

Paul wrote this letter to the church in Corinth and believers in Achaia to prepare for an upcoming visit. Chapters 8 and 9 specifically address the preparation which they should make in regards to sending financial relief to the needy believers in Jerusalem. The Corinthians had been enthused about giving but organizationally they had failed to do what was necessary to give as generously as they had promised. Paul offered a solution (cf. 8:16-24) with some implied benefits we can appreciate.

I. *The state of the collection in Corinth*

1. *The collection had begun with much enthusiasm (9:1-2).* The Corinthians lacked neither information nor enthusiasm. The latter was enough for Paul to boast about and for the Macedonians to be “stirred up”.
2. *The collection had stalled because of a simple need to organize it (9:3-5).* Disorganization and disunity was a basic problem in the church at Corinth (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:10; chapters 1-4, 6, 9, 10-11, 12-14; 14:33, 40; 16:16). He had already given instructions how to go about making this collection (1 Cor 16:1-5) but the job was not getting done. So Paul sent three men to help them finish the arrangements.

II. *Benefits of preparation for giving*

1. *Preparation gives us time to consider the help being given and not simply the act of giving.*
The word which the NIV translates “service” (9:1) is often translated “ministry”. Like the English word it is related to the word for servant and is used a number of times outside these two chapters for raising and administering material relief (Acts 6:1; 11:29; 12:25; Romans 15:31).
Giving on the spur of the moment seldom encourages thoughts of ministry or service to another person, but planning and organizing our giving can.
2. *Preparation carries through when enthusiasm wears off.*
The enthusiasm of the Corinthians is obvious from its specific mention (v. 2), Paul’s boasting (vv. 3-4), and their promise (v. 5). But they were a church who needed some outside help to get the job done in a proper fashion.
In our enthusiasm we can often promise to do things, like giving, with good intent. Carrying through with that promise may need planning and organization.
3. *Preparation allows us to overcome covetousness and greed.*
In verse 5 Paul compares the manner in which the gift is given and not the manner in which it is secured, as some translations might imply. The positive attitude is translated by the NIV with the phrase “as a generous gift” which is elsewhere translated “blessing.” The blessing upon the Jerusalem believers is in the form of a generous gift.
The negative attitude, which the Corinthians were to avoid, is translated by the NIV as “not as one grudgingly given.” The idea is that the giving should not be in the manner that a covetous or greedy person would give. The greedy person limits what he gives to others because of what he wants to keep for himself. Although the Corinthians might not have been greedy or covetous, their gift to the Jerusalem saints might have looked that way, if they waited to make their collection until Paul arrived.

Organizing or planning our giving not only avoids the appearance of greed but actually works against greed in our lives. See Ephesians 4:28. Greed is often behind theft. A recovering thief needs to have a job and to give others who have need. This means regularly setting aside some of his income to give to the needy. Planning or organizing our giving helps fight against greed in our lives.

Planning our giving can also reveal greed in our lives. Giving in the moment can make us feel good, but planning in light of our entire income will reveal our heart even more.

Paul was thrilled that the Corinthians had been so enthusiastic about giving financial help to the poverty stricken believers in Jerusalem. He boasted about their commitment to others. But enthusiasm alone does not pay the bills. Their disorganization and possibly their disunity as well hindered them from getting together the generous gift they had promised. So Paul sent organization help.

We are stewards not just of our money but of our time and talents as well. We will be better stewards if we examine our lives and plan how we can serve with all that God has given.