

Models of Pecuniary Openhandedness:

Paul's Advocacy on Generosity and Imitation

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**Abstract:** For the collection for the famine in Judea, 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 suggests the models of generosity of the Macedonian Christians, the Father, and Jesus for imitation. Paul implicitly and explicitly conveys that God's grace flows through these Christians, the primary argument. Unlike the popular assumption, studies suggest that very few wealthy patrons existed among this first generation. Instead Paul strives for the effort of contribution, not the amount. Corinth has already failed to share among their own. Given the example of Macedonians contributing during hardship, Paul expects a collection among Corinth will make known God's past and continuing gifts; these Christians will experience joy in the process. The Judean fund is but one component of grace becoming far more apparent.

**Keywords:** generosity, model, imitation, collection, Paul, Corinthian, Macedonian

In first-century CE, Judea experiences a famine that obliged the collection and support from emerging Christian communities around the Mediterranean. Josephus records, “there was a famine in the land that overtook them [i.e. the people of Jerusalem], and many died of starvation.”<sup>1</sup> Acts of the Apostles 11:27-30 depicts the arrival of prophets from Jerusalem to Antioch, foretelling a famine under the reign of Claudius. Many Christians commit to send assistance; Barnabas and Saul are entrusted to deliver the funds. Bryan Elliff estimates that the Judean famine transpires on 46 C.E. Ten years following, Paul of Tarsus composes the Second Letter to the Corinthians, featuring the exhortation to generosity in chapters eight and nine.<sup>2</sup> Beverly Roberts Gaventa notes the significance of the Jerusalem collection-effort for Paul, because he mentions it repeatedly in other letters. “In Galatians, Paul recalls . . . the stipulation that Paul should ‘remember the poor’ in his work (Gal 2:10). In 1 Corinthians 16, Paul has already asked the Corinthians to put aside something every week . . . Romans 15 indicates Paul’s plans for taking the collection to Jerusalem.”<sup>3</sup> This campaign on the Judeans’ behalf has lasted at least one year; he is in some ways answering queries about the logistics of

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<sup>1</sup> Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews*, 20:2:5.

<sup>2</sup> Bryan Elliff, *Surplus: Fearless Generosity in 2 Corinthians 8-9* (Parkville, MO: Christian Communicators Worldwide, 2019), 10-11.

<sup>3</sup> Beverly Roberts Gaventa, “The Economy of Grace: Reflections on 2 Corinthians 8 and 9,” *Grace upon Grace: Essays in Honor of Thomas A. Langford*, eds. Robert K. Johnston, L. Gregory Jones, Jonathan R. Wilson (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999), 52-3.

the collection.<sup>4</sup> The plight of Jerusalem Christians remained a central concern for Paul's missionary campaigns and epistles.

Second Corinthians 8-9 utilizes models of generosity in the figures of Christ, the Father, and the Macedonians to induce the imitation of Corinthian Christians. Mimetic theory, researched by Rene Girard, establishes the efficaciousness of models and imitation, for similar behavior.<sup>5</sup> This article will first consider the present norms of generosity in the Roman Empire and Paul's warrants for benefaction. Turning to 2 Cor 8 and 9, the second section will analyze the Macedonians as a model set before the Corinthians. Next, the essay will elaborate on the bountiful Father in 2 Corinthians, an image recurrent in Hebrew Scriptures. The final portion will examine Jesus' self-gift as an exemplar. I will argue that, though Paul's pleas for the Judean collection is multifaceted, the steady repetition of grace as work is his principle assertion. The Macedonians and Jesus stand as foremost examples of the movements of grace that circulate through all human communities.

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<sup>4</sup> J. Paul Sampley, *The New Interpreter's Bible*, vol. XI (Nashville: Abingdon, 2000), 113.

<sup>5</sup> For a primer on Mimetic Theory, see Rene Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World, The Scapegoat, Violence and the Sacred, or I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*.

## I. Standards of Generosity in the Roman Empire and Paul's Collections

Whereas in Israel Paul could effortlessly draw upon Jewish precedents to elicit the generosity of his churches, pagan Greco-Roman norms of giving would sway Corinthian behavior. *Pietas* in the Roman Empire stipulated that a wealthy patron first care for the needs of his household, before looking to needs in the wider community. Paul has a history of varied approaches on collection drives. L.L. Welborn suggests that Paul composes arguments framed on surplus and generosity, while Schellenberg sees a manner of *mutualism* at work among the epistles. One must apprehend that a class of many affluent patrons did not exist in this generation. Stephen T. Friesen's study has proposed that few, if any, wealthy individuals existed among the early Christians. Second Corinthians 8-9 occurs within years of collection crusades by Paul, sidestepping the usual parameters of Greco-Roman benefaction.

The Roman principle of *pietas* heavily shaped the inclination for donations to causes. Timothy J. Murray stresses that acclamation for *pietas* is located throughout Roman literature. Cicero holds it as the baseline for all virtues.<sup>6</sup> For the Roman senator, "The importance of material provision for one's family is such that benevolence to those beyond the family is necessarily limited." The normative fiduciary responsibility is to the family-unit, and the head of a household can harm his household members with munificence to foreign causes. Murray finds a similar appeal in Quintilian, a first-century Roman

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<sup>6</sup> Cicero, *Pro Plancio*, 29.3.

rhetorician. *Pietas* demands a concentration on family wants and an intimate solidarity.<sup>7</sup> Notably, *pietas* applies to non-elite families too. Many elderly parents would become dependent on the income of their children; this reciprocated the care and occupational-training the grown children would have received. Murray makes sure to establish that Roman *pietas* would have formed Corinthian and Philippian social norms.<sup>8</sup> Paul must therefore convince Corinthians that social duties stretch well outside the household.

Welborn shows that surplus and inequality, undergirds Paul's use of models in Second Corinthians. In 2 Cor 8:14, Paul pointedly states the surplus (περίσσευμα) among the Corinthians and the needs (ὑστέρημα) of the community in Jerusalem. Welborn corroborates that material rather than spiritual lack is attested, from Romans 15:27. Here Paul distinguishes "material blessings" from spiritual. Welborn declares,

I see no reason to believe that Paul's account of the Corinthian's abundance is rhetorical exaggeration. Through all stages of the Corinthian correspondence, Paul anticipates the crucial role that the Corinthians will play in the success of the collection on account of their greater wealth<sup>9</sup>

Welborn continues, explaining that the majority of Corinthians were poor; greater financial inequality existed in Corinth contrasted to other Christian communities.<sup>10</sup> He cites 1 Cor

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<sup>7</sup> Timothy J. Murray, *Restricted Generosity in the New Testament* (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018), 40-1.

<sup>8</sup> Ibidem, 43.

<sup>9</sup> L.L. Welborn, "Paul's Place in a First-Century Revival of the Discourse of 'Equality,'" *Harvard Theological Review* 110:4, (2017), 554.

<sup>10</sup> L.L. Welborn, "Inequality in Roman Corinth: Evidence from Diverse Sources Evaluated by a Neo-Ricardian Model," *The First Urban Churches 2: Roman Corinth*, ed. James R. Harrison and L.L. Welborn (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016), 189-243.

11:21-22, of conspicuous inequality at the Christian banquets. Welborn believes “those who have nothing” refers to those below subsistence level. The Corinthians have indeed failed to share sufficiently even within their own district Christian community!<sup>11</sup>

Elsewhere in the Thessalonian correspondence, Paul has encouraged a generalized reciprocity as found among relatives. Ryan S. Schellenberg deduces this from “brother” (ἀδελφοὶ) language found throughout 1 Thess 4. “Hence all members, even those who are receivers of aid, are urged to make what contribution they can to the needs of the fictive household.”<sup>12</sup> In the situation of the Corinthian collection for Jerusalem, Schellenberg opines that economic equality is the aim. The “equality” (ἰσότης) that Paul refers to in 2 Cor 8:14 is closely associated with reciprocity, as Aristotle, Philo, and Menander attest.<sup>13</sup> Schellenberg equates it with κοινωνία and mutual benefit. The author concludes that Paul is trying to convince Corinthians of mutual exchange, at a time when it was not yet standardized. It is for this reason that Paul promises divine restitution in 2 Cor 9.<sup>14</sup> Paul thus inserts “brother” diction to imply other Christians as the same household, deserving of *pietas*.

While Paul energetically launches this campaign for Jerusalem, Steven J. Friesen’s research details that the Corinthian community consisted of many impoverished figures and

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<sup>11</sup> Welborn, “Paul’s Place,” 555.

<sup>12</sup> Ryan S. Schellenberg, “Subsistence, Swapping, and Paul’s Rhetoric of Generosity,” *Journal of Biblical Literature*, vol. 137, no. 1 (2018), 226.

<sup>13</sup> Schellenberg cites Aristotle, *Eth. Nic.* 85.5 [1157b]; Philo, *Leg.* 84-5; Menander, *Mon.* 259.

<sup>14</sup> Schellenberg, 228-9.

few wealthy. There were individuals who could contribute nothing to the community meal. Unlike typical appeals to a single wealthy patron, Paul insists on a group-effort. Friesen sees that, for Paul the attempt of contribution is more significant than the monetary sum. “Paul was portraying the Corinthian saints in terms that reflect a majority in category 6 of the poverty scale; that is, urban poor who faced the prospect of sliding into economic crisis.” The Macedonians would hold an even lower position on the poverty scale. Even with the supposed patrons Stephanus, Prisca, and Aquila, Friesen dismisses the notion of their enhanced wealth. Paul never resides with Stephanus, nor does he host a Christian assembly. Prisca and Aquila likely lived in the tenement sections, working as manual laborers. The fact that many poor individuals own slaves and had homes, eliminates the usual claims that Philemon is affluent.<sup>15</sup> Paul therefore strives for a combined effort from many subsistence or impoverished individuals, from Corinth and Macedonia.

In both Corinthian epistles, Paul has introduced himself as ἀπόστολος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ, to persuade Corinthians through his authority and obedience. S.J. Joubert elucidates,

In this respect Paul figures as the superior party with the highest status and most power since he has direct access to the revelations of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 2:10-16). Paul further demarcates and legitimizes his authority as apostle by stating that he acts in complete obedience to God’s commands (1 Cor 4:1-5; 2 Cor 1:12-24). Due then to

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<sup>15</sup> Steven J. Friesen, “Poverty in Pauline Studies: Beyond the So-called New Consensus,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 26.3 (2004), 350-4.

his role as normative mediator of the μυστήριον τοῦ θεοῦ (1 Cor 2:1), he expects total obedience to his commands from the Corinthians (1 Cor 7:8; 16:1-4).<sup>16</sup>

But even with this expressed authority, Joubert stresses that Paul refers to a “father-figure” role towards Corinthian “children” several times. The scholar underscores that 2 Corinthians 8 must be analyzed within this overall relationship of Paul’s letter. Joubert says that Paul’s fatherly role implies that the Corinthians must obey (2 Cor 2:9), trust (2 Cor 12:11), refrain from judging him (1 Cor 4:5), and imitate his behavior (1 Cor 11:1). Paul teaches (1 Cor 4:17; 7:1-40), admonishes them (2 Cor 2:8), and supervises their conduct (2 Cor 13:11). Joubert believes that Paul’s father-role exerts extra pressure, over and above his hierarchical leadership.<sup>17</sup>

Additionally Paul may have needed to defend his management of finances, through the collection effort in 2 Cor 8-9. Lodge reads 8:20 as Paul’s acknowledgement that some figures still suspect him; some Corinthians may not have confidence in him. Paul was announcing a collection, whilst he said he never desired any payment for preaching himself. Lodge thinks Paul wonders whether the Corinthians trust his honesty; therefore, he uses another team to supervise the collection. Although he does suggest himself as exemplar occasionally, it appears here that he endeavors on some level, to reestablish trust.

Across his epistles, Paul overturns *pietas* by appealing to brotherhood and acknowledging surplus. Still, fewer wealthy individuals existed than commonly presumed

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<sup>16</sup> S.J. Joubert, “Behind the Mask of Rhetoric: 2 Corinthians and the Intra-Textual Relation between Paul and the Corinthians,” *Neotestamentica* 26, vol. 1 (1992), 102.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*, 103.



today. Paul must further subvert conspicuous inequality even in Corinth. It is the Macedonian model and economy of grace, that moves Paul's project forward in Second Corinthians.

## II. The Example of the Macedonians

Paul's affection for the Thessalonians and Macedonians is readily apprehended, among his letters dispatched across the Mediterranean world.<sup>18</sup> In 2 Corinthians, "Macedonia" implies the churches that Paul has founded in Thessalonica, Philippi, and likely Beroea.<sup>19</sup> Compared to the crises of the Galatian and Corinthian Christians, the Thessalonians had minor theological confusion over the effects of the *Parousia*.<sup>20</sup> Paul publicizes their example of grace-giving, as well as their own imitation of Jesus. They give beyond their means, power, and are a living sacrifice. Paul acknowledges that, while the Macedonians exhibit joy before perils, their example may engender anxiety among the Corinthians. Ironically, Paul has bragged about the Corinthian's zeal before the Macedonians.<sup>21</sup> "Spurred on by the example of the Corinthians, the Macedonians had, under

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<sup>18</sup> See Phil 1:3-8; 1 Thess 1:2-8; 2 Thess 1:3-4.

<sup>19</sup> Victor Paul Furnish, *II Corinthians*, The Anchor Bible (Garden City: Doubleday, 1984), 400.

<sup>20</sup> 1 Thess 4:13-17.

<sup>21</sup> Sampley cites 2 Cor 8:10-12; 9:2-5.

Titus's tutelage, outdone themselves (8:2-6), virtually begging to be part of the enterprise."<sup>22</sup>

Ultimately their actions themselves preach the Gospel to other believers.

The evangelist opens 2 Cor 8 by immediately drawing attention to the paradoxical generosity of the Macedonians. "In a severe test of affliction, the abundance of their joy and their poverty overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part."<sup>23</sup> Victor Paul Furnish determines that *haplotēs* "connotes a simplicity of purpose and action, absolute guilelessness."<sup>24</sup> Paul already identifies the source as "the grace of God" in verse 1. Most surprisingly, "they begged us insistently" that they might participate in this collection; Paul views this as self-gift towards God and his team of evangelizers. The participation (*κοινωνία*) implies a "partnership of believers."<sup>25</sup> He asks the Corinthians, who "excel in every respect" to follow this graciousness similarly (v. 7).

Joubert posits that the Macedonian's behavior stands as an *identification model* for the reader. As the Macedonians have done, so also the Corinthians should offer themselves to God and the evangelizers. "Identification with the Macedonian believers, however, implies more than a mere repetition or a superficial echo of their conduct, since the bestowal of God's grace presumes a distinctive reaction in each new situation."<sup>26</sup> Joubert names 1 Cor

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<sup>22</sup> Sampley, 116.

<sup>23</sup> 2 Cor 8:2. All Biblical citations henceforth from the New American Bible (NAB).

<sup>24</sup> Furnish, 400.

<sup>25</sup> Ibidem, 401.

<sup>26</sup> Joubert, 106.

8:1-5 highly effectual, since it conveys *implicit pressure* to match the impressive acts of the Macedonians.

Even though the Macedonians stand as a principal subject, Paul looks behind their example to the movement of God's grace. Fiona J.R. Gregson declares that "Paul's exhortation to the Corinthians is dominated by grace."<sup>27</sup> God has firstly bestowed this grace<sup>28</sup> and arises from Jesus' own actions.<sup>29</sup> According to Paul, grace is to be credited above his own efforts or the Macedonians' volition.<sup>30</sup> John G. Lodge assesses that the Macedonians' actions revolve around *charis*. "The northerners have harvested God's 'blessings upon blessings.' The evidence is empirical: some activity on the part of the readers' brothers and sisters in the body of Christ caused by God's acting among them."<sup>31</sup> The paradoxical harvest of magnanimity amidst hardship bespeaks of Jesus' Death and Resurrection. Lodge notices that joy seems associated with such generosity, in their experience and lexically. "I can testify," a shift from plural to singular first-person, emphasizes that Paul himself realizes God's activity among the Macedonians (v. 3).

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<sup>27</sup> Harris, *Second Corinthians*, 555 in Fiona J.R. Gregson, *Everything in Common?: The Theology and Practice of the Sharing of Possessions in Community in the New Testament* (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2017), 146.

<sup>28</sup> McCant, *Corinthians*, 79 in Gregson.

<sup>29</sup> Barclay, "Because," 1-2, 47 in Gregson.

<sup>30</sup> Furnish, 413.

<sup>31</sup> John G. Lodge, "The Apostle's Appeal and Reader's Response: 2 Corinthians 8 and 9," *Chicago Studies*, vol. 20 (April 1991), 66.

Hans Dieter Betz systematizes these first five verses of 2 Corinthians as an *exordium* that ends in the Macedonian *exemplum*. The purpose of the former is to capture the attention of the reader. Oddly, Paul does not gesture towards novel information, but reminds the Corinthians about what they have known all along. “Paul’s words suggest that the full implication of the facts, particularly those pertaining to the present letter, had managed to escape them. What the facts imply is an embarrassment to the Corinthians.”<sup>32</sup> Paul endeavors to compose a pointed reminder to these Corinthians about Macedon.

The *exemplum* of the Macedonians’ behavior fills into an *encomium*, in Betz’s analysis. The example is the glowing depiction of the Macedonians’ admirable work. “Rhetorically, therefore, the example is laudatory in character, and thus an *encomium*.”<sup>33</sup> Whereas Paul throws around various combinations of grace, Betz arrives at the conclusion that χάρις should be correlated with “gift.” The ancient world regarded gift-giving as a religious practice. “Paul made use of such underlying connotations when he connected the grace of God, manifest in Christian salvation, to the gift of money expected of those who have participated in that salvation.”<sup>34</sup> Paul indicates that grace arrived among the Macedonians before the Corinthians, as a model for the latter to imitate.

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<sup>32</sup> Hans Dieter Betz, *2 Corinthians 8 and 9: A Commentary on Two Administrative Letters of the Apostle Paul* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 40.

<sup>33</sup> Betz, 41-2.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibidem*, 42.

In the middle of the Macedonian model, Christ's example is focused upon in verse 9. Gregson specifies that "Jesus is the 'supreme model' and while Paul is careful not to command the Corinthians, the example of Jesus may be seen as commanding them, or at least being such a strong example that Paul has no need to command them."<sup>35</sup> Gregson turns to Barclay that Jesus' image is a "divine momentum" that believers share and are enabled to share with others. There is some controversy among scholars over what precisely Jesus relinquished. Some hold that Jesus does not grip his heavenly status, remains in poverty, avoids the fullness of communion with the Father, or multiple loci of poverty as a Galilean. Gregson reasons that Paul may have calculated a *multireferent* meaning. Christ forsakes the potential richness of his status, implying that the Corinthians may consider the same.<sup>36</sup>

The Macedonians, according to Paul, have clearly donated beyond their own abilities. Despite being in a situation of poverty and circling troubles, they gave without worry. Lodge expresses that, since these Macedonians do not behave in typical human ways, it must be God's own example and grace at work. "The non-stop piling up of phrases describing the manifestation of God's gifts (vv. 3-5) among the Macedonians imitates the rich, overflowing miracle of their generosity and mirrors the speaker's excitement."<sup>37</sup> Betz realizes that Paul's operating theology of grace includes Christ's self-sacrifice;<sup>38</sup> the Scripture scholar expects it is

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<sup>35</sup> Gregson, 149-150.

<sup>36</sup> Ibidem, 150-1.

<sup>37</sup> Lodge, 67.

<sup>38</sup> Betz cites Gal 1:4; 2:20; 3:13.

present in verse 5. In Romans 12:1-2, Paul articulates that Christian life is a self-sacrifice to God. The acknowledgement of divine giftedness mobilizes them to give beyond their own means.

Joy is present paradoxically as an outcome of the Macedonian magnanimity during trial. Betz points to John Chrysostom, that a paradigmatic joy arrives to Christians under distress. Though their challenges are many, the Macedonians possessed “the abundance of their joy” (v. 2). Betz locates this same dynamic in Paul,<sup>39</sup> the Sermon on the Mount, and Judaism itself. Paul’s encouragement includes the promise of emotional reward.

The Macedonians’ exemplary deeds preaches the Gospel itself, the heart of all Christian activity. Lodge looks to 2 Cor 1:5, “For as Christ’s sufferings overflow to us, so through Christ does our encouragement (παράκλησις) also overflow.” Such encouragement (παρακλήσεως) is what the Macedonians desired by means of their involvement in the Jerusalem collection in 2 Cor 8:5. Lodge surmises this encouragement will come to them, since “it will enable them to recognize the supreme gift of love, i.e., Christ, which they have.”<sup>40</sup> This dynamic only occurs through some acceptance of poverty. Christ’s love will accompany their joy.

Although encouragement is anticipated as an outcome, Joubert envisages *anxiety* among the Corinthians confronted with the Macedonian model. He writes, “Paul

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<sup>39</sup> 2 Cor 4:7-18, Rom 12:15, 1 Cor 7:30, 2 Cor 6:10.

<sup>40</sup> Lodge, 70.

undoubtedly knows that this mention of the admirable conduct of the Macedonians in the first five verses has created a measure of anxiety on the part of his audience.”<sup>41</sup> In albeit difficult circumstances, the Macedonians have well exceeded expectations. If the Corinthians perceive they have more material means than Macedon, they are perhaps intimidated to generate sufficiently for this accumulation. This adds pressure to the Corinthian audience and readers.

Chapters eight and nine of Second Corinthians appear within a letter riddled with allusions to grace. All the subjects and objects mentioned, are under the influence of God’s grace. Grace surfaces in the first verse of chapter eight; it is what empowers the Macedonians to contribute, even with their own obvious need. Paul is presenting and representing the movements of grace, so that the Corinthians will acknowledge it in the manner that the Macedonians have done. Even with the mention of Christ, the underlying principle is that God’s grace is at work.

### **III. The Model of the Father’s Generosity**

Given the thanksgiving offered to the Father in the Psalms and standard Jewish prayers, it is natural that Paul would feature the Father as a model for Corinthian generosity. The mention of “grace” in verse 1, already indicates the Father’s activity; generosity is often

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<sup>41</sup> Joubert, 109.

listed as a chief attribute of the Father.<sup>42</sup> God allows human beings to be wealthy in an array of dimensions, and bestows gifts freely. Scripture scholars have noticed how Paul deploys Proverbs and Psalms as instances of the Father's bountifulness. A certain obvious aspect of this magnanimity, is the sending of the Son among humanity.

Gregson posits that chapter eight begins with the giving nature of the Father, rather than attention on Macedon. God's original gift-giving and provisions, enables the Corinthians to give themselves.<sup>43</sup> Gregson cites Barnett, "δεδομένην is a passive perfect points to God continuing to give."<sup>44</sup> Subsequent giving by humanity, necessarily consequent to God's first gift, henceforth gives glory to God.<sup>45</sup> Paul sets a chronological and ontological foundation, that the Father's generosity arrives prior to all human volition, spurring a continuing human commitment to share.

The previous letter to the Corinthians elaborated on God's various gifts among their community. Lodge discusses how 1 Cor 12-14 specifies the gift of charisms and the ways by which the Corinthians respond to this. "The bold repetition of 'every' may make readers recall Paul's prayer of thanksgiving in his earlier letter . . . Paul reminds the audience that they possess a wealth of God's gifts, including the free spirit of generosity from which flow good works."<sup>46</sup> The *abundance of free distribution* from the Father, should motivate the

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<sup>42</sup> See Psalms 13, 69, 111.

<sup>43</sup> Gregson, 158.

<sup>44</sup> Barnett, *Second Corinthians*, 391.

<sup>45</sup> Furnish, 446.

<sup>46</sup> Lodge, 63-4.



Corinthians, towards their own generosity. 2 Corinthians is a reminder of what Paul has reiterated in the first epistle.

Sampley discusses how Paul develops a multi-layered meaning for *charis* for effect, in the style of ancient rhetoricians. The term appears ten times in 2 Cor 8-9. The nature of “every grace abundant” should prompt the Corinthians to undertake many good works. Sampley expresses, “God’s grace is powerful and moves the recipients to a reflection of God’s abundance so that they respond profusely by doing good works toward others.”<sup>47</sup> It is a mode of thanksgiving sent back to God. The collection taken on behalf of Jerusalem is part of a cycle of *charis*: gifted initially by God, work impelled by it, and thanksgiving offered back to God.<sup>48</sup> Paul desires that Corinthians return to reflect on grace received, again and again.

Paul draws upon the generous-language of Proverbs 22 and Psalm 112, to bolster his argument. Gregson turns to Wright, that Paul employs *σπεύων*, identical to Prov 22:8 in the Septuagint. Gifts are not single events, but invested within individuals and harvested after ripening. Similarly, Elliff spots the language of Psalm 112 in 2 Cor 9:9, “He scatters abroad, he gives to the poor; his righteousness endures forever.” Crucially, the subject of Ps 112:9 is the *human being*, not the Father. Psalm 112 is the actual imitation of the righteous

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<sup>47</sup> Sampley, 119.

<sup>48</sup> Ibidem.

human being, that carries out God's own magnanimity found in the previous psalm.<sup>49</sup> The historicity of God's giving is well-documented in Hebrew literature.

2 Cor 9:14-15 bespeaks of the Father's generosity specifically in the gift of Jesus. Although Paul does not explicitly name the gift here, various scholars have arrived at Jesus.<sup>50</sup> Chrysostom views it either as Jesus' person or the gifts given by Jesus.<sup>51</sup> On the other hand, Matera deems the bestowal is salvation. Gregson reconciles this disparity saying, "It is not necessary to distinguish between Jesus and salvation as the gift, as both fit within the context of Paul having focused on God's grace and on Jesus' generosity in salvation."<sup>52</sup> Matera's attentiveness to the emotive praise in the piece, does seem to associate the Corinthian collection with humanity's salvation.<sup>53</sup> Although *charis* may be related to an assortment of things, the Christ-event is an arresting instance.

Paul remains careful to firmly link God's grace as the power stirring within the Macedonians. Gaventa declares that 2 Cor 8:1 sets the topic and tone, as the Father's grace: "Importantly, Paul identifies the topic at hand as God's grace rather than the collection itself or even the benevolence of the Macedonians."<sup>54</sup> Elliff supposes that 2 Cor 9:8, God's potency to make all graces abundant, therefore allows human beings to perform good works in

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<sup>49</sup> Elliff, 63-6.

<sup>50</sup> Gregson cites Barnett, *Second Corinthians*, 448; Hughes, *Second Corinthians*, 342; Strachan, *Second Corinthians*, 145.

<sup>51</sup> Gregson cites *Hom. 2 Cor. 20.2* in Bray, *Corinthians*, 282.

<sup>52</sup> Gregson, 162.

<sup>53</sup> Matera, *Corinthians*, 210.

<sup>54</sup> Gaventa, 54.

abundance.<sup>55</sup> Paul's recitation of grace, found throughout the letters to the Corinthians, regularly returns the readers' attention to the activity of the Father.

By a collection of approaches, Paul conveys that the Father continues to give generously unto humanity, especially the Corinthian community. The richness of *charis* is habitually elaborated upon. The evangelist sources Proverbs 22 and Psalm 112 as evidence for this persistent bestowal upon humanity. God's grace is indeed a *free* distribution in which all manner of gifts are given.

#### **IV. The Model and Example of Christ**

Jesus regularly features in the New Testament epistles as the primary model for human beings to follow as disciples. In Second Corinthians, Paul raises the import of the Incarnation, as well as the generous acts of Christ and his general kindness. The evangelist looks to emphases in Philippians 2, on the chosen poverty of Christ for the sake of humanity. Jesus Christ's privation enriches this Christian community. The Corinthians' status as the Body of Christ further draws them into the example of his being.

Craig L. Blomberg argues that the most crucial dimension of Christ, in the Incarnation-event in totality. The scholar looks to 2 Cor 8:9, "for your sake he became poor

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<sup>55</sup> Elliff, 62.

although he was rich, so that by his poverty you might become rich.” For Blomberg, *the Incarnation* is the principal model.

*Contra* some liberation theology, this statement probably does not refer to the material or socio-economic circumstances of Jesus throughout his earthly life. Rather, it offers a far more profound theological summary of all that he gave up in leaving his heavenly home for the constrictions of earthly existence and ultimate ignominy of crucifixion.<sup>56</sup>

This perspective on the totality of Christ’s life, according to Blomberg, should definitely motivate Corinthians to share among the needy.

Conversely, Joubert accentuates the *kindness* exhibited by Christ as model for human behavior in verse 9. The theologian takes χάρις as “kindness.” “Whereas Paul in verse 1 referred to the χάρις τοῦ θεοῦ he now in verse 9 refers to the: χάρις τοῦ κυρίου.” Joubert sees the entirety of Christ’s existence as this act, the “voluntary abandoning of his heavenly existence and his complete identification with [sic] a frail humanly existence.”<sup>57</sup> But unlike Blomberg, he captures it as the *kindness* essential to Jesus’ existence. It is this part of Christ that permits the prosperity the Corinthians enjoy. For Joubert, the collection “finds its most profound meaning” when juxtaposed to the kindness of Christ. Paul equates observance of the Gospel, with donating to the Jerusalem cause.

A tertiary position is supplied by Furnish, who credits the *salvation* offered through Christ’s life and death, as inspiration for the Corinthians. Furnish is adamant that “Christ’s

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<sup>56</sup> Craig L. Blomberg, *Neither Poverty nor Riches: A Biblical Theology of Material Possessions* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 193.

<sup>57</sup> Joubert, 108.

act of grace” is not presented here for them to follow. He rationalizes that, in verse 13, Paul does not request the Corinthians to become poor themselves. Christ’s self-giving love is a model elsewhere in Paul’s texts, but not in 2 Corinthians 8 according to Furnish.<sup>58</sup> Instead, salvation are the riches that the Corinthians have received from Christ. “The admonition implicit in this statement is not ‘Do what Christ did,’ or even ‘Do for others what Christ has done for you.’ It is, rather, ‘Do what is appropriate to your status as those who have been enriched by the grace of Christ.’”<sup>59</sup>

The Corinthians are expected to bear others love as members of the Body of Christ, a supplementary argument. Lodge assesses, “The effect is to make the audience recall that of all the gifts one might have, ‘the greatest of these is love’ (1 Cor 13:13). The love referred to is the love which members of the Body of Christ share with one another.”<sup>60</sup> Lodge views “the love we have for you” (v. 7) as the evangelists’ prompt unto the audience. Because the Corinthians have obtained such a degree of love from Paul and his companions, they should remember all of their gifts and care deeply for the other members of the Body of Christ. This should manifest in a rich collection for the Judeans.

Gaventa summarizes that the grace of Christ should foster *a form of mimesis* among the Corinthians. This is at least implicit. “Just as the liberality of the Macedonians has

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<sup>58</sup> For Christ’s self-giving love as example, Furnish cites Rom 15:2-3; 1 Cor 10:24, 33-11:1.

<sup>59</sup> Furnish, 418.

<sup>60</sup> Lodge, 68.

offered an example, so now Jesus Christ's self-imposed poverty offers an example which Paul invites the Corinthians to imitate—at least to a limited extent.”<sup>61</sup> Rather than the poverty stated in Philippians 2, Gaventa highlights the mind of Christ in Phil 2:5. These two phrases do not anticipate that a Corinthian will become like Jesus, but share in the “mind” of Christ. Gaventa points out that the reader should notice no explicit command from Paul, for the Corinthians to imitate Jesus. They are to act out of the love from Christ. This love of Christ is not an “ethical standard,” nor stipulation to be Christian, nor direct response. For Gaventa, Christ's passion has an effect upon all who are called. As seen with the model of the Father, Paul's use of Jesus is a multipronged illustration, that foregrounds the Incarnation itself, Christ's attribute of kindness, and the obligations in the Body of Christ.

## Conclusion

In Second Corinthians 8-9, Paul exhibits three models of generosity for imitation, propounding foremost that grace stirs humanity unto beneficence. The evangelist must surmount the Greco-Roman norm of *pietas*, present in Corinth; magnanimity is expected chiefly within the family-unit. To encourage their care for the Judean cause, Paul talks at length about his pride in the Macedonians, the Father's legacy of magnanimity, and Jesus' utter self-gift. The notion of surplus, inequality, and generalized reciprocity facilitate Paul's case. But *charis* has been sprinkled throughout the Corinthian correspondence, and each of

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<sup>61</sup> Gaventa, 56-7.

these three return to this prime contention. Macedonia does not possess the surplus referred to by Paul in the Corinthian letters. But nevertheless, they still contribute in a magnificent style, and experience joy. For Paul, it is the circulation of graces received and bestowed time after time, that motivated Macedonians and should mobilize Corinthians. Ancient religion often featured recurrent gift-giving. Although Christ's acceptance of poverty in Philippians 2 materializes, the evangelist is not suggesting these women and men should accept privation in a similar way. As Lodge articulated, Paul promotes a harvest collection for Jerusalem, subsequent to a harvest of graces in Corinth.

Further research may associate Paul's utilization of models of generosity, amidst encouragement of Christians to imitate other's discipleship. Twice in 2 Thessalonians 3, Paul advocates that these Christians should follow his example; it occurs as well in Philippians 3. As this present article has seen, Paul appears to periodically incorporate Macedonian, Philippian, and Corinthian behavior together. Scholars may assess the communication and travels between these regions, aside from the renowned texts of Paul.

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