

THIS GRACE ALSO

"THEREFORE, as ye abound in every thing, in faith, and utterance, and knowledge, and in all diligence, and in your love to us, see that ye abound in this grace also." II Corinthians 8:7.

With an intense zeal for Christ and a fervent love for people, the Apostle Paul repeatedly gave spiritual instructions to the followers of our Lord. In writing to his fellow-Christians in Corinth, Paul told them very plainly what the Lord expected of them.

The Christians in Jerusalem and Palestine were suffering from famine, persecution and unfavorable circumstances over which they did not have any control. The Jewish Christians had passed through bitter persecution, which had swept away their homes and their means of employment, and they were suffering the pangs of want and misery. Since they were destitute, they were in desperate need of the assistance which was due them from their fellow-Christians.

One of Paul's major projects for the Lord at that particular time was the raising of relief funds for the persecuted and afflicted Christians in Palestine. Because of the great needs he raised large sums of money in four of the Roman provinces where he had labored — Asia, Galatia, Macedonia and Achaia. Paul was doing his utmost to enlist the liberal support of the Corinthians in this worthy endeavor. He sought their liberality as a fruit of Christian faith, as a token of Christian love to brethren in need and, above all, as a timely response to the unmeasured love of God in Christ.

In his first letter to the Corinthians Paul had invited them to share in this great Christian endeavor. Apparently they had agreed to join other churches in this worthy effort, but due to their stinginess they had not done anything about paying what they had pledged. Meanwhile a whole year had elapsed.

Chapters eight and nine of Second Corinthians contain various reasons why the Christians at Corinth were obligated to participate in the making of liberal contributions at that particular time.

I. The Liberality Of The Macedonians.

In his effort to challenge the Christians at Corinth to give generously, Paul very wisely used the Macedonian Christians as an example of liberality. To dispose of the common excuses for not giving, such as the church is poor, the church does not have any wealthy members, or the times are hard, Paul related the amazing story of the grace of God among the churches in Macedonia. "In a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality." In spite of their numerous afflictions and serious troubles, the Macedonians had an abundance of joy which overflowed into the riches of liberality. This flood of joy swept away any objections and all excuses. In fact, they did not wait to be asked to give, but they asked to be allowed the privilege of giving. From experience they had learned, as Christ taught, that "it is more blessed to give than to receive."

By their liberality is not necessarily meant large sums, but rather amounts proportionate to or beyond their ability. Seemingly they had given more than they were able to give. They gave more than they comfortably could afford. They gave until Paul was almost ashamed to receive what they gave. "Moreover, brethren, we do you to wit of the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia; How that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality. For to their power, I bear record, yea, and beyond their power they were willing of themselves." They did not measure their gifts according to their ability. Giving must be estimated always by the size of the balance.

Moreover, they gave voluntarily and cheerfully. They insisted on giving. They did not give with hesitancy or reluctance, but with prayerful entreaty. When Paul hesitated about receiving such generous offerings from people who were so poor, they implored him to receive their gifts and to use them in the Lord's work in the spirit of Christian fellowship. They were certainly worthy and noble examples of sacrificial giving.

The secret of the giving of the Macedonian Christians was in their absolute self-surrender and complete dedication. Having given themselves to the Lord, it was not hard for them to give their means. When they gave themselves their gifts followed. That is true of any Christian. In fact, what we have is what we are. Our substance is ourselves. When we dedicate ourselves to the Lord and His service we also surrender our substance to Him. Many professing Christians have never learned that. Consequently, they look in giving as a burden. Selfishness always drowns out every call for generosity.

II. The Payment Of Their Promises.

Under the influence of Titus the Corinthians had pledged to give to this cause. Their promise to give was a fine thing. Paul did not object to that at all, but, since more than a year had gone by and they had done nothing about it, he did insist that they pay what they had promised. However, to get money out of those Corinthians was like trying to get blood out of a turnip.

The members of the church at Corinth were quite talented. They gloried in their faith, in their knowledge, in their ability to speak, in their diligence and in their love. Upon the basis of these things, Paul appealed to them to abound in the grace of giving. He said, "See that ye abound in this grace also." This was an urgent request for their liberality. After he had enumerated the richest and most coveted graces, such as "faith," "utterance," "knowledge," "earnestness" and "love," Paul insisted that they abound in the grace of giving also.

III. Love For Christ.

"And to prove the sincerity of your love." Giving is a real test of one's love for Christ. This word "sincerity" when applied to love has a similar meaning to that of genuineness when applied to money or legitimacy in connection with birth. The giving of money is an accurate test of the genuineness of one's love for Christ. Profession of love is good, but performance proves the quality of the profession. In every relationship of life love prompts to giving. Giving is a test of the sincerity of our words of love. Actions speak louder than words.

IV. The Example of Christ.

"For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich." Prior to His coming in the flesh Christ was rich in the love of the Father, in His surroundings, in His possessions, in His position and in His power. Then Christ became poor both in position and in circumstances in order that we might become rich. "Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift." That supreme gift of love certainly calls for the correct response on our part.

V. The Law of Sowing And Reaping.

"He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully." "God loveth a cheerful giver." He has a special love for those who give cheerfully of their means. Truly God loves the Christian who has the time of his life in using his substance in the Lord's work. There is real joy in the hearts of Christians who love Christ enough to give. Those who rejoice in giving will sing with joy, serve with gladness, pray with pleasure and live with happiness.

People are easily deceived about the extent of their beneficence, and they usually exaggerate the amount which they give. Those who do not know how much they contribute to the Lord's work always give less than they think they do. There is a strangely paralyzing power about money. It so restricts the heart that the more people get the less they are inclined to give. Our Lord must have had this in mind when He spoke about "the deceitfulness of riches." Money can cause a person to think that he is growing larger when all of the time he is getting smaller. While the inlet is expanding the outlet is contracting. It is one of the pathetic ironies of life that people who are accumulating possessions have an increasing fear of poverty. This fear puts them in such bondage that they are afraid to give lest none should remain.