Week 39 is scheduled for study Sept. 18-24, 2023. All the topics for the daily lessons this week circle back to whether or not we have learned to be a cheerful giver.

# Day 1

*Recording spiritual impressions will help you remember what you learn during scripture study. You might write in a study journal, make notes in the margins of your scriptures, add notes in your Gospel Library app, or make an audio recording of your thoughts.*

**2 Corinthians 8:1-15; 9:5-15 - I can cheerfully share what I have to bless the poor and needy.**

As I read and reread these verses, what sticks in my mind is the importance of being a cheerful giver. To be cheerful in our giving could just mean the Lord prefers we be happy about what He requires we do. That just doesn't sound complete to me. I know that the Lord thinks in terms of eternal consequences. The evidence of this mindset is all throughout the scriptures. So to be a cheerful giver must mean more than just "grin and bear it."

The Lord must be looking for a mindset that sets apart the cheerful giver from all others who do good. A business can do good because it is good for their bottom line. Doing good in their community is simply good for their business image. Often doing

good for others helps to promote and advance a politician's career. There seem to be so many reasons for people to do good that have nothing or little to do with the celestial mindset that it can be difficult to distinguish between the celestial giver and the earthly giver.

Let's look at verse nine from chapter eight. When I first read this I was left puzzling about what Paul was saying about being rich and poor.

> 9 For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.

There is something about the grace of Christ, his enabling power, that applies to the cheerful giver. How is Christ rich? He is the most powerful and most greatly spiritually endowed person next to God Himself. His grace, his love for us and for doing the will of our Father, enabled him to sacrifice all that he was and had to pay for our sins. In other words, Christ was the richest of all and for our sakes made himself the poorest of all. He reserved nothing of himself, and kept nothing back from the sacrifice required by God for our benefit.

It is only because Christ was willing to give everything he had for us that we, through his atoning sacrifice, can be made rich, like him in the eternities. Our repentance enables his grace to change us so that our capacity grows, our desires change, and we become more like Christ. We become more spiritually rich like him. There might be another take on this verse, but this is how I read it and think it through. If Christ had not been cheerfully willing to give all that was unique to himself to God for others, we would be spiritually poor forever, for we rely on his abilities to become enriched in the Spirit through repentance. I know of no other way for this to happen.

**Our cheerfulness**

There is no way to equally compare our personal abilities to that of Jesus of Nazareth. It is a case of total apples and oranges. Beyond both of us being children of God, we just don't measure up to his abilities and capacities. But that is not what is at stake here. God loves a cheerful giver. Any giver, not just one of Christ's stature. God even loves me when I am willing to give my personal all like Jesus gave his personal all. My sacrifice is in many ways insignificant compared to the sacrifice of Jesus, but it is viewed by God as my widow's mite, and is still sacred in His eyes.

What God loves is the willingness and desire to become a celestial person. Only those who are willing to give their all in the support and love of others are qualified to live with God, for that is a key part of His own personality. Those who will feel comfortable living in the presence of celestial people must also feel comfortable with the notion that caring for others takes sacrifice of self for the welfare of others. Do you think for one minute that a celestial person cares if they need to go without a meal so that someone else can eat? The desire is for others to have what they need, not to guard what we already have so that others can't touch it.

Becoming a cheerful giver means we don't care for our own comfort nearly as much as we care for the welfare of others. At one point in my life I literally had nothing, no job, food, place to live, no anything. It was like going into the twilight zone, for I finally realized that my creditors could no longer touch me, for no amount of guilting me could squeeze blood out of this stone. I simply had nothing to give them, no matter what my desire to do so was. And yet, even in this total poverty I realized that I was keenly aware of the needs of others in a like condition. I gave of myself in all kinds of ways that didn't involve money, since I had none. It was only when I began to get money again and reestablish myself financially that I became markedly more protective of my time and abilities. The more I got, the more protective I became of what I had.

Even knowing that I had something to give, I found reasons for not contributing and not volunteering. Entertainment and diversions from the daily grind became more important to me. The more money I made, the worse it got. And mind you, I have never made much more than minimum wage my whole life, so don't think I'm talking doctor's wages here. For years I struggled to find my way back to that mental state when I had absolutely nothing but myself to give. That was when I was the most generous and willing to give my all. It was only when money was introduced again that I began to flounder.

It has been years of struggle, but I feel like I am finally beginning to feel like I am more of a cheerful giver than I was in the past. As long as I can still eat and pay my essential bills, money doesn't mean that much to me any more. Now I work to find the most effective way to help others so that it does them the most good. With very little money at my disposal (fortunately) most of my giving is time and resource related. If I can sit with someone who is lonely, help pick up and clean up where needed, run errands for someone without a car, etc. These are the ways I can give of myself for the welfare of

others. This makes me happy. I hope that qualifies me as a cheerful giver, a giver of myself, in the Lord's eyes.

# Day 2

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**2 Corinthians 11:1-6, 13-15; 13:5-9 - "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith."**

I believe that this injunction from Paul is one of the most difficult things to do in all the world. It is simply too easy and convenient for us to float along in our beliefs from week to week and year to year, never questioning, examining, or putting ourselves to the test as to whether we really are the Christian we hope we are. There is an underlying fear that if we go to the effort to really search our own soul to see where we actually stand before the Lord that we will find our self woefully lacking. That is a truth that can be just too hard to bear or face.

My guess is that most of the members of the Lord's church at one point or another made some choices and set out on the path of discipleship then never took the effort to keep tabs on where they had traveled in their spiritual journey.

Do I know and understand what it means to be a disciple of Christ?

Has the gospel of Christ become hard to live or complex, fraught with questionable historical facts that make me question my beliefs?

Am I so involved in the actions of a Latter-day Saint that my life and time feel consumed by those things that are required of me?

These are the kinds of questions that can cause us to doubt our testimony and the level of our conversion to Christ's teachings.

The point here is that the gospel, the teachings of Christ are not complicated. If that is true then what has happened in my life to make me feel like being a follower of Christ is

hard or difficult to understand? "The simplicity that is in Christ" referred to in today's lesson is a key to learning where we are in our Christian journey. Refer back to yesterday's lesson. Being a Christian is supposed to be simple. To be a cheerful giver, one who happily gives of themself for the welfare of others doesn't take great intellect or financial resources, just a willingness to use our personal resources and talents to make someone else's life more comfortable when we can.

To be a deliberate Christian requires that we know why we do what we do. Too many of us made a decision to start down the Christian path then stopped thinking about why we do what we do. We do it out of habit and social custom. It has become our way of life. Paul is challenging us to examine our lifestyle and determine why we do the things we do. Is Christ really a part of our life or are we just going through the motions today because we are just continuing behaviors we chose to start years ago? How can we be keeping our sacramental covenant to remember Christ if we are just taking the sacrament each week out of habit, doing something without thought?

Paul's main points in today's lesson is that the gospel of Christ is not difficult, complex, or hard to live. If it has become any of these things then something has been added to it that we need to get rid of in our life. His other point is that to be a real disciple requires deliberate thought and action. We should be regularly thinking about what we do each day and why we do it. If we are not willing to deliberately make the changes in our life that need to be made then why would we think that we will ever become more Christlike. That requires change, and if I don't make the choices I need to make to go through those changes then either I won't change or someone else will tell me what changes I need to make, and what do they know about where my soul is before God? Those decision need to be mine, and mine alone. This is why I need to become close to the Spirit. It is His responsibility to teach me how I need to change to become more Christlike. But I have to seek Him out to learn what I need to do.

All this requires that we take action, deliberate action. This is why there really is no such thing as a comfortable Christian. A real Christian is working hard and making sacrifices every day. Real followers of Christ are seeking to make the changes that will bring them closer to becoming the kind of person Jesus is.

# Day 3

*Recording spiritual impressions will help you remember what you learn during scripture study. You might write in a study journal, make notes in the margins of your scriptures, add notes in your Gospel Library app, or make an audio recording of your thoughts.*

**2 Corinthians 12:5-10 - The Savior's grace is sufficient to help me find strength in my weakness.**

The verses for today's lesson demonstrate with a real world example 2 Corinthians 8:9 that I quoted in the lesson for Day 1.

> 7 And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.
>
> 8 For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me.
>
> 9 And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.
>
> 10 Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ’s sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.

Paul was given his proverbial "thorn in the flesh" to keep him humble and teach him a lesson. What was that lesson? It was that God's grace is sufficient to help each of us learn to rely on Him as we deal with the thorns in our own flesh. We may have addictive personalities, same sex attraction, problems with anger or we might just have a flighty personality and don't think things through before making rash decisions. The list could be endless. God gives us many of these obstacles to keep us from getting high minded and thinking we are important or that we don't need Him. The purpose of Paul's thorn in the flesh was to show him that Christ's grace could help him deal with his lot in life. Christ told him that it was more important that he learn to live with his weakness than that God remove it. Having that weakness in the flesh caused Paul to recognize his dependence on God.

Paul realized that dependence on God in our life is so important that he decided that he would "glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me." It was more important to Paul to experience the power of Christ in his life than to have the

inconvenience and pain of his thorn in the flesh removed. One action would remove an impediment in his life, the other action would cause joy and growth in his life. Paul chose to celebrate his infirmities because Christ's grace showed him how to take those infirmities and grow spiritually and emotionally because of them.

# FHE/Personal Study

### 2 Corinthians 10:3-7 - Warfare against wickedness

I suggest that you have these verses ready to look back on while I talk about them.

> 3 For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh:
>
> 4 (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;)
>
> 5 Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ;
>
> 6 And having in a readiness to revenge all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled.
>
> 7 Do ye look on things after the outward appearance? If any man trust to himself that he is Christ's, let him of himself think this again, that, as he is Christ's, even so are we Christ's.

Verse 3 - We don't fight the battle for our soul with the same kind of weapons we use to fight battles of the flesh. A gun can do nothing against a temptation for it is the wrong weapon to defend against that attack. And remember that God's way is to defend, not to attack.

Verse 4 - What are the strongholds this verse references? Satan has whole institutions based on his own brand of wickedness. There are the secret combinations that allow people to get gain and power, to murder and peddle influence either without public notice (i.e. secretly) or with impunity - without punishment. He has introduced philosophies to mankind that have been around so long we don't even notice that they are against the teachings of God. The whole arena of science has become a breeding ground for the godless to push their agenda of leading believers away from their faith in God. There is truth in science, but the ungodly have been in control for so long that it can be difficult to discern what is good and what is dangerous to our soul. These are but two examples of many.

Verse 5 - Can you think of what qualifies as "imaginations?" These are the vanities of the world, those things they teach, believe, and live by that exalts humanity over even God Himself. When we make God less important in our considerations and decisions than the importance of the individual, we have crossed the line and are in dangerous territory. These would include worldly philosophies that promote abominations to God, like abortion, euthanasia, and legalizing practices condemned by God.

The phrasing of the second half of this sentence (verse 5) is quite remarkable. To bring "into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ" sets the imagination running. Imagine what happens when you don't try to subject your thoughts to be only about good things. When we don't try to captivate them and place them into subjection to our will, they tend to run wild. And with that running wild comes temptations that would otherwise have difficulty influencing us.

For example, if I buy a house directly across the street from an amusement establishment that has exhibits and entertainments that are unhealthy for my soul, I have chosen to see their front door every day of my life. I will see that entrance inviting and calling me in every time I leave or return home. How long will I last before I have finally succumbed to my thoughts of curiosity and enter in to see what is contained in that park? This is what happened to Lot when he chose the plains outside of Sodom and pitched his tent with the door facing the city. It wasn't long before he had moved into the city and his children married into the surrounding culture. When the angels finally told him to gather his family and flee so they could destroy the city, his children laughed at him and called him crazy for his beliefs. They died along with all the rest of the city.

So many of today's accepted beliefs, and especially those being pushed by those who want to bury anything having a taste of God about it, are being accepted by our children and young married couples. Why? Because they have not bridled their thoughts and confined their attentions to those things God has told us will bring us happiness. The only reason those things bring happiness is because they are godly in their qualities. Reading scriptures, contemplating the teachings of the prophets and of Christ, actively participating in all good things, and especially in the Church cause us to think more like Christ. When we allow the agenda of the world to take up time in our minds we spend more time contemplating their reasoning. Sometimes we simply must ignore the logic and reasoning and dismiss the worldly premises that contradict that which God has

taught us. It may not seem reasonable or logical, but it must be done to find the happiness that is found only in and through Christ.

Those who do not learn the importance of choosing God over the teachings of the world, even when it doesn't seem to make sense, soon learn the hard way that misery is the lot of those who side with the world, and protection, safety, and peace follow those who choose obedience to the commandments.

Verses 6-7 - I don't understand what verse 6 means about revenge, so I won't touch that verse. Verse 7 talks about judging the appearance and behaviors of others. We may believe that we have chosen the better part, and by so doing it can become easy to condemn someone else for not being as good as we believe we are. Because we are judging from outward appearances, we may miss the fact that they also believe they are obedient to Christ. They may be living their life as they believe God wants them to do it. Who are we to declare them as unfit Christians? That kind of judgment belongs to Christ, for judgment is his.

**Passage review**

This short passage talks about the warfare that is currently taking place between good and evil all over the world. How we fight this battle for the possession of our soul is done in special ways. Earthly weapons won't make any difference in this battle. We need to control our thoughts, fight against ideologies and philosophies that eliminate or ignore God which have become dominant in today's cultures across the world. Obedience brings blessings, but our thoughts must become our chief weapon. Considering and pondering the philosophies of the wicked, without putting those thoughts in their proper perspective aside the teachings of Christ lead us into dangerous territory.

To be safe from spiritual harm we must, as soon as we recognize that a philosophy or teaching goes against what God has taught, dismiss it and spend our time strengthening our resolve to be obedient. For in this war against the teachings of Satan and men, obedience and strict adherence to the truth is the only thing that will keep us safe. And finally, we need to recognize that we are not fighting this war alone. There are millions around us doing the same, some more successfully than others. We should be careful to acknowledge that they are trying to do what they think is best, just as we are.

We are not the only Christians in this battle, but are surrounded by others also trying their best. Let's be tolerant of the struggles we all face in common.

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