corinthians 9:10-15

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Please, would you turn to 2 Corinthians chapter nine? We are going to finish off that chapter this morning. We are going to be reading from verses 10 through verse 15.

Paul says:

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!¹

All flesh is as grass, And all the glory of man as the flower of the grass.
The grass withers, And its flower falls away, But the word of the LORD
endures forever.²

The title of my sermon this morning is “Faith and Sacrifice.” We are continuing with Paul’s important teaching about the nature and the importance of giving or generosity in the kingdom life. Last time we saw the connection between sowing and reaping and the exhortation not to sow sparingly so that we might reap bountifully. It was also made clear that the hope for a bountiful harvest was not self serving, but so that God’s servant might have abundance for every good work. That is, God gives plenty to his faithful servants so that they might spread it abroad to the glory of his name.

He says now in verses 10 and 11:

Now...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

¹ 2 Corinthians 9:10-15

² 1 Peter 1:24-25

righteousness, while you are enriched in everything for all liberality, which causes thanksgiving through us to God.³

Paul says it is God who both gives the seed that is sown and also brings about the end result of the sowing, namely, the bread for eating. He not only gives the seed that is sown to break bread, but he produces and is the one who brings about the end of that. God doesn't just give the seed and then all the rest flows from man's wisdom and ability. Nor does God just give bread, the end product, while leaving all the preceding steps in man's hand and control. God has sovereignly ordained the means and the ends. Both the seed and the final product, the bread, come from God's hand because this is how God has ordained things to work with respect to satisfying hunger. There is a process that functions. There is a system that it goes through in order to satisfy hunger. And we cannot break that system. We cannot try and deflect off that path.

God says, "This is how my world functions. This is how you satisfy hunger. There is the seed. You sow it. And there is the bread, but it all comes from my hand."

So Paul wants us to understand that. And Paul uses this image in order to instruct and exhort the Corinthians in their giving to the Lord. This is what you have got to do. This is what giving is like. And I want you to understand this natural process of satisfying hunger in order to understand how giving functions.

The work of God's kingdom is carried out by his sovereign power from the beginning to the end. However, the normal way that God has ordained for this to happen is through the lives of his servants. It is through the lives of his servants in the natural processes of life. God has set up the world to function in a certain way and he says, "This is how it should function."

God doesn't in some mystical way suddenly fulfill people's hunger. He has a natural process and order and the principle is always the same. Namely, it is God who gives the seed and then it is God who multiplies that seed so that the bread can satisfy hunger.

It is possible that one of the other reasons Jesus refused to turn stones into bread in the wilderness when the devil tempted him was because of this violation of the natural order. Ok, we know what the primary reason was. He refused to live by any word other than from God's mouth and the devil's suggestion to do something, he said, "I reject that. I live by God's Word."

But the other reason I believe is possibly that this would have been unnatural. This is not how bread comes about. Christ could do anything. But I believe he conformed himself to and I think time and time again in the Scriptures we see this conformity to the natural process in order to give us instruction as to how we are to live our lives and how we are to understand how things function.

³ 2 Corinthians 9:10-11

Consider the two miracles in the Old Testament. Excuse me, the two miracles—one in the Old and one in the New—that show the same principle of God supplying the seed or the little and multiplying it so as to accomplish his end result. And both have to do with food.

The first one is the widow in the time of Elijah where there was this great famine throughout the land due to God's Word that Elijah had preached, that there would be a famine and a drought. And he had preached this Word and now there was a famine and a drought and Elijah was suffering because of this famine and drought. And the Lord sent him to this widow lady in Zarephath to receive food.

When Elijah arrived at this lady as you see her that she is there. She has one son. She is a widow so there is just the two of them. And all she has got left is a handful of flour. And she is collecting some sticks and communicating to Elijah she says, "I am just going to make this last cake of bread," thick cake, but it is just like a little bun or a little loaf, "I'm going to make this last bit of bread. My son and I are going to eat it and then we are going to go and lie down and wait to die."

That is how extreme the situation was. There was nothing else there. There was nothing else to be had, no relief, no possibility of anything else and she was down to her last handful of flour.

And God told Elijah to go to this widow he said and since he would provide for Elijah through this widow. Now Elijah probably laughed. No, I don't think he did. He was a man of faith. But I would have laughed. "She is going to provide for me? She has got one handful of flour and you sent me here?"

And then Elijah, with his faith in God encourages, says, "Yes, go do that. That's a good idea. Go and prepare that bread, but you bring and feed me first. You feed me first."

You can read about that in 1 Kings 17 verses eight through 16.

He says, "If you do that, then the Lord will provide all that you need. But you feed me first."

And she goes, this lady. It is an act of faith. She goes and does that. And her flour never ran out and neither did the oil God promised until the drought ended.

You see, the principle Paul is expounding to the Corinthians is clearly demonstrated in this story of Elijah with...and the widow from Zarephath.

This is how the kingdom works. The little seed in our hands which comes from God is increased and multiplied by God for the purpose of blessing others and glorifying the Lord. The Lord's purpose to supply food for Elijah was accomplished through very earthy means and according to the principle of selfless, kingdom generosity.

Now we mustn't philosophize with this lady.

“Well, she was going to die anyway, therefore what is the difference of giving some flour to Elijah. She is going to...”

No, we have got to put it in the context of the incredible hunger that was upon her, the desperation. If you have seen people who are extremely hungry and starving to death, the desperation that consumes them, you would understand that kind of context that she was in and that her son is involved as well. It is not just herself. And she has got this son and she is thinking, “Ok, now we are going to die. We are going to share this last meal with this man.”

So we mustn't try and philosophize it too much. We need to realize the context and the extreme circumstances that she was in when she sacrificed and gave that seed, that little bit that was in her hand in order to benefit somebody else. That is the principle Paul is talking about in these verses.

The New Testament example of the same principle is seen when Christ fed the 5000 with the five little barley loaves and the two small fish in John chapter six. Jesus, in this story, turned the problem over to the disciples. Do you remember? He is preaching and all these people are there and he says to the disciples, “Hey, guys, tell me how we are going to get bread for these people”

And they say, “You are out of your mind. Where are we going to get the kind of money to pay for the food for these people?”

Now, Jesus could have created something out of nothing. He could have made manna fall from heaven as happened in the wilderness, but he didn't, because the normal working of God's kingdom functions according to what Jesus did in this story. And we are to receive instruction through what Jesus did.

As I said, I believe Paul is merely expounding this incident of feeding the 5000 and the Elijah story when he is speaking to the Corinthians here in this passage we are looking at this morning. The same principles are all there and it is vital that we grasp these kingdom principles so that we might be effective in the kingdom ourselves.

Basically the principle that Paul is expounding about the working of the kingdom with respect to generosity is this faith and sacrifice. That is the principle. That comes from the heart. That's the essence of kingdom life. It is the essence of everything God does. It is faith and sacrifice coming from the heart, a faith and sacrifice that is very connected to the dusty workings of this life, not a romantic other worldly experience, but the very intricacies and dustiness of the life we live in.

Too often the believer's hope for victory in the kingdom is disconnected from the simple details of this life. Didn't the Jews in Jesus' day distort what victory would look like? And they wanted to get this sudden deliverance in some miraculous, unexplainable way,

mystical way deliverance from this problem that they had with the Romans. Somehow this is just going to happen. And Jesus was pulling them back the whole time. No, we have got to deal with the dusty aspects of life. Your sin we have got to deal with. Redemption we have got to deal with, the principles of God's truth. You have got to live these out. We have got to do these things.

They didn't want that. They wanted some miraculous deliverance. And they had in some way they wanted God's power to be displayed that was quite divorced from the earthiness of their lives.

And we see that same understanding coming out when Jesus fed the 5000. The people missed the point. They missed the point of faith and sacrifice in that miracle. Although it took place in front of their very eyes, although they witnessed this very thing, they missed the whole point. They didn't understand it at all. The little boy sacrificed his dinner. And what Jesus was demonstrating here when he fed this great multitude was that they ought to have faith in him and sacrifice what they have in their hands. That is how the kingdom functions.

You see, the little that the boy had for his dinner was irrelevant, really, to what was accomplished. It did not contribute other than the seed that was given. It was Christ's power taking that seed and the manifestation of faith and sacrifice in that little boy that Christ then blessed and multiplied and then spread it abroad in this great blessing upon many. Hearst were meant to be turned to Christ. That is the message Christ is preaching. Christ doesn't do things for no reason and the very action that he did and the circumstances that he did this miracle in was meant to be instructing to hearts that were soft and sensitive to him. And they were meant to be turned to him in faith and trust. And it is by that trust that it is by faith that we sacrifice what we have because we have seen the kingdom and we have perceived how the kingdom works.

You see, it is a matter of understanding this is how the kingdom works. It is an understanding that we grasp from the depths of our being and say, "This is what the kingdom functions by. And, therefore, we give ourselves into it. This is the fuel. This is the manifestation of the kingdom, believing in Christ's Word on the matter."

When you read the story in John chapter six what do you see after this amazing meal? The next day the crowd was looking for Jesus because, remember, he had slipped away, he had slipped away from their midst and gone away. And so the next day they come off the mountain and they are hunting for him and eventually they found him. Catch up with him and surround him and chatting to him. And then we find out why they were pursuing him. And they had totally missed the point of faith and sacrifice.

And Jesus, in his very direct way, he says to the crowd that the only reason that they were following him was because they wanted more food in John six verse 26. Jesus says, "My kingdom is about faith and sacrifice and all you have in your hearts is how you are going to get another free lunch."

Can you see the disparity of thinking and understanding? Christ just... “See, I have demonstrated to you what my kingdom is about and here are you coming for a free lunch.”

God is able to miraculously do whatever he wants to do. But for the sake of his servants, his normal way of operating is through the earthly circumstances of this life. And, thus, we need to receive that instruction.

And this is the instruction that we ought to get from Christ’s feeding of the 5000. It is all about faith in Christ and his power and his enabling. But inseparable from that is the necessity of our sacrifice. That is the point Christ is giving across time and time again. He could have just created something out of nothing. It would have still demonstrated his sovereign power. But he said, “No, let’s connect it to sacrifice and faith. Let’s connect it to this boy giving the seed in his hand and laying it into the kingdom. Let’s see that connection because I want you to see what is in your hands. I want you to see the connections. I want your hearts to be drawn out in the same way that you see what it is in my hand in order for the kingdom to be functioning and how I can use what I have in my hand for the glory of God’s kingdom.”

See, that’s the instruction that is coming out. The little boy sacrificed. The widow of Zarephath sacrificed. And God’s bounty was manifested on the back on these sacrifices. The ungodly will not notice the faith and the sacrifice connection. They don’t see it because all they are thinking about is self. All they are thinking about: How can I gain? How can I get another free lunch out of Jesus? And that was all they were in for. They saw no connection between the boy’s sacrifice and they saw no connection between Christ using that in order to glorify and advance himself.

Christ’s act of feeding the 5000 ought to cause the godly to look to Christ for all things, to trust in his powerful working, but they should also look at what they have in their own hands and how they can sacrifice with what they have. That is what the crowd should have done. That is what the crowd should have done. That is what they should have recognized. “Wow, look at what this little guy did. And look what Jesus did with his sacrifice. Man, I must have something I can sacrifice. I must be able to be involved in this kind of kingdom work.”

You see, the connection Christ intended for people to make is that God works through the seeds, the small things that he has given to them. And as they disperse that abroad by faith he multiplies it for the purposes of accomplishing his will. He multiplies that seed and he gives more seed and they spread that seed.

It is God’s power and glory yet the kingdom demands real sacrifice from God’s servants, sacrificing what God has previously given to them. That is what it is. I give you the seed. You sacrifice the seed. I will multiply the seed. You sacrifice and the kingdom is multiplied and grows. That is the natural process that God has ordained for the kingdom to function.

This is exactly what Paul was teaching the Corinthians. All things come from God's hand. And, thus, both the seed and the end product, the seed to sow and the bread to eat are from him. It is God and his pattern that Paul points the Corinthians to when he says he wants God to supply and multiply their seed. I want him to supply it and I want him to multiply it. The seed we have we must recognize that it comes from God because when we see this reality with kingdom eyes, then we understand what the purpose of the seed is, to be sacrificed for the glory of God. That is why we have it. Whatever we have, that is the purpose that it exists, fundamentally, for the kingdom of God.

Last time we saw the siphon principle where by God wants us to be channels so that we might disperse abroad. Well, when we sow our seed for the kingdom's sake, then that seed is multiplied by God so that we might sow more. It is God who supplies and multiplies our seed for his purpose.

At the end of verse 10 and Paul wanted the Lord to increase the fruits of the Corinthians righteousness. And their righteousness in this context had to do with the good works that flowed from their redeemed hearts. The fruit of righteousness is the fruit that flows from our lives that are lived by faith and the power of God's redeeming grace.

You see, it is not a fruit unto righteousness. That is, we are not earning a righteousness that will make us acceptable to the Lord. And it is important we are to keep that in our minds all the time because we want to quickly shift away from that, but rather it refers to the righteous acts that are a result of having been brought into kingdom by God's grace. It is God who increases or multiplies the fruits or harvest of our work, our righteous works. And if they are going to be effective for the kingdom, we need God's blessing and increase.

Moreover the reason God enriches us in all things is for the purpose of generosity or liberality in the kingdom. There are two different mindsets that people can embrace when it comes to the positions and their increase. But only one is a kingdom mindset. You see, your sacrifice for the kingdom must always be generous. And this is inescapable in the stories of the widow and with Elijah and the boy who gave his lunch, or even the Macedonians that Paul has just been talking about. And they are giving to the Jerusalem Church. This is the whole context that Paul is continuing to talk in, the sacrificial giving. Whatever we have comes from the Lord and is given to us so that we, in turn, might sacrifice by faith for the kingdom. No matter what we have the kingdom principle is faith and sacrifice. That is one mindset.

This is my mindset. Faith and sacrifice, whatever I have it is received by faith for the purpose of sacrifice. That is a mindset. The other mindset is centered upon self serving which is really unbelief and unbelief will not be engaged in real kingdom sacrifice. It can't be because self serving cannot be involved in sacrifice and to be self serving you cannot be involved in kingdom work. It is impossible. The two do not meet together.

Proverbs uses a leech to describe this mindset, a leech. Do you know what a leech is? That little guy that lives in the murky, muddy swamps and people go in there or animals.

He latches on. I don't know how he does it, but he punctures your skin and he starts to suck. And he sucks at blood and he sucks and he sucks and he sucks.

And you have to ask the leech, "How much is enough?"

He says, "It is never enough." He just keeps sucking. The only way he stops sucking is if you get him off there.

That is why Proverbs says in Proverbs 30 and verse 15, "The leech has two daughters," Their names? "Give and Give! Give, Give!"⁴ It is never enough.

Corrupt politicians also give us that picture of it is never enough. The untold millions that Robert Mugabe has in Indonesian bank accounts, how much is enough? And if you were looking at that trail that is taking place at the moment of Charles Taylor, the ex-Liberian president and this was revealed just this last week that while he was president he had five billion dollars in his private bank accounts in the United States.

Now you are thinking now, "How much is enough? How many billions is enough?"

Five billion. That's what they know about. And that is his private bank account.

Now you are thinking, "You know, how many billions do you need in order to have enough?"

You see the self serving, the selfish mindset, how much is enough? You are in bondage. You are in something you will never get to a position where it is enough. It is never enough.

And ask some of the corrupt politicians from this area how much is enough. It is never enough.

You see, those who are caught in the mindset of the world never have enough and, thus, can never be sacrificially generous. In other words, they know nothing about the working of God's kingdom. The biblical illustrations of kingdom generosity are not from the Bill Gates and the Warren Buffets of the world, they are from the widow from Zarephath and that little boy who gave his meal to feed the 5000. It is from the Macedonians who were sacrificing out of their lack in order to provide much needed aid to the suffering saints in Jerusalem.

Can you see the pictures that are...? Can we understand what it means?

You see, the focus is upon the heart. The focus is upon the sacrifice. The sacrifice is upon truly understanding how the kingdom functions because you have got to believe that this, indeed, is the energy, this is the fuel and the power of the kingdom. Otherwise why do it? You don't believe that. If you truly believe this is the energy, then you pour it into that,

⁴ Proverbs 30:15

but if you don't, if this is just an arbitrary side show then it continues to be an arbitrary side show and our hearts are not engaged into understanding that. You see it has got to come from the heart. It has got to be something that is birthed within us and we see it and we actually see this kingdom, we actually see the seriousness of the times we live in. We see the battle that we are engaged in. We see the walls that are surrounding us with respect to spiritual conflict and battle. And we realize we are engaged in battle, brethren. The only way to fight in this battle in the kingdom is through these principles and according to this way.

So we either believe that and we engage in it, or we just step back and we watch the kingdom functioning and things going on as they go and we kind of engage every now and again when it is convenient and suitable to us.

God says.. that was very untimely...Elijah's arrival in Zarephath, I assure you. You have arrived now?

That little boy could have just snuck away and snuck away around the boulder somewhere and just scooped his lunch and come back, "Hey, guys. Let's carry on. Preach up, Jesus. Great. Let's have some more teaching."

But he understood the kingdom. He understood the battle. And that is what Paul is pointing the Corinthians to and he shows that they are two very different mindsets with two very different results or approaches to life. You cannot imitate these things.

In verse 12 Paul says, "For the administration of this service not only supplies the needs of the saints, but also is abounding through many thanksgivings to God."⁵ You see, what Paul says at the end of verse 11 is similar to this. And he picks it up, I believe, in verse 12 and he stands it and so I will pick up on it here.

We see that there are two vital kingdom goals that are accomplished through generous sacrifice. Firstly, it supplies the needs of the saints. We have seen previously that the saints supplying one another's needs is the oil that lubricates the whole kingdom machinery. The effectiveness of the kingdom is from inside to outside. Its focus is upon the heart. It is not just externals. We talked about that last time I believe. It is focus is upon the heart. God's power flows through the hearts of his servants and accomplishes his purposes in that way.

Christ is the ultimate example. But there are many lesser examples of this truth in the working of God's kingdom in history. And that example is generously sacrificing self for the benefit of others and the glory of God's name, the sacrifice for the benefit of others is for all people, but especially for those who are of the household of faith as Paul says in Galatians six and verse 10. With the kingdom mindset increase means sacrifice. Increase means more sowing. Increase means greater impact for the kingdom. That is how we must be thinking. That is how we have got to understand what the kingdom is. Because

⁵ 2 Corinthians 9:12

that is the first thing we learn in these verses here. That is the impact, the things that are accomplished through generous sacrifice. The saints' needs are supplied.

And, secondly, Paul mentions something else that is often overlooked and its significance is not appreciated. A ministry—and we are all ministers, remember, as Ephesians tells us about the equipping of the saints for the work of the ministry and so we are all ministers—but a ministry is abounding and prospering in the kingdom sense when many are giving thanks to God. Because of your ministry thanks are being given to God.

Expressing gratitude and appreciation for God's bounty is fundamental to the purpose of his kingdom. Why do all things exist? We know they all exist for the glory and praise of God. God's name being praised is the fundamental reason why all things exist. Everything that has breath ought to praise the Lord. The heavens declare the glory of God. All these things exist for one purpose, that God's name is glorified. God's name is to be praised we are told. His praise is to continue to be upon our lips and the lips of all.

When we realize that this is not just a picturesque way of talking about things, but actually means that people ought to be praising the Lord, then our understanding of the kingdom takes on a different perspective. You see, Jesus understood this. People have to be praising God. And Paul is saying that we can be a part of this whole cycle when we understand this and our ministry is not only supplying certain aspects and needs in the kingdom, but it is also bringing praise to God. And that is a vital part of our ministry.

And Jesus understood that when he was coming into Jerusalem and the people were praising him and the Pharisees said, "Tell these people to keep quiet."

And he said, "If they keep quiet, the very rocks are going to cry out because God's name must be praised. That is how the kingdom functions. That is what the kingdom is, praising and glorifying God."

And Paul is saying that our lives, our lives can bring praise to God by how we act, that people's praises can be lifted to God, that thanksgiving can be lifted to God for the graciousness that they experience through our lives, through our ministry to them. And this is building and glorifying to God because this is a vital part of God's kingdom.

It is not just words. We are not just talking about words, but praising God, but words that are flowing from hearts that are genuinely full of gratitude.

This kingdom work is also meant to flow from the inside out where people praise God from the depths of their heart. Let one's praise from the heart. He doesn't just want lip service. Otherwise we could just put tapes on, put some music that just goes through these mantras and sing praise to God all the time and we could have these playing in each room of our house and, thus, can be satisfying God. That is irrelevant. It is irrelevant. He wants our hearts. It is a living, vibrant relationship that he wants and he wants that praise.

I believe it was Kevin Swanson who made that point of saying and pointing out the inconsistencies of the words being sung by some of these pagan artists, you know, like from Elvis or others coming down to modern time where they sing these Christian words and Christian songs and yet their hearts are the furthest thing and their lives are the furthest removed from the reality of the words they sing. And somehow it influences our culture and our situation where words and lives are just these things that don't match up. They don't have to match up and we don't worry about that.

So you have got somebody who is living a life of adultery and he is singing a song like, "I'll be always be faithful to thee, my Lord." And really we must interpret that song as irrelevant as far as kingdom value is going.

And in a marginal sense you have got God's name going forth, but we must not think that that's truly praise to God. It cannot be because God does not just want mantra praise. He wants praise from the hearts, from the depths of our being of who we are and what we are and proclaiming his goodness.

So my point here is to show that while praise and thanksgiving to God are vital and necessary in the working of the kingdom, we must not think that it refers to mere words. It means hearts. God is glorified and thanked when our hearts embrace the truth that we give thanks for.

This doesn't mean that we have to perfectly demonstrate faithfulness in order to thank him for faithfulness, but it means that our hearts have embraced the reality of faithfulness, of the truth of faithfulness, of the need for it and that we say, "Indeed, this is something that is glorious and wonderful and therefore we praise the Lord for faithfulness. We praise the Lord for his goodness."

So I say this in order to explain what kind of thanks Paul is talking about, not just empty repetitions of words, but heartfelt thanks flowing to the Lord.

The importance of this is obvious by what Paul says here. Moreover we are shown how we can increase this kingdom activity of many giving thanks to God. That is an objective. We want many to give thanks, not to us, to the Lord.

You know, when we want to be effective for the kingdom our hearts should be saying, "Lord, how can others hearts be put on fire by my ministry? How can their hearts be turned to Christ? I don't want them to remember me. I don't want them to remember my wisdom. I don't want them to remember that I was the one who said that to them. I want their hearts to burn with a zeal for God. I want them to go away with something in their heart where they are saying, 'Oh, Christ, I love you. I trust you. I am going to depend upon you and rest upon you.'"

That is what we want because what are we having? We are having hearts that are turning and giving thanks to God and we have got to realize that this is kingdom. This is what the

kingdom functions on. These kinds of things is what the kingdom is. And so we want this to be manifested through our lives for the glory of Christ.

Yes, we can utter such thanks ourselves and we should, but we can also be involved in the kind of ministry that Paul is talking about here; faith and sacrifice for the benefit of others and all of our increase is a natural resource in order to do that. All of our increase, all that we have from the Lord is a natural resource in our hands whereby we can get this praise to God, where people can say, “We thank the Lord. We thank the Lord for your goodness to us, God.” As people will thank the Lord for what he does and when they see his truth and his life and light wherever it is manifested from.

We must view our resources in this way, that many will give thanks to the Lord because of what we have been prospered with and how we have sown that into the kingdom.

He continues in verse 13 and 14.

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.⁶

You see, these next two verses show us the knock on effect of faithful ministry whereby we influence one another toward this end. God is glorified by a number of things that flow from this kind of ministry. Remember, we are all called to be ministers and Paul is explaining our ministry in these verses. It is tied to the solid character of this kind of ministry that glorifies God. This is the proof of ministry, the proof that it has been founded in and by God. God is glorified when we or the Corinthians demonstrate that our lives are submitted to the gospel of Christ.

You see this. When your life is submitted to that gospel the...in verse 13, as he begins verse 13, “While, through the proof of this ministry, they [magnify] God for the obedience of your confession to the gospel of Christ.”⁷ They glorify God because of the obedience of your confession, that being the demonstration of your life. Your whole life is demonstrating submission to the truth of God. And they are glorifying God because of that.

Do you see that it is not just externals that God is concerned about? The kingdom is not concerned about these mere external things, but internal submission to Christ as our hearts bow internally in submission to God that is glorifying to him. That is why pragmatism and appearances are so destructive because when people substitute appearances for real kingdom work it is ineffective. It is empty. It claims something that it is not. It is hypocrisy. It is destructive. It is deflecting from the kingdom. Pragmatism and appearances are meaningless. They, in fact, distract people from what they should be doing and they are powerless to do anything, to have any real import in the kingdom and

⁶ 2 Corinthians 9:13-14

⁷ 2 Corinthians 9:13

all that they are aimed at doing. Appearances, all that appearances are aimed at doing is supporting the selfish ends of the person who is giving the appearance. That is all it is.

“I want my will to be done. I want to serve myself. And I am going to give this appearance so that this is...this appears that so I can score for myself.”

That is what it is. Appearances are empty and destructive. Real kingdom effectiveness and glory for God comes from the submission of your confession, the submission of your whole life to the gospel of Christ, to his every word. What is effective for the kingdom and what truly glorifies God is not how well men speak of you. That is not necessarily the test. We know that Christ had people who spat in his face literally because of their hate for him. So it is not necessary that men have to all speak good of you in that sense. It is God, the submission to his gospel. And Christ was glorifying God although he was despised.

But this is the ministry that we have been called to, to exalt our God and king by doing his truth. Man pleasing is not the goal.

So we see that firstly. Secondly, what Paul lays out here is the manifestation of a godly ministry is proof of the solid ministry has to do with our generosity which causes the hearts of others glorify God. Paul encouraged the Corinthians to be generous to the believers in Jerusalem, but also to all people. It is not only the direct beneficiaries of generosity that give thanks to the Lord. God is praised and thanked by all who love his kingdom when they see generosity being showered upon others in God's name.

But you can testify in your hearts I'm sure. When you see generosity being showered by somebody upon somebody else in the name of Christ, your heart rejoices and you say, “Oh, God, I thank you.” That's kingdom. That's kingdom. God's kingdom functions and exists on that kind of praise, on that kind of thanksgiving.

And that is what should motivate us in understanding this. You see, Paul calls this generous sharing fellowship. He calls it fellowship, *κοινωνία* (*koy-nohn-ee'-ah*). That's the word he uses in this sharing, this fellowship with these brethren. This is true fellowship with these people when you share. We have fellowship when we identify with people and we enter into their lives. We enter into their joys. We enter into their struggles and their sorrows and their hopes and their thanks. We enter into it. That is fellowship. We are united with them in this and we stand with them in this in the name of Christ for the glory of his name. That is kingdom.

Somehow our eyes are looking for something else, too often. We are looking for another manifestation. Where is the kingdom? And we are almost like the religious leaders in Jesus' day as we looked at last week.

“Show us the kingdom.”

And Jesus is saying, “There is the kingdom. It is within. Touch it, hold it, feel it, manifest it through your heart and through your lives.”

But you can't have this kind of fellowship with self seeking greedy people. You can preach the gospel to them, but real fellowship is not possible. You can find watered down the meaning of fellowship to the lowest common denominator. We have fellowship with anyone who says Jesus.

Well, that is not biblical fellowship. Biblical fellowship, we can see, is deeper. It is involved. It is connected. It is ministering one to another. It is this sacrificing one for another and receiving that sacrifice from the hand of Christ.

Biblical fellowship has to do with kingdom effectiveness and glorifying God. And the way we do this is by what Paul is explaining in these verses. Christian fellowship has to do with intimate union with Christ and submission to his gospel which proves or demonstrates its reality by the generosity of sharing, faith and sacrifice, that is the kingdom.

Thirdly, in these verses we see that the impact these last two verses (I mean 13 and 14) we see that the impact of disbursing abroad the increase that God has given to you causes a spiritual reaction in the hearts of those who receive this sharing or fellowship. They pray. They pray for you.

So they pray. And what are they praying for? They are praying for your ministry. And what is your ministry focused upon? The kingdom of heaven.

Do you want prayer for your ministry?

Indeed, I want prayer for my ministry. I want people's hearts to cry out to the Lord for me. I want them to have a deep passion in their hearts to pray for me so that I can be more effective in the kingdom, so that I can be more faithful, so that I can, indeed, be more spreading abroad of the seed that is poured into my hands. I want that.

So you see this chain effect now that God says. These people now have been blessed by your generosity and they, in turn, are praying back because that's all they have got at the moment, those Jerusalem Christians that were starving. All they have got is their prayers. But they pray intentionally for you and then what is the purpose of the praying? So that you can be more effective. And you see the chain reaction or the snowball effect, so to speak, of how the kingdom works.

And the spiral continues to increase and gain momentum. It is all God's grace, but each person has a vital part to play in the working of the whole kingdom plan as we move forward and as God's kingdom gathers momentum through our labors and efforts.

Fourthly, Paul mentions how the receivers of the generous sharing long after those who have them the gift. They long. They long after them. What the receiver recognizes in the

givers is the reality of the grace of God in their lives. And they desire fellowship with them, to imitate them and to be like them, to be the faithful testimony and the self sacrifice draw true believers towards such qualities. They should.

A heart that has been born again from above, when it comes across true sacrifice, true generosity, true kingdom service, they want to be connected. They want to be...they long after those people to be with them, to have fellowship with them, to be influenced by them, to be instructed by them. And that is what Paul is pointing them to. The godly want to have fellowship and be companions with other godly people. And the proof of godliness is seen by how people live their lives. It is seen in the hard issues. Faith and self sacrifice is a quality that cannot be easily imitated.

You can't imitate self sacrifice for very long. You can give an impression, but you can't imitate that. You can imitate lots of things, but self sacrifice...

Tell me how that little boy is going to imitate self sacrifice? He is going to weasel off somewhere and hide under the bushes and eat one of the fish and two of the loaves and come back with a little bit. That's not self sacrifice.

The Zarephath woman said, "Fine, you sit here. I'll bring you the cake." And she takes her son in and cooks a meal and scoffs it down before anything happens. That is not...you can't imitate self sacrifice. Self sacrifice is too dusty. It touches us too much at the core of our being, the very place where the Spirit of God dwells or doesn't dwell.

And so it is not easy to imitate these things. But when the people of God see these things and are exposed to them, their hearts rise up and they seek to embrace them. They long after this. They want fellowship. They want to be...have access to such people. They long after them. They want to associate with them and be inspired by them and influenced by them and instructed by them.

When you see the exceeding grace of God in someone's life, make sure you learn what you can from that person. Be inspired by their example and learn their principles because what they have is due to the grace and the power of God's working and there is much to be learned from that. We learn from the widow. We learn from that little boy. We learn from that because we see in that the faith and the sacrifice that God is exemplifying as this is my kingdom. And so we learn from them. God instructs us through the lives of others.

What is the Bible but revelation about the lives of others that instructs us either positively or negatively, but tells us. Hey, be like this. Don't be like that. That is what it is. It is just the lives of others.

What is Christ's example? It is merely his relationship with the Father that we are to want to imitate. We are to want to be involved in and we are to want to emulate. His example shines forth and beckons us to imitate it. To be like Christ is to be like him in the context of life on this earth. Yes, we are looking for that eternal state and that eternal

being and likeness that we are going to have. But that is beyond our comprehension now. What is clear should fill our vision and what that vision should be is the example that Christ lived before the eyes of men. And, thus, Paul ends off with that. “Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift,”⁸ or the indescribable gift of Christ.

You see, it is Christ’s sacrifice, the great gift of God through him that starts and ends the kingdom principle of sacrificial generosity. It is his example that points the way. It is his example that is to inspire our sacrificial generosity. God so freely gave something that was infinitely precious so that we might be rescued from our poverty. What God has given is way, way more valuable than anything we might ever give. It is beyond our ability to even make a comparison with anything in this world. There just is no comparison to what God gave through his Son and to what we have in our hands and possessions to give.

Everything we are, everything we have and everything we ever will be flows from this inexpressible generosity of God giving us his Son. That is what it flows from. But that, Paul argues, sets the stage for our own faith and sacrifice as we generously spread abroad our increase for the Lord in whatever form that comes.

As Jesus exhorted:

This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends.⁹

You see, true Christ like love is to sacrifice self unto death for the benefit of others in God’s glory. And, thus, Paul exhorted the Ephesians in chapter five and verse two to walk in the love of Christ, to walk in love as Christ has loved us and given himself for us. That is what love is. He gave himself. He sacrificed himself for us. That’s love. That is our standard. God’s inexpressible gift. Generosity is the kingdom. It touches is in the deepest part of our being. Thus, the fruit of Christ centered generosity is powerful in the hands of God for the advancing of his kingdom purposes. That is how he works his kingdom. That is how it manifests itself and unfolds.

If you see the kingdom and have passion for the kingdom, then your life will be characterized more and more by faith and sacrifice, Christ like sacrifice. This is the way of the kingdom to ultimate victory. May you see it, may your hearts embrace it and may we faithfully be part of that great victory.

Let us pray.

Father, we thank you for these words. We thank you for the boldness of Paul. We thank you for the inspiration of the Spirit who gave him these words to write and we do pray that our hearts would understand them, that we would embrace them and capture them

⁸ 2 Corinthians 9:15

⁹ John 15:12-13

and that we truly would see the reality of the kingdom battle that we are involved in, that we would understand the mechanisms of the kingdom, that we would understand its fuel and the contributions that we are to have in fighting and being involved in these great battles.

Thank you, Lord, for calling us into the kingdom. Thank you for supplying such abundance to us through Christ and giving us such abundance so that we, in turn, might be able to sow back into the kingdom work. Help us to be faithful to this end. Give us eyes to see it and hearts to do it in your power and your grace we pray, Amen.