Paul’s Marvellous Teachings About Giving And Receiving

In Romans 11:35-36, Paul attacked the underlying foundations of the religious philosophy of giving to God in order to try to receive earned totally merited rewards in return: “Or who has first given to Him and it shall be repaid to him? For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen.” Paul here declares that because all things were created by and through Him and are for Him, it is ridiculous to suggest that by giving to Him what He already owns that He then owes us a fully earned reward as a debt in return. In these verses, Paul also shows that even the slightly deserved rewards believers receive for giving to God are in one sense not really deserved or merited either.

In Greek, the expression “first given” in Romans 11:35 is a form of the word “prodidomi” which is made up of the words “pro” meaning “before” and “didomi” meaning “give”. Forms of “didomi” are used in Matthew 19:21 and Luke 11:41 in the context of religious people giving to the poor.

In Acts 20:35, Paul uses a form of the word “didomi” when he declared it is more blessed to give to others than to receive. Acts 20:33-35 states: “I have coveted no one’s silver or gold or apparel. Yes, you yourselves know that these hands have provided for my necessities, and for those who were with me. I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”

In Greek, the expression “it shall be repaid” in Romans 11:35 is a form of the word “antapodidomi” which means in this context “to give back as an equivalent, to requite, recompense (the ‘anti’ expressing the idea of a complete return)” or “to pay something back to someone as the result of an incurred obligation”. Forms of “antapodidomi” are used in Romans 12:19, 2 Thessalonians 1:6 and Hebrews 10:30 in the sense of God repaying the wicked the punishments they fully deserve or merit.

Also, note a form of “antapodidomi” is used by Jesus in Luke 14:14 in relation to the rewards believers will receive at the Final Judgement: “And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just.” Luke 14:12-14 shows believers will be rewarded in heaven for their generous giving to the poor, the maimed, the lame and the blind. But as Paul taught in Romans 11:35, even such rewards are in one sense not really deserved.

---

1 Vine, page 265.
2 Ibid, page 513.
3 Louw and Nida, page 575.
The giving principle of grace


In 2 Corinthians 8:1-9:15, Paul relates giving by believers to the undeserved grace of God 6 times. In 2 Corinthians 8:1, 8:9, 9:8 and 9:14, Paul refers to God's totally unmerited grace which in these verses is a form of the word “charis” in Greek. 2 Corinthians 9:9 and 9:15 mentions God's totally free undeserved giving.

In 2 Corinthians 9:6-11, Paul refers to God blessing believers who cheerfully give: “But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, have an abundance for every good work. As it is written: ‘He has dispersed abroad, He has given to the poor; His righteousness remains forever’. 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.”

Note in 2 Corinthians 9:6-11, Paul says God will give great blessings in this life to generous believers by His undeserved grace. Paul mentions nothing here about God giving totally deserved rewards to New Covenant believers in this earthly life because of their generous giving. In fact, none of the Greek words for “reward” are used anywhere in the whole of 2 Corinthians 8:1-9:15.

Many churchgoers wrongly think 2 Corinthians 8:1-9:15 refers to believers totally deserving earthly rewards from God because of their generous giving to Him and others. These passages, however, relate to the giving principle of grace. The giving principle of grace refers to:

- we as believers copying the grace-based attitudes and behaviour of our Heavenly Father in giving generously to others because of love for them and concern for their welfare. This is even though the receivers have not earned or merited what we give them. Such giving is not based on any selfish ulterior motive. It is not giving with the aim of receiving in return. It is giving from a gracious generous heart and not from the motives of a shrewd investor. Shrewd investors will sometimes donate thousands of dollars to charities if this is a good advertisement for their firm which increases their long-term profits. The total grace nature of the giving of the Corinthians is seen in the fact that in 2 Corinthians 8:6, 7 and 19, Paul calls their giving “grace”. In Greek, the word “grace” in these three verses are forms of the word “charis”.

2 Corinthians 8:8 and 24 show Paul believed the grace-based giving of the Corinthians should be based on love. True love gives with the motive of blessing the receiver and not with the ulterior motive of obtaining blessings in return. Our attitude should be: “If we are blessed as a result, praise God. If we are not, praise Him also.”

Much teaching these days tells believers to give primarily for the ulterior selfish motives of being blessed in return. This is a perfect illustration of the inroads of humanism these days
into the church. A principle of God’s love is twisted into a humanistic selfish type of love. It is a form of worldly religiosity.

Note in 2 Corinthians 9:15, Paul relates the grace giving of believers to God’s indescribable gift of Jesus Christ, His death and resurrection: “Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!” Because of perfect love, God gave Jesus Christ to die for every human being (see John 3:16).

This is even though He foreknew the majority of humans would not give Him back their appreciation, thanks, love, lives or anything else in return. Even though He foreknew that most humans would respond in this way, this did not result in Him not giving His Son to die a dreadful death for all of them. This is the type of giving God wants us to copy.

- God blessing us further as an unmerited grace result of Him seeing us operating in the same grace principles by which He operates. In 2 Corinthians 8:9, Paul said: “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.” Here again, Paul emphasises God blessing us through undeserved grace.

Note in 2 Corinthians 8:6, 8:7 and 8:19, Paul refers to giving by Christians as “grace”. In Greek, the word “grace” in these three verses are forms of the word “charis”. The word “charis” means “that which is given freely and generously” or “free favor, free gift, grace”. Because grace is totally free, the person who gives in grace does not expect a return payment from their giving. The person who gives with the expectation of receiving a recompense or an earnt payment for self in return, is not giving in grace. He is giving as a business investment.

In Romans 4:4, Paul contrasted God’s “grace” with Him being indebted to us because of our good works: “Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt.” In Greek, the word “debt” above is a form of the word “opheilema” which means “what is owed, one’s due, it is not considered a favor”. Also in Greek, the word “wages” above is misthos” which means “a recompense based upon what a person has earned and thus deserves” or “pay, wages, reward or punishment”. Therefore, Paul is contrasting God’s grace to rewards.

Grace is not merited by good works like tithing and giving to God. Rewards are merited by good works like tithing and giving.

2 Corinthians 8:1-9:15 relates to giving to the needy and not tithing

In the context of 2 Corinthians 8:1-9:15, Paul does not relate the sowing and reaping principle to tithing to the Church. This passage relates to giving generously to poor needy fellow believers and not to tithes for providing the needs of church leaders.

2 Corinthians 9:7 shows that the sowing and reaping principle mentioned in the previous verse does not relate to tithes: “So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.” In Greek, the word “necessity” is
“anankes” which means “an obligation of a compelling nature” or “compulsion”. Because in Malachi 3:8-11, tithing was a command or obligation or compulsion, Malachi 3:8-11 cannot be applied to any verse in 2 Corinthians 8:1-9:15. The latter passage relates to free-will giving to the poor and not tithing under compulsion.

In 2 Corinthians 8:1-9:15, Paul refers to the giving by prosperous believers at the Church at Corinth and surrounding areas to believers in financial hardship in Judea. 2 Corinthians 9:8 says: “And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work.” Note that here Paul refers to the collective abundance of the Church at Corinth and the surrounding Roman province of Achaia. His words here do not reveal whether every or many or just some members of the Church at Corinth and Achaia were economically prospering.

In this verse, Paul refers to the possibility that the believers in Corinth and surrounding areas “may have an abundance for every good work.” In Greek, the expression “you may have an abundance” is a form of the word “perisseuo” which means “to have such an abundance as to be more than sufficient”. So Paul is referring to the possibility of them having plenty in order to be able to help needy other believers. The New American Standard Bible translates a form of “perisseuo” as “prosperity” in Philippians 4:12.

Paul relates this having of a financial abundance to God causing His unmerited grace to abound towards these giving believers. The expression “to make abound” is also a form of the word “perisseuo” in Greek. Here we see the prosperity which New Covenant believers receive is based totally on God’s undeserved grace.

Paul was so balanced in his teaching. In 2 Corinthians 9:11, he told the believers at Corinth and surrounding areas: “you are enriched in everything for all liberality” (N.K.J.V.) or “you will be enriched in everything for all liberality” (N.A.S.B.). Paul recognizes the fact God had enriched or would enrich these believers in these lands.

But then in 2 Corinthians 8:14 and 9:12 Paul spoke of the great financial needs of the believers in Judea. Paul did not pretend that the believers in Judea were all wealthy.

In 2 Corinthians 8:14, Paul mentioned the financial lack of believers in Judea compared to the relative financial abundance of the believers at Corinth and surrounding areas. In Greek,
the word “lack” used twice in this verse is “husterema” which means in this context “need, want, poverty” or “need, want, deficiency in contrast to abundance”. In 2 Corinthians 9:12, Paul spoke of “the needs of the saints” in Jerusalem. In Greek, the word “needs” is also a form of the word “husterema” which was defined in the previous paragraph. In Romans 15:26, Paul refers to “the poor among the saints at Jerusalem”. In Greek, the word “poor” here is the plural form of the adjective “ptochos” which means “pertaining to being poor or destitute” or “dependent on others for support”.

Sowing and reaping earthly free gifts and not totally merited rewards

Note in 2 Corinthians 8:1, Paul calls the giving of the Macedonian believers to poor believers in Judea “the grace of God”. By calling their giving “the grace of God”, Paul was emphasising it was an undeserved gift by God through the Macedonians to His people in Judea and not a totally merited reward. In Greek, the word “grace” in 2 Corinthians 8:1 is a form of the word “charis”. The same form of “charis” is used in 1 Corinthians 16:3 in relation to the gift of the Corinthians to the needy believers in Judea.

When 2 Corinthians 9:6-11 refers to God giving blessings by His undeserved grace to generous givers, it calls this sowing and reaping. 2 Corinthians 9:6 says: “But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.” One popular modern legalistic interpretation of the above verse claims it teaches that if we give generously to the Church and/or the needy, God will give us totally merited earthly rewards in response. This is claimed to be a “universal law of rewards or repayment”.

But note 2 Corinthians 9:6 does not have anything to do with totally merited rewards. Instead, it relates to the unmerited consequences of believers fulfilling the God-determined condition of sowing bountifully. The reaping bountifully consequence is a result of God’s pure undeserved grace. In Greek, the word “bountifully” used twice in 2 Corinthians 9:6 is “eulogiais” which is a plural form of the noun “eulogia” which means in this context “a blessing, a benefit bestowed”. Note in the previous verse – 2 Corinthians 9:5, Paul uses a singular form of the noun “eulogia” which is translated “generous gift” (N.K.J.V.) or

---
16 Vine, page 350.
17 Bauer, page 849.
18 In 2 Corinthians 11:9, Paul uses the word “husterema” in relation to his own lack at a particular time. In Philippians 4:12, Paul stated that he experienced lack at times: “I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need.” (N.A.S.B.) In Greek, the expression “suffering need” in Philippians 4:12 is a form of the word “hustereo”. “Hustereo” means “to be lacking in what is essential or needed” (Louw and Nida, page 562).
A form of the word “hustereo” is used in Hebrews 11:37 in relation to the fact that various heroes of faith mentioned in Hebrews 11:35-40 experienced great financial lack or being destitute at times.
19 Louw and Nida, page 564.
20 Bauer, page 728.
21 In Romans 15:26-27, Paul stated that in one sense, the Macedonian and all other Gentile believers were indebted to the Jewish believers for having passed on a spiritual heritage and the Gospel to Gentile believers. But note these verses do not say that God was indebted to the Jewish believers. Instead the reverse was true. The Jewish believers were totally indebted to God.
22 Vine, page 70.
“bountiful gift” (N.A.S.B.), when referring to the gift the believers in Corinth and Achaia were giving to needy believers in Jerusalem.

In the context of 2 Corinthians 9:5, “eulogia” means “that which is bestowed or given as a blessing or benefit” and “a gift, benevolence”. “Benevolence” is “an act of kindness; generosity” and is not a totally deserved reward. So in context, 2 Corinthians 9:6 teaches God gives bountiful blessings as free gifts to those who give bountiful free gifts to the needy.

In context, this sowing and reaping verse does not teach God gives earthly blessings as totally merited rewards for our free gifts to others. In Greek, part of this verse reads “Ep eulogiai ep eulogiai” which means “blessings for blessings” or “free gifts for free gifts”.

**God’s unmerited grace through believers to other believers**

Acts 2:44-45, 4:32, 4:34 and 4:37 reveal how exceptionally generous the wealthier Jewish believers had been previously towards the poorer believers in Jerusalem. According to Matthew 6:2-4, Jesus promised that God would in future repay or reward believers who gave to the needy with good motives. Matthew 6:3-4 states: “But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing that your alms may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will repay you.” (N.A.S.B.)

In Greek, the word “repay” in Matthew 6:4 is the future tense form of the word “apodidomi” which means in this context “to recompense someone, whether positively or negatively, depending upon what the individual deserves; to make a payment, with the implication of such a payment being in response to an incurred obligation”.

Matthew 6:3-4 may suggest that God gives slightly deserved earthly rewards undergirded by His grace to believers for them giving generously to the poor. Or maybe these verses refer only to God giving these generous believers slightly deserved rewards in heaven. Or maybe Matthew 6:3-4 refers to such rewards on both Earth and in heaven. The verses do not specify which alternative is true.

---

23 Louw and Nida, page 570.
24 Perschbacher, page 181.
26 Louw and Nida, pages 491 and 575.