



PROSPER[us] vGroup Study


VINTAGE PRESS

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WHY SHOULD WE PROSPER?

According to The Science of Generosity, a research initiative conducted by the University of Notre Dame, generosity is “*the virtue of giving good things to others freely and abundantly.*”¹ The origin of the word comes from a Latin word, which, as it has passed down through the centuries, came to describe someone of an elite nobility. As it passed into the 19th century, the word gained the sense of being “open-handed” and liberal with giving money and possessions to others due to wealth and status.

According to the researchers, “the word ‘generosity’ that we inherit and use today entails certain historical associations which may still inform, however faintly, our contemporary cultural sensibilities on the matter.”² How so? The researchers argue that we sometimes, whether conscious of it or not, assume that generosity is to be expected of people with higher salaries and social status, while those who are below the poverty line are excused from such benevolence.

But in the New Testament, generosity is a virtue that is expected of everyone, regardless of wealth or social status. Moreover, generosity has theological roots—it grows from the recognition that we give freely and abundantly because Jesus gave himself freely and abundantly.

Three times in Paul’s letters (Galatians 2:10; 1 Corinthians 16:1-4; Romans 15:25-28), Paul mentions a financial collection for the church in Jerusalem. This collection was intended for the poor, and on Paul’s first visit to Corinth, the Corinthian church had contributed to this collection.³ Here in Paul’s second letter to the Corinthian church, Paul reminds them to finish what they began.

⁶Accordingly, we urged Titus that as he had started, so he should complete among you this act of grace. ⁷But as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you—see that you excel in this act of grace also.

⁸I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine.

2 Corinthians 8:6-8

While Paul uses the word “grace,” the context shows that Paul is using the word to mean “an act of generosity.”⁴

- Paul asks the Corinthian church to excel in 6 things; what are they, and why do you think they are important?

Verse 6 is an admonition for the Corinthians to continue with their commitment to give generously.⁵ He wanted them to know that, while things like faith, knowledge, and love were important, the authenticity of love is sometimes best expressed through giving.

⁹For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.

2 Corinthians 8:9

- In what way was Jesus “rich?” In what way was Jesus “poor?” Do these refer to material wealth and poverty, or to something else?
- What’s the connection between Paul’s desire for this church to give, and Christ’s example given here in verse 9? Why do you think Paul is making this connection?

Verse 9 is the theological foundation for why the church should be generous. The “riches” referred to are spiritual riches in Christ, making the matter of wealth irrelevant in this passage. The test for the Corinthians is whether these spiritual riches will motivate them to be generous, just as Jesus had been generous toward them. Christ’s sacrifice is the motivation for giving—which certainly means more than just finances, but in this context, it definitely includes finances.⁶

¹⁰And in this matter I give my judgment: this benefits you, who a year ago started not only to do this work but also to desire to do it. ¹¹So now finish doing it as well, so that your readiness in desiring it may be matched by your completing it out of what you have.

2 Corinthians 8:10–11

- Observe these verses closely. There is something more important to Paul than just giving—what is it?

Once again, Paul reminds them to finish what they started, but more importantly, he wants them to be motivated by genuine desire. A person who gives out of obligation is not grasping the love of Jesus at the cross. In the words of David Garland, “a halfhearted response ill befits the total sacrifice that Christ made for us.”⁷ According to the New Testament, one should never give out of a half-hearted or begrudging attitude.

¹²For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have. ¹³For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened, but that as a matter of fairness ¹⁴your abundance at the

present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need, that there may be fairness. ¹⁵As it is written, “Whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack.”

2 Corinthians 8:12-15

- Read closely: Paul says if the readiness to give is present then what is acceptable for everyone to give?
- What does verse 12 mean? Does this mean that everyone should give an equal amount? If not, why?
- In verse 15, Paul quotes from an Old Testament verse—by taking a quick look, what is the original context of this verse?
- Does Exodus 16:18 change how you understand 2 Corinthians 8:15, and if so, how?

From what we know of the city of Corinth, we can assume the Corinthian church was pretty wealthy, unlike their sister church in Macedonia ([2 Corinthians 8:1](#)).⁸ Yet Paul isn't asking for equal giving. He is simply asking the church to give proportionately. The principle of this passage is *equity*. Paul is concerned that those who are in need are cared for, but he is realistic in his understanding that everyone will give in different amounts based on what they have.⁹

According to Paul, when people give generously to others, it is a sign that the benevolent grace of the Spirit is moving in believers.¹⁰ In this context, giving money is a physical sign of such invisible grace. Paul wanted the Corinthians to imitate the relatively poor Macedonian church in giving. Paul does not say the Corinthians should give what the Macedonians have given; it isn't about an amount, but about a joyful and willing contribution to the church as a response to God's generosity. It's not the quantity of the amount—it's the spirit behind the amount that counts.¹¹

- In the passage we read, how does Paul apply the generosity of Jesus to the tithing of the Corinthian church? How did Jesus impact the way they saw generosity?

- In 2 Corinthians 8:6–15, Paul reminds the Corinthians of Jesus' generosity. How *should* Jesus impact our generosity? How *does* Jesus impact your generosity?
- Do you have a desire to be generous? If so, why? If not, why not? What needs to change for your desire to change?
- Paul talks about not only having the “desire” to be generous but also “completing” the generosity. What are some actionable next steps you need to take to actually be generous?
- Today, how does our generosity contribute to God’s mission through the church?

As we anticipate what God wants to do through Vintage Church, make a commitment to give what you are able as we live the Gospel, serve the city, and be the church.

REFERENCES

¹"What is Generosity?" Science of Generosity, <https://generosityresearch.nd.edu/more-about-the-initiative/what-is-generosity/> (accessed 9/4/19).

²Ibid.

³Mitzi L. Minor, *2 Corinthians*, Smyth & Helwys Commentary (Macon, GA.: Smyth & Helwys Publishing 2009), 152.

⁴David Garland, *2 Corinthians*, New American Commentary on the New Testament (Nashville: Broadman Holman Publishers, 1999), 365.

⁵Ibid., 372.

⁶Ibid., 378.

⁷Ibid., 376.

⁸Ibid., 381.

⁹Ibid., 383.

¹⁰Ibid., 365.

¹¹Ibid., 368.