



**2 Corinthians 9:13 --
The True Meaning**

By Randy Blackaby

Laying by in store on the first day of the week, as we have been prospered (1 Corinthians 16:1-2) not only is good and honorable, it is a part of our confession of faith and obedience to the gospel.

That is one of several assertions the Apostle Paul made when he wrote his second epistle to the church at Corinth, urging them to fulfill what they had promised -- to aid the saints in Jerusalem.

In urging them to keep their promise, Paul wrote, "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" (2 Corinthians 9:12-14 -- NKJV).

The King James Version translates only slightly differently the key phrase, saying: "for your professed subjection unto the gospel of Christ." The New International Version renders it, "for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ."

Too often, we erroneously limit our confession or profession of faith in the gospel of Christ to the verbal acknowledgement made when we repent and are baptized into Christ. Certainly, that confession, made "with the mouth" (Romans 10:9-10), is a necessary element of "obeying the gospel." But the term used by Paul (Greek:

homologia) implies an "acknowledgement of the truth" illustrated and executed in the gift of the Corinthians.

When we say the words "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God," we tell the world where we stand with respect to Jesus and the gospel. Likewise, when we sacrificially part with a significant part of our material goods (the product of our life's work), we demonstrate, just as powerfully, the same thing.

Paul observes that the Corinthian gift not only would alleviate physical need among the Jerusalem saints, but would also show those Christians the true obedience and acknowledgement of the gospel within the Corinthian saints. And this obedience would cause others to thank God, the source of all blessings.

Most of the Judean Christians were Jews. More than likely, a majority of the Corinthian Christians were Gentiles. At that time, acceptance of Gentiles as part of the kingdom was a major issue. This gift would go a long way toward convincing Jewish Christians that there was substance to the faith of the Gentile saints.

Many profess faith with their lips, but their hearts are far from God (Matthew 7:21-23, 15:8; Luke 6:46). But far fewer will part with significant portions of their wealth to enable the salvation of lost souls and the relief of needy saints -- these are they who are fully committed to the gospel. Therefore, such gifts provide evidence, or proof, of our confidence in the gospel and thus, of Christ's authority to rule and direct our lives.

God's generous and giving nature is reflected in the lives of those who, likewise, give gifts abundantly. God's grace is genuinely seen in His saints.

The Lord's authority over us, and over all we possess, is seldom more clearly tested and proven than when we are called upon to part with earthly possessions. The person who does so must care more for others than he does for himself, be determined to do that

which pleases the Lord, and be submissive to the inspired directives of the Lord's apostles.

We sometimes forget that giving is one of five aspects of worship delineated by God. Worship involves honoring God and declaring His greatness and worthiness.

In an elementary fashion, our giving can be understood simply as obedience to divine command. But giving the gift cheerfully, and not as a grudging obligation, heightens its value as worship.

True worship, which always involves bowing to our Lord's authority, serves a three-fold purpose:

It honors God and elevates Him and His authority before men.

It stamps God's nature into our own character.

It benefits, either physically or spiritually, those who receive blessing from our actions.

The more serious we are about obeying the gospel, the more it will reflect in our actions. And, as people see our confessions in action, many will praise and glorify God. Faith will be strengthened among believers and established in unbelievers. God's grace will be seen in us.

Brother Blackaby has dealt with one facet of this passage -- the need for all Christians to give so the work of the church can continue. Who are the all men of whom Paul spoke? Some brethren use this passage as proof text for taking money from the Lord's treasury to help those who are not His saints. Who is Paul addressing in this chapter? "Now concerning the ministering to the SAINTS, it is superfluous that I write to you." {2 Corinthians 9:1} The one who carefully reads the text will find the phrases: "... sent to

the brethren," (vs.3); "... necessary to exhort the brethren," (vs.5); "For the administration of this service not only supplies the needs of the saints ..." (vs.12). These words apply to the SAINTS -- not those outside the body of Christ. To properly understand its meaning, one must read the chapter in context.

We must always be ready to show our erring brethren that they are taking these passages out of context, and that they do not provide scriptural basis for their practices. In 2 Timothy 2:15, Paul told Timothy to "rightly divide the word of truth." If we are both "rightly dividing," how do we arrive at two different conclusions? We are both wrong, or one of us is wrong -- but we cannot both be right! Why not allow the Bible (its own best commentary) to explain itself?

Sadly, many see a set of words in a passage, then jump to the conclusion that they have found the proof text for whatever practice they seek to justify. Remember, the Bible clearly teaches that the local church has three work areas -- Evangelism, Edification, and Benevolence. (The universal church has none.) How do funding social programs, feeding and housing the homeless, building human institutions, and a host of other things fit into any one of these three areas?