

A Faithful Minister 4) Relies on the Lord's Provision

2 Corinthians 9:8-11 • 2021-08-01 • Series: A Faithful Minister



There's an interesting account in 2 Kings 4 about Elisha and a woman who had been married to a prophet and had children. Her husband, a prophet, had died, and she was in panic because their family owed money to someone. Her family had no means of support. They weren't just going to be bankrupt; they would likely be sold as slaves to pay off the debt. God's solution included a miracle. Elisha had the woman collect as many jars as she could and start pouring oil into them from a single jar. The oil kept on coming from a small jar and it filled all the rest until she had enough oil to sell and pay off her debt. The lesson? God provides for those who serve as ministers of his Word. He even provides for their families. We see many other examples of this miraculous type of provision. Elijah was fed by the ravens. Moses and the Israelites were fed by manna. Jesus and his disciples had enough miraculously provided food to feed five thousand. God provides.

But what about when there is no miracle. Does God provide for his ministers in more ordinary ways? You've no doubt seen the various forms of collecting funds for various ministries. The other day someone came up to me in a parking lot and started sharing information about their Christian ministry. It was a ministry in Phoenix which I had never heard of before. This woman shared her testimony about how the ministry had helped her and why it was important. Then she began to solicit donations as she held out a plastic jar with a few dollars already in it. Of course, I knew nothing about this ministry other than a 30-second testimony of some stranger. It felt like a sales pitch and like I was put on the spot to support something which I barely even knew existed. I'm sure you've encountered requests for donations from many different Christian organizations. You hear it on the radio, read it in your mail, and see it on videos. Often the invitation to donate is preceded with something like, "If you'd like to help support this important ministry..."

Have you ever wondered, "Why should I give to support the work of the Church? Couldn't they just rely on the Lord to provide what they need. Why do they need me?" Today we look at 2 Corinthians 9 and see how God flips that question back around to all of us and asks us, "Why don't you rely on me to provide for what you need?" We will conclude our series looking at what Scripture says about a faithful minister. And it is a truth which applies to all Christians, especially those who serve as examples. Today we see how a faithful minister relies on the Lord's provision.

There are two main pitfalls which believers can slip into when it comes to supporting gospel ministry. Firstly, the Scriptures clearly indicate that believers are supposed to provide for the needs of those who serve the Church. The Old Testament had a set amount which the priests would receive as a portion of certain types of offerings. God directed and moved the hearts of the people to supply the needs of his prophets so that they could do full time work. King Saul may have hired David for personal music, but king David commissioned full-time musicians for worship in Jerusalem. This was a godly thing. It is clear God desires support for the work of those who serve in his Church. Jesus sent out his apostles and told them to accept what wages they received for gospel ministry. Regarding their ministry Jesus said, "The worker deserves his wages." (Luke 10:7) The apostle Paul writes here in 2 Corinthians and other places that gospel ministers have a right to receive support for themselves and their families. (2 Cor 9:3-9) We read last week about how wicked people threatened those who shared God's Word by withholding support from them. It is clear that God directs us to support gospel ministry. Failure to support gospel ministry dishonors God and his Word.

How much a congregation organizes their support effort and how much it commits to provide is under Christian freedom. Planning provision for workers certainly honors the gospel and gives the gospel worker the ability to focus freely on his work. I am thankful for this congregation's dedication to support full-time gospel ministry. I can serve without concern for providing for the needs of my family. This congregation and our church body is blessed to have a consensus that it is worth supporting gospel ministry in all its various forms. There are of course times when our church body may have failed in this area, but we thankfully have avoided the first pitfall for the most part.

But there is a second pitfall. That one is on the pastor's end. Just as the flock can become greedy, so can the shepherd. We saw that earlier in our series. One of the qualifications listed for those who serve as spiritual leaders is that they should not be eager for financial gain and not a lover of money. Some ministers receive wages as if they are running a for-profit business. Their wages increase as their congregation's membership increases. And other ministers receive far more pay than most people might ever receive. That isn't right at all. By way of example, a pastor is to live in contentment and not chase after wealth. He is to serve because he is eager and willing, not for wealth and greed.

God calls for a healthy balance between these two pitfalls. Both pastor and flock need to have a healthy mindset. An older pastor I once knew summarized the two pitfalls this way, "A pastor shouldn't always be the first one in the neighborhood to have the newest TV. But neither should he always be the last."

But our main focus for today isn't going to be on God's instruction to pay ministers and a minister's need to remain content. Thankfully those points aren't under contention here and or our church body. Instead, today we will be focusing our attention on the attitude a minister and the flock are to have towards what God has given them. That was Paul's primary concern as he writes to the Corinthian Christians regarding the offerings which would be collected.

Paul has already made plans to visit the believers in Corinth. Part of his plan includes delivering a collection from the Corinthian Christians to the Christians in Jerusalem. There was a severe famine and the Christians in Jerusalem needed help. Note that Paul could have easily just secured the gifts by warning the Christians in Corinth about being selfish. There is a real time and place for such warnings. The Christian still has a sinful nature which ever strives to let the selfish part of us win the day. We daily need to examine our actions in light of how selfish or selfless we are.

But Paul takes an entirely different approach. He reminds them to rely on the Lord to provide for their needs so that they could carry out his good work. *"God is able to make all grace overflow to you, so that in all things, at all times, having all that you need, you will overflow in every good work."* Think about how amazing God's work is for us. He always gives us just what we need so that we can always give what is needed for every good work! And his undeserved gifts to us overflow so that our good works can overflow.

Is your giving ever stifled by the fear that you won't have enough for the future? Sometimes we may buy into the world's thinking. "I better spend it for myself today." Or perhaps the wiser among us might think in a similar line: "I have wealth today. I better save it all up for myself for a rainy day." Saving or spending is at times necessary, but God urges us also towards generous giving. Here is encouragement for the giver: God will provide for your needs. *"He who provides seed to the sower and bread for food will provide and multiply your seed for sowing, and will increase the harvest of your righteousness."* Just as God provides the seed needed for the one who sows it, he provides what is needed for the spread of the gospel seed. He will give his Church what is needed to do its work. *"You will be made rich in every way so that you may be generous in every way."*

And why would Christians want to generously share what God has given? *"Your generosity will result in Thanksgiving to God."* The Jews in Jerusalem looked down on the Christians living there in Paul's time. They were treated like second-class members of society and the famine hit them especially hard. But just imagine the effect the Corinthian Christian's gifts had on those poor Jews in Jerusalem, many of them also likely new to Christ. Imagine the effect it had on them when the non-Jewish believers showed their mutual connection and love in Christ with their offering! The others in Jerusalem may not have believed in the message of Christ. But they would stand in respect of the measure of selfless giving and love displayed by the Christians around the world. They would have to thank God!

I don't think we always realize just how great of an impact our generous offerings have. When a Christian school can remain open like our schools on the Apache reservation because of the gifts given by those who share in their faith, you can be sure the thanksgiving goes up to God! When we are able to train workers for gospel ministry all around the world in places like Indonesia, China, and Vietnam praise goes up to God. When our missionaries are able to work in places like India, where there is a lot of poverty and extreme separation of poor and wealthy and they are able to support an orphanage with Christian teaching, thanksgiving goes out to God as those orphans learn about the love of Jesus. When our WELS Christian Aid and Relief works for disaster relief to help after a hurricane or to drill a well for water, the thanksgiving to God is greater than you may realize! When your pastor is able to continue for another day, another month, another year in full time spread of the gospel you can be sure thanksgiving goes up to God by more than just him. When you support efforts to spread the gospel through local outreach and through things like our summer outreach program you can be sure thanksgiving goes up to God. I heard a lot of it this past week. Is not just the giving, it is the giving which accompanies your confession of Christ. And others will praise God as a result of witnessing faith in action. Paul says it overflows in thanks to God.

It all comes down to God's indescribable gift: the most precious giving of all. God gave his greatest treasure, his only Son. And he sent his Son to give his life. With the gift of his blood shed for sins we have the treasure of heaven. We are freed from the guilt of our selfish greed and our stingy attitudes. We are spared from paying the price of our sins and receive the graciously given gift of everlasting life. He gave his life knowing it would produce harvest: you and me and all believers. He gave this gift without compulsion, but freely. Jesus knew that the Father would provide what he needed to give. Jesus died with full confidence in the Father's love and that he would rise back to life and continually be able to give more and more to his church. He did it all so that thanksgiving would flow from all to our gracious Father.

Martin Luther reportedly once described conversion as having three stages: the head, the heart, then finally the wallet. When our generosity and support of the gospel begins, then money is no longer our God. It is a tool we use. It is viewed as a gift from God who provides for all our needs. And we use it in every opportunity to glorify and thank our God. May God give us ministers who rely on him to provide. May God give us members of his body who rely on him to provide. And may God use that trust in his provision to work his good purposes.

I believe it is true that if support can't be found for faithful gospel ministers, God can provide for them through miracles. But God wants more than the ravens to be involved. He asks faithful ministers and the faithful flock, "Why don't you trust in me to provide?" He will. Because he is faithful.