

Paul's Use of Psalm 112:9 in 2 Corinthians 9:9

— A Brief Exegetical and Theological Study

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Context of Psalm 112:9

Psalm 112 provides a glorious portrait of the man of God. The man of God primarily is known because he fears His God (v.1). And this God-fearer lives his life with a consuming love for God's Word (v.1b). Some of the blessings that God brings into this godly man's life are spelled out in vv.2-9. He will have godly, mighty (גְּבוּרָה) descendants on the earth. This is the parabolic, general principle that godly parents who diligently live holy lives and train up their children will see them also fear God. They God-fearers also have a God-like character—righteous, gracious, compassionate (vv.3-5). God has saved them and so they endeavor to emulate their Savior (cf. Eph 5.1). Furthermore, they live with the spiritual eyes of faith and thus a light arises for them in the darkness as they live upright lives and follow Christ (v.4). Indeed, this godly man who fears His God will never be shaken since he has an unconquerable courage in God (v.6). Even when evil reports and bad news crosses his path, the man of God does not fear since his heart is steadfast, firm and fixed (נִבְרוֹן לְבוֹר). His heart is upheld and supported by God Almighty so he does not fear anything that comes his way. God has so instilled a godly fear in the man of God that he gives freely to the poor and his righteous conduct endures forever. He has received so much from God (grace, salvation, love, even *God Himself*) that this godly man gives — indeed, he scatters (פָּזַר נְתַן) — freely and generously to the poor and afflicted (לְאֵבְיָוִיבִים) (v.9). The stark contrast is heightened by the description of the wicked man (v.10) who sees the godly and is angry, he gnashes his teeth and even melts away in his fury. He will be destroyed forevermore. Thus, the man of God who fears His God (v.1) is described by his righteous character in his heart, his godly conduct in his life, and his generous care towards others (vv.2-9).

Context of 2 Corinthians 9:9

In 2 Corinthians, Paul defends his apostleship by affirming that he lived with integrity, a clear conscience, and faithfully preached the gospel to them. And in the middle of this letter to the Corinthian church, Paul reminds them of the great opportunity of giving sacrificially to the Lord (chapters 8-9). In fact, the churches of Macedonia even in their affliction gave liberally with abundance of joy (8:2) even far beyond their ability (8:3). Paul exhorts the Corinthian church to abound in this gracious work of financial giving also (8:7). The ultimate model, of course, is the Lord Jesus who though He was rich, yet for the sake of His people became poor, so that His people through His poverty might become rich (spiritually) (8:9). A bit later, Paul draws the connection between sowing and reaping and giving and sharing. He affirms that the one who sows sparingly will reap sparingly (9:6). Give a little and you'll reap a little. But if one gives bountifully he will reap bountifully so that he can give even more in the future (9:6-11). But, one must not be compelled to give; it must come from the heart, not grudgingly for God loves a cheerful giver (9:7). And Paul supports this argument by quoting (καθὼς γέγραπται; "as it is written") Psalm 112:9: "He scattered abroad, he gave to the poor; his righteousness (ἡ δικαιοσύνη αὐτοῦ) endures forever." Paul incorporates Psalm 112 in his argumentation in 2 Corinthians 9. The godly man who fears his God is in fact the man of integrity, whose character is upright, who receives blessings from God, and who thus responds to God by giving sacrificially and generously to others (especially, the poor; τοῖς πένησιν).

How Paul Quotes Psalm 112 in 2 Corinthians 9: Some Theological & Practical Observations

In a brilliant way, Paul incorporates not only Psalm 112:9 in his argument in 2 Corinthians 9:9 but he draws in the entire context and theme of the psalm into 2 Corinthians. That is to say, Paul substantiates his argument with the Corinthians in desiring to see them give to the Lord and to others by affirming that those who fear God (Ps 112:1) are those who have such godly lives and God-like characteristics about them that they cannot help but to give to the poor (Ps 112:2-9). The believer has become spiritually rich through Christ's spiritual poverty and they then who have received God's grace turn and graciously sow bountifully so that God will increase the harvest of their righteousness which all results in further thanksgiving and blessing to God (2 Cor 9:10-11). Paul believes the inerrancy of the Scriptures. He does not quote a random Scripture and proof-text it for his 'Apostolic hermeneutic.' He knows His Bible and substantiates his point of pleading with the Corinthians to generously give of their resources to others since this is in fact what the godly man who fears God *wants* to do. Indeed, he must give! He has received so lavishly from His God. And in response to this gift of God, he fears his God and loves his God and so he turns and supplies the needs of others saints which altogether results in the abounding thanksgivings to God (2 Cor 9:12). As if that wasn't enough, this generous financial giving proves their God-like and God-fearing ministry which glorifies God as it flows from their obedience (2 Cor 9:13-15). So then, let all of God's people who fear God (Ps 112:1), imitate God's character (Ps 112:2-8), and as they have received so much from the Lord, let them in turn scatter and give to others in need as their righteous, God-fearing character demonstrates itself through their sacrificial and financial giving to others in need. The Apostle John says: "but whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth" (1 Jn 3:17-18).