

A MINISTRY FOR HUNGRY SAINTS

IN THIS WORLD, WE EXPERIENCE SUFFERINGS: BUT GLORY IS COMING

SECOND CORINTHIANS

✠ II CORINTHIANS

An overview of the Book of Second Corinthians, by Gwen O. Blakely

Lesson #34

COMMENTARY ON: 8:6-9

2 CORINTHIANS 1:3-4

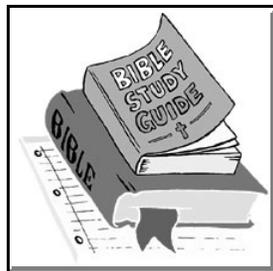
"Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God."

FINISH THE WORK!

Having "the mind of Christ," Paul took verbalized commitments to the Lord seriously. In fact, he did everything within his power to assist the saints in the fulfilling of such commitments. Our text is a case in point. The Corinthians had said they would give assistance to the poor saints in Jerusalem. Their commitment had been public, and had even stimulated others to also contribute to their Jewish brethren. The performance of their vow, however, had not yet been fulfilled. Now, with the expertise of a spiritual tactician, Paul is working with them, bringing them to a point of willing involvement.

2 CORINTHIANS 5:1-2

"For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. for in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven"



Since May, 1993, a ministry instituted for the encouragement of believers in Christ



The Epistle of Second Corinthians

Lesson Number 34



TRANSLATION LEGEND: AMPLIFIED or AMP = Amplified Bible, (1965), ASV=American Standard Version (1901), BBE=Bible in Basic English (1949), DRA=Douay-Rheims (1899), ESV=English Stand Version (2001), IE = International English, ISV = International Standard Version (1967), JPS = Jewish Publication Society (1917), KJV=King James Version (1611), LIVING = Living Bible (1971), MONTGOMERY = Montgomery's New Testament (2001), MRD = Peshitta-James Murdock Translation (1852), NAB=New American Bible (2002), NASB=New American Standard Bible (1977), NAU=New American Standard Bible (1995), NIB=New International Bible, NIV=New International Version (1984), NJB=New Jerusalem Bible (1985), NKJV=New King James Version (1979), NLT=New Living Translation (1996), NRSV=New Revised Standard Version (1989), PHILLIPS = J B Phillips New Testament (1962), PNT = BISHOP'S New Testament (1595), RSV=Revised Standard Version (1952), TNK=JPS Tanakj (1985), Webster=The Webster Bible (1833), WEYMOUTH=Weymouth's New Testament (1903), WILLIAMS = William's New Testament (1937), TNK = JPS Tanakh (1985), TYNDALE=Tyndale's Bible (1526), WYCLIFFE= Wycliffe New Testament (1382), YLT=Young's Literal Translation (1862).

LEXICON LEGEND: FRIEBERG = Friberg Lexicon, UBS=UBS Lexicon, LOUW-NIDA=Louw-Nida Lexicon, LIDDELL SCOTT=Liddell Scott Lexicon, THAYER=Thayer's Greek Lexicon

A MINISTRY INITIATED IN MAY 1993, AND DEDICATED TO BUILDING THE FAITH AND ENHANCING THE HOPE OF THOSE WHO ARE WORKING OUT THEIR OWN SALVATION WITH FEAR AND TREMBLING.

AN EPISTLE WRITTEN TO A CHURCH THAT WAS MOVING AWAY FROM ITS CARNALITY, YET LACKED MUCH INSIGHT. HERE IS A STRONG APPEAL TO PERFECT HOLINESS IN THE FEAR OF THE LORD.

----- Lexicon and Bible Translation Codes with Identification -----

FINISH THE WORK!

“^{8:6} Inasmuch that we desired Titus, that as he had begun, so he would also finish in you the same grace also. ⁷ 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. ⁸ I speak not by commandment, but by occasion of the forwardness of others, and to prove the sincerity of your love. 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.” (2 Cor 8:6-9)

INTRODUCTION

Paul is ministering in the capacity of an “*apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God*” (2 Cor 1:1). In this ministry, Jesus Himself had spelled out what Paul was to do. He was not merely a representative of Christ that went about functioning in His own wisdom, doing this and that in strict accord with carnal perception. Nor, indeed, did Paul have one agenda for ministering to the lost, and one for ministering to the saved. He was directed specifically to the Gentiles, and generally to his Jewish brethren as well. The Lord was clear about what he was to do.



broad target of the ministry of Paul: “*But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my*

name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel” (Acts 9:15). Paul traveled throughout the Gentile world (Acts 13:47-49; 14:23-27; 15:7; 16:6-9; 19:26; 21:19). He witnessed to rulers like Felix (Acts 24:10-26), Agrippa (Acts 26:1-23), Festus (Acts 25:1-12), Publius (Acts 28:7-8), and Caesar (Acts 27:24). He also appeared before his kinsmen in synagogues throughout the world (Acts 9:20; 13:5,14; 14:1; 17:1,10; 18:19; 23:1-9; 24:1).

The experience of his calling was also given in detail to Paul, both through Ananias, and by Jesus Himself (Acts 22:14-15).

The Lord specified to Ananias the

Promises and commitments made in faith by honest and good hearts are to carried to their completion– by Given O. Blakely

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- ☛ To **know** Christ's will.
- ☛ To **see** the Just One.
- ☛ To **hear** the words of His mouth.
- ☛ To be a **witness** unto all men.

The Lord Jesus Himself also spelled out the scope of Paul's ministry (Acts 22:16-18). He was to engage in a marvelously extensive work.

- ☛ To be a **minister** and a witness.
- ☛ To **open** their eyes.
- ☛ To **turn** them from darkness to **light**.
- ☛ To **turn** them from the power of Satan unto **God**.

- ☛ To **turn** men so they may receive the **forgiveness** of sins.
- ☛ To **turn** men so that may receive an **inheritance** among them that are sanctified by faith in Christ.

THE RELEVANCE OF THIS

There is a tendency within the Christian community to think that Paul's ministry was only to the lost – to those with no knowledge of the Lord. However, this is not at all true.

For example, although he had never been to Colossae, he wrote to the church there, saying that his ministry was given for them as well – and they were already in Christ. *"Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for His body's sake, which is the church: whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me FOR YOU, to fulfil the word of God"* (Col 1:25). Another version reads, *"... for the sake of his body, which is the church. I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness."*^{NIV}

Paul's Apostleship, therefore, included the nurturing of the church – bringing the people to a point where they could more fully comprehend the great salvation of which they had become partakers.

It is at this precise point that the American church has miserably failed. Those who hold out, what they choose to call, *"the great commission,"* have adopted a spiritual posture that is leaving the church starved and emaciated. They major on reaching sinners, but neglect the saints in the process. This is a sin of enormous magnitude, and it is not possible to overstate how serious it is.

There is no valid ministry that focuses exclusively upon the lost. Men may boast of such a work, and build a seemingly strong case for it. However, such efforts are nothing more than an exercise in vanity. Earlier "missionaries" made a point of revisiting the converts they had made, to ensure they were doing well in Christ Jesus (Acts 15:36). Paul sought opportunities to speak to believers in Christ who were not converted under his ministry, yet needed the insights that had been given to him (Rom 1:11).

Paul's ministry to the Corinthians was included under his Divine mandate – to open men's eyes, and turn them from darkness to light, and the power of Satan unto God. He was ministering to them to ensure they obtained the inheritance to which Jesus had called them.

THE EXPERIENCE IN CORINTH

The church at Corinth had retrogressed to a state that bore the characteristics of the condition from which they had once been delivered. The Tempter had seduced them, so that their consciousness of sin had waned, and thus they tolerated it in their presence. They had a view of Paul that was not fostered by the Holy Spirit. They viewed their brethren in a manner that sharply conflicted with the *"mind of the Spirit."* Some of them held to a view of the resurrection that sharply contrasted with the truth. They were divided among themselves – a condition that is in no way allowed by either the message of the Gospel, or the nature of life that is in Christ Jesus.

Paul therefore addresses them as an *"apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God"* – one who has been sent to deal with their condition. **God is not glorified by a religious regimen that supposedly converts the lost, yet leaves the saints to wallow in delusion, bath themselves in**

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ignorance, and remain obtuse to the greatness of the inheritance reserved for them. Where is the person who would dare to affirm such nonsense? And yet, these conditions exist all around us. Spiritual Babylon – Satan’s fabrication of the church – is striding through society like an attractive, yet gaudy, woman, just as John saw. Yet, she is, in fact, nothing more than a spiritual prostitute, riding on the perceptions and principles of this present evil world (Rev 17:1-7).

rejoined that God placed “evangelists” in the world, then we must observe that such have, in fact, been given to the church, and are intended play a role in “the perfecting of the saints, for the edifying of the body of Christ” (Eph 4:11-12). **God has no work that allows for the neglect of His people.** There simply is no such thing! In reality, the saved are, in fact, the focus of all valid ministries, for they are the ones who “shine as lights in the world” (Phil 2:15), provoking inquiry

have only displayed their ignorance. **If it is the “power of God unto salvation” (Rom 1:16), then it is has relevance as long as salvation remains incomplete, or is in the process of being finished.**

IN OUR TEXT

The relevancy of the Gospel will be seen in this text. Paul will make a powerful appeal to the Gospel itself to provoke a godly response among the people. He will not assume the people will be able to simply recall this glorious Gospel at will. They have, by their very posture, confirmed that this Gospel had not been dominating their thinking. Therefore, Paul will gently, yet firmly, lead them to the wells of salvation once again, so they can draw refreshment from them, as they are intended to do.

Paul will also confirm that the godly conduct of holy men and men have a strong impact upon sensitive hearts. **The body of Christ is often constrained from within – by its various members.** This confirms that everyone is not living within the same circumference of sensitivity. Some have wandered to the periphery of spiritual life, being unduly influenced by the course of this world. **Now Paul will lead them to look back – back to the heart of the circle of redemption.** There, he will draw their attention to the responses of those who have chosen to live by faith and walk in the Spirit. Because they are part of the body, there will be a drawing power in these people.

All of this means that Corinth had been derailed, and Paul, according to his appointed ministry, was getting them back on track. Because spiritual life is not lived out in a vacuum, the Gospel, by which we are saved (1 Cor 15:1-3), must be declared and expounded regularly.

One of the key differences between genuine “ministers of Christ” (1 Cor 4:1; 2 Cor 11:23) and spurious ones, is the care they have “for the churches” (2 Cor 11:28). Real shepherds feed Christ’s “lambs” and “sheep” (John 21:15-17).

(1 Pet 3:15), and adorning the doctrine that is preached to the world (Phil 1:27; Tit 2:10; 1 Pet 2:12).

All of this means that Corinth had been derailed, and Paul, according to his appointed ministry, was getting them back on track. Because spiritual life is not lived out in a vacuum, the Gospel, by which we are saved (1 Cor 15:1-3), **must** be declared and expounded regularly. Those who postulate that preaching the Gospel is an activity for the lost alone

Indulge me for a moment while I state this again, for here is a matter that has all but been obscured to the modern church. **There is no such thing as a ministry that focuses on “the lost,” to the neglect of the body of Christ.** If it is

INSOMUCH

“ 8:6a **Insomuch . . .** ” Other versions read, “So we,” ^{NKJV} “Consequently,” ^{NASB} “so that we might,” ^{NRSV} “Accordingly,” ^{RSV} “That we should,” ^{GENEVA} “In the end,” ^{NJB} “They were so enthusiastic about it,” ^{LIVING} “That is why,” ^{IE} “This led us to,” ^{WEYMOUTH} “With the result that,” ^{MONTGOMERY} “So much so,” ^{AMPLIFIED} and “Now this has made us.” ^{PHILLIPS}

going, sending, or moving toward. In this case, the preceding word of movement is found in the prior verse concerning the insistence the churches in Macedonia exhibited. “*Begging us with much entreaty for the favor of participation in the support of the saints, and this, not as we had expected, but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God*” ^{NASB} (2 Cor 8:4-5).

the Macedonian brethren will provoke an godly action in Paul. Their godly willingness and zeal provoked him to “*love and good works,*” just as the members of the body are intended to do (Heb 10:24).

A MARVELOUS DISPLAYAL

In this text there is a marvelous display of Divine workings. Paul perceives this whole matter as having been orchestrated by “*the will of God.*” Therefore he has said of the Macedonian brethren, “*And this they did, not as we*

Here is an interesting word. It is a preposition that denotes motion toward a place or activity, and follows verbs of

Now, in keeping with the nature of spiritual life and the manner in which the body of Christ functions, the action of

hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us **by the will of God,**” or “in keeping with God’s will”^{NIV} (2 Cor 8:5). It is as though Paul saw he himself could not accomplish bringing the Corinthians to be liberal toward the poor saints in Jerusalem, even though they had pledged to give a sizeable offering. **Yet God, in His wisdom and mercy, has found another way to move the Corinthians be free-hearted and open-handed with their money – something that is exceedingly difficult to accomplish.** Riches have a certain “deceitfulness” about them that leads men to become enslaved to them, even living in disregard of their needy brethren (Matt 13:22). In order to work around this circumstance, charlatans use craft and trickery to cause men to give to their corrupt causes. However, note how

the Lord works in this case. In this work we will behold the Divine nature.

Paul affirms that he was surprised at the liberality of the Macedonians, for they gave even more than he had hoped. He was so affected by this generosity that he is moved to bring it to the attention of the Corinthians. **He is telling them he does not want them to be outstripped by the unsparring liberality of brethren that were sitting at poverty’s door.** How is it that those with relative abundance could be completely outdone by those who were in the midst of “a great trial of affliction?” The whole situation makes no sense at any level, and Paul knows it. Now he endeavors to bring the Corinthians to see the same glorious perspective. He will aggressively move to make them aware of the facts.

This is not some form of deception, but is rather a wonderful display of insight and wisdom. Paul sees how God has orchestrated this matter, so that all of the members of the body are involved. If some are reluctant to be liberal in their offerings, He will not simply command them to give abundantly. He will set before them an example of brethren who gave abundantly when they really were not able to do so. It will be obvious that God Himself was in this whole matter, and He is no respecter of persons. Here is the principle to see. **The work of God touches the hearts of the people of God.** There is a certain tenderness of heart that is experienced when we can see God at work in the lives of our brethren. It will embolden us to seek to attain grace in the very area in what we may be weak.

WE DESIRED TITUS

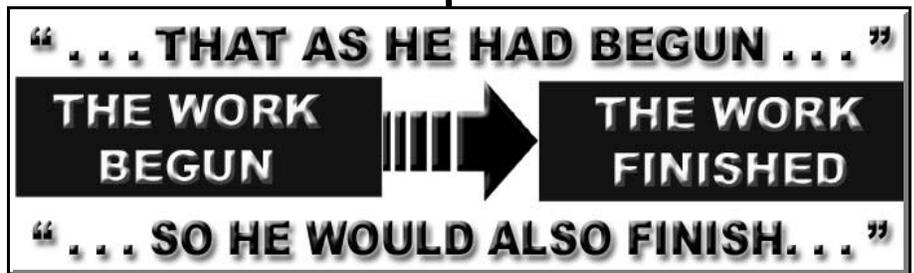
“ 8:6b . . . that we desired Titus, that as he had begun, so he would also finish in you the same grace also.”

Paul is not content to see the Macedonians giving and the Corinthians **not** giving. It is not good for some of the body to participate in needy activities, while others do not. While it is true that, when it comes to special offerings, each person is to give as “*he purposeth in his heart*” (2 Cor 9:7), it is sometimes necessary to provide some strong incentives for that “*purpose*” to be a fitting one. **The response of God’s people to the needs of their brethren should not detract from the nature of the salvation of God, which they are enjoying.** Further, as Paul will point out later, the person who sows “*sparingly,*” giving meager offerings in proportion to what they possess, cannot expect the blessings of God to be poured forth copiously upon them. As it is written, “*But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully*” (2 Cor 9:6). No child of God should be reluctant or ashamed to declare this to be the case.

WE DESIRED TITUS

“ . . . that we desired Titus . . . ”
Other versions read, “we urged Titus,”^{NKJV} “We have urged Titus,”^{RSV} “we exhorted Titus,”^{ASV} “we made a request to Titus,”^{BBE} “we begged Titus,”^{DARBY} and “I insisted that Titus.”^{WILLIAMS}

The idea here is that Paul called Titus into this work, summoning him to play a key role in the gathering of the offering for the needy saints in Jerusalem. This was done by means of a strong appeal, pleading, as it were, for



The word “*desired*” is a fellowship word – one that fulfills the nature of kingdom work, **which involves participation among the members of the body.** This term is translated from the Greek word παρακαλέσαι (par-ak-al-es-ai), which lexically means, “to call to ones side, call for, summon, to speak to in the way of exhortation or entreaty . . . to entreat . . . to combine the ideas of exhorting and comforting and encouraging,”^{THAYER} “to ask for (earnestly), to request, to plead for, to appeal to, earnestly request,”^{LOUW-NIDA} and “to call to aid.”^{LIDDELL-SCOTT}

Titus to put himself into the work that will be specified.

I want to point out the necessity of this kind of activity within the body of Christ. **Noble spiritual causes often call for strong exhortations.** This must not be viewed as an imposition on the saints – particularly when the hand and direction of the Lord is perceived in the matter.

AS HE HAD BEGUN, SO HE WOULD FINISH

“. . . *that as he had begun, so he would also finish in you . . .*” Other versions read, “*that as he had begun, so he would also complete.*”^{NKJV} “*that as he previously made a beginning, so he would also complete.*”^{NASB} “*since he had earlier made a beginning, to bring also to completion.*”^{NIV} “*that as he had begun, so he would also accomplish.*”^{GENEVA} “*who encouraged your giving in the first place, to return to you and encourage you to complete.*”^{NLT} and “*as he had previously been the one who commenced the work, so he should now go and complete among you.*”^{WEYMOUTH}

It may appear on the surface as though this matter – a collection – is unworthy of such an emphasis. **However, anything that is done in the name of the Lord is important, and what is done toward the people of God is deserving of the utmost earnestness.** The Lord takes seriously what His people pledge to do in His name, and they are to take it

(1 Cor 16:1-2). Systematically, in an orderly manner, and in accordance with how the Lord has prospered each person, the Corinthian brethren were to accumulate an offering for the “*poor saints.*” Paul did not want them to have to take up a collection when he arrived. Thus, the work got under way, originally being done in anticipation of Paul’s personal arrival in Corinth.

Now, stirred up by the marvelous selfless giving of the Macedonians, Paul tells Titus to bring this collection to its completion. He was, like the Lord Himself, to “*finish*” what he had “*begun*” (Phil 1:6).

Paul was seeking proof that the Corinthians were actually liberal – a frame of spirit that grace produces within the saints. **It is one thing to boast of loving the Lord and His people. It is quite another to confirm that love by means of liberality.** The Scriptures

contained weekly attendance and giving statistics. The bottom two lines on these boards of betrayal would contain the weekly budget and the weekly offering. Most of the time, whether the church was large or small, the offerings did not come up to the budget. Whatever the reason for this condition, it revealed that commitments were made that were not being carried out – precisely the condition that is being addressed in our text. It all may appear quite innocent, and there may even be some who have learned to live with such circumstances. However, after all is said and done, this betrays a condition that is not good. **Christian people who conduct their business affairs in such a way confirm that they have never made a connection between their finances and the Lord.**

This text can assist us in shaping our thinking on giving to be more in harmony with “*the mind of Christ.*” You may recall that on one occasion Jesus positioned Himself by the Temple treasury to behold “*how people cast money into the treasury*” (Mark 12:41). At that time He also observed “*the rich men casting their gifts into the treasury*” (Lk 21:1). On yet another occasion Jesus spoke extensively about His relation to the Father, declaring that the Father bore witness to Him. It is said of that occurrence, “*These words spake Jesus in the treasury, as he taught in the temple*” (John 8:20). **Let no person imagine that the Lord does not take due note of the manner and amount of the giving of His people.**

This text is especially noteworthy in view of some other words Jesus spoke concerning money. “*No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon [money^{NIV}]*” (Luke 16:13). This was preceded by an admonition from the Savior. “*And I say unto you, **Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations. He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much; and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much. If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches? And if ye***”

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seriously also.

Paul had sent Titus before, accompanied by “*a brother.*” This was apparently to gather up the offering which the Corinthians had pledged themselves to give. This, according to the tenth verse of this chapter, had taken place “*a year ago.*” During that visit, the gathering of the collection of reference had begun, apparently under the direction of Titus. Some of the instruction given to them is covered in the sixteenth chapter of First Corinthians. “*Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come*”

affirm, “*The liberal soul shall be satisfied*” (Prov 11:25), and this is well known by those who are, in fact, “*liberal.*”

FROM MY OWN EXPERIENCE

I have often pondered the manner of people with whom I was affiliated in the early years of my ministry. They were **not** noted for their giving, but were largely characterized by a stinginess that sharply conflicted with any profession of faith they might have had. It was not at all unusual for the preachers among these people to be bordering on abject poverty. The average churches among these people were not noted for assisting poor saints, missionaries, or the likes.

The Infamous Bulletin Board

I frequently remember the infamous “Bulletin Boards” that

have not been faithful in that which is another man's, who shall give you that which is your own?" (Luke 16:9-12).

This teaches us that money is a means by which our faithfulness to God is tested. Whatever men may think of it, it is appropriately called "that which is least." However, it does not really belong to us, but is called "that which is another man's wealth." In this case, that is the Lord Himself. Money can be put to uses that bear upon eternity: i.e. the faithful use the money, instead of it managing them. Thus, Jesus said, "use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings."^{NIV}

This is exactly what "the churches

in Macedonia" did. They made friends with their money, so that it went to work for them. In assisting the brethren in Jerusalem, they were making a heavenly investment – laying up treasures for themselves in heaven (Matt 6:20).

THE SAME GRACE ALSO

"... the same grace also." Other versions read, "this gracious work as well,"^{NASB} "this act of grace on your part,"^{NIV} "this generous undertaking among you,"^{NRSV} "this act of grace,"^{NIB} "this ministry of giving,"^{NLT} "the same benevolence,"^{TNT} "this favor,"^{YLT} "your share in the ministry of giving,"^{LIVING} "this special gift of love,"^{IE} "this act of beneficence,"^{WEYMOUTH} "this work of kindness,"^{ISV} "this gracious contribution,"^{WILLIAMS} "this beneficent and gracious

contribution,"^{AMPLIFIED} and "this work of generosity,"^{PHILLIPS}

It is important to note how Paul refers to this collection, or offering. Here he calls it "the same grace." Earlier he referred to it as "the riches of their liberality"(8:2), and said it was the direct result of "the grace of God" being "bestowed" upon them (8:1). He also identified it as "the fellowship of ministering to the saints" (8:4). The collection for the poor saints is also referred to as "this grace" (8:19), and "this abundance" (8:20). **Such descriptions confirm that this was the outworking of the grace of God, which was not received in vain by the brethren in Macedonia.** It is apparent that they had been living by faith.

ABOUNDING IN EVERYTHING

"^{7a} **Therefore, as ye abound in every thing . . .**" Other versions read, "as you excel in everything,"^{NIV} "as you are full of every good thing,"^{BBE} "as you are rich in everything,"^{NIB} "as you excel in so many ways,"^{NLT} "are leaders in so many ways,"^{LIVING} "just as you are growing rich in everything,"^{WILLIAMS} "as you abound and excel and are in front in everything,"^{AMPLIFIED} and "Already you are well in the fore in every good quality."^{PHILLIPS}

kingdom of God. Lexically it means, "to be over and above the number . . . to be more than enough, remain over . . . to be superior, have advantage in,"^{THAYER} "exceed, surpass . . . overflow with . . . be outstanding in, excel in,"^{FRIBERG} and "to exist in abundance, with the implication of being considerably or than what was expected."^{LOUW-NIDA}

I must admit that it is refreshing to read of anyone who excels in every facet of what they have come to possess. **Although the church at Corinth had a number of things against it, being mediocre was not one of them.** Since the church has been overrun with purported scholars, psychiatrists, statisticians, and the likes, the mantle of mediocrity has been spread over nearly all that it does. We have preachers that cannot preach, teachers that cannot teach, and singers that cannot sing. The church is filled with banal elders, deacons, and other leaders, so that scarcely a person can be found that stands out in a God-ordained ministry. Who does not know that this is the case? Things are in such a deplorable state that a person who regularly reads God's word, or can speak intelligently and profitably concerning it, stands out like king Saul among the Israelites. A person whose devotion to the Lord is obvious, by that very trait, distinguishes

himself from the rest of the professed church. As James would say, "My brethren, these things ought not so to be" (James 3:10).

I do not know of a single facet of the salvation that is "in Christ Jesus with eternal glory" (2 Tim 2:10), that contributes to mediocrity, averageness, the ordinary, or the commonplace. It was not accomplished by ordinary means. It does not provide average promises, or hold out mediocre rewards. The work to which the Lord calls us is an excellent one. The adversary with whom we contend is extraordinary. The message we have been given is glorious. Newness of life is of an excellent nature. What, pray tell, is there about salvation that could possibly produce half-hearted, uninvolved, or casual disciples?

Is there anything about the Lord that is not arresting? Has anyone in the history of the world ever knowingly confronted Him and remained casual? What of the image to which we are being conformed – the Lord Jesus Christ (Rom 8:29; 2 Cor 3:18)? Is there anything about Him that causes the soul to be drowsy, the hands to be idle, or the mind to be listless? **What is the origin of this**



The word "abound" is translated from the Greek word περισεύετε (peri-seu-tee) that has a meaning befitting for the

dreadful ocean of mediocrity that is flooding the church?

Ponder what marvelous things are said about the salvation of God.

- ☛ The grace of God has “**abounded unto many**” (Rom 5:15).
- ☛ Where sin abounded, “**grace did much more abound**” (Rom 5:1).
- ☛ God Himself so fills us that we may “**abound in hope**” (Rom 15:13).
- ☛ We are admonished to be “**always abounding in the work of the Lord**” (1 Cor 15:58).
- ☛ Both “the sufferings of Christ” and “**consolation**” are said to “**abound**” in us (2 Cor 1:5).
- ☛ Affection toward the people of God can be “**more abundant**” (2 Cor 7:15).
- ☛ God can “**make all grace**” to “**abound**” toward us (2 Cor 9:8).
- ☛ Through Christ, God has “**abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence**” (Eph 1:8).
- ☛ Our love can “**abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment**” (Phil 1:9).
- ☛ Rejoicing can be “**more abundant**” (Phil 1:26).
- ☛ Fruit can “**abound**” to our account (Phil 4:17).
- ☛ We are taught in Christ to “**abound in thanksgiving**” (Colo 2:7).
- ☛ We can “**abound more in more**” in the matter of pleasing God by our lives (1 Thess 4:1).
- ☛ The grace of God is “**exceeding**

abundant with faith and love” (1 Tim 1:14).

- ☛ We were begotten again “**according to His abundant mercy**” (1 Pet 1:3).
- ☛ The various graces that are to be added to our faith can “**abound**” in us (2 Pet 1:5-8).



Because of the very nature of salvation, joyful expectation plays a prominent role in the saved. While the “**outward man**” is perishing – in a state of irreversible deterioration – the “**inward man is renewed day by day**” – moving forward and being changed from one increasing stage of glory to another (2 Cor 3:18). It is this circumstance that makes for “**abounding**.” This is why believers are told that God can “**increase**” their “**fruits of righteousness**” (2 Cor 9:10). It is why the Lord has so ordered ministries within the body of Christ that it might “**make increase**” (Eph 4:16), and “**increase with the increase of God**” (Col 2:19). Thus prayers were made for the saints, that they might “**increase in the knowledge of God**” (Col 1:10). If we love one another, that is not enough. We are to seek to “**increase and abound**” in that love (1 Thess 3:12; 4:9-10), bringing it to

perfection.

It is time to have done with mediocre religion, and an approach to life in Christ that reaches a static plateau. This is the blight of institutionalism, but has no place in the body of Christ. In order for spiritual Babylon to flourish, the people must CEASE to grow, for only an non-growing and immature people can be managed and directed by a religious institution that is an end of itself. One of the great liabilities that exists in “**Babylon the great**” is the rare presence of someone who is actually growing in Christ Jesus. Such people break forth, threatening the walls of the institution and disrupting its affairs. They ask too many questions, are not enthused about lifeless programs, and draw attention from the others. These people are not commended by “**the great whore**” (Rev 17:1; 19:2). They are not asked to participate in their conventions or made the head of their schools. They are institutionally abnormal, and are therefore seen as a liability.

But let us behold this text with understanding. Those who are making progress in the faith are being commended. The abounding virtues that are found in them are lauded, and they are challenged to bring this “**abounding**” quality into other areas of their spiritual lives as well.

Paul will mention four areas of newness of life that are critical. None of them are especially valuable in dead religion. In fact, it will be glaringly apparent that they are absent in such a domain. Searching for some comely qualities, here is what Paul has found, and he was delighted to find them.

ABOUNDING IN FAITH

“**7b . . . in faith . . .**” Other versions read, “**so much faith**,”^{NLT} “**you have so much faith**,”^{LIVING} and “**very rich in faith**.”^{WEYMOUTH}

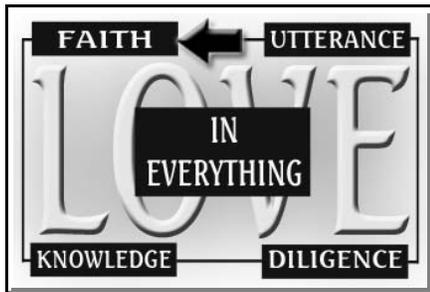
Remember, we are **not** speaking of the mere existence of these things, but

of their **abounding** presence and effectiveness. These are areas of spiritual growth, productivity, maturity, and advancement.

THE ESSENTIALITY OF FAITH

It is not surprising that the first thing mentioned is “**faith**.” **This is the mother of all other godly traits.** If faith is weak, everything else in the spiritual spectrum is also made weak. You cannot, for example, have a weak faith and a

strong love, or a weak faith and an abounding hope. **If faith is weak, nothing**



else can be strong. “Little faith” (Matt 6:30), or being “weak in faith” (Rom 4:19) blocks spiritual progress, for “without faith, it is impossible to please God” (Heb 11:6). However, “All things are possible to him that believeth” (Matt 9:23). It should not be difficult to perceive the priority of faith.

FAITH APPROPRIATES

Once we see the marvelous things that are appropriated exclusively by faith, the advantage of an abounding faith is at once apparent. **These are things that cannot be attained by any other means.** Here is a sampling of the indispensable benefits of faith.

- **JUSTIFICATION.** “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom 5:1).
- **SANCTIFICATION.** “To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me” (Acts 26:18).
- **PURE HEARTS.** “And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith” (Acts 15:9).
- **ACCESS TO GOD.** “By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God” (Rom 5:2).
- **STANDING.** “Not for that we have

dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy: for **by faith ye stand**” (2 Cor 1:24).

- **ARE CHILDREN OF GOD.** “For ye are all the **children of God by faith in Christ Jesus**” (Gal 3:26).
- **WAIT FOR THE HOPE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS.** “For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith” (Gal 5:5).
- **CHRIST DWELLS IN OUR HEARTS.** “That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith: that ye, being rooted and grounded in love” (Eph 3:17).
- **BECOME RIGHTEOUS.** “And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith” (Phil 3:9).

It is no wonder that Paul later admonishes the Corinthians, and us as well: “Examine yourselves, **whether ye be in the faith: prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?**” (2 Cor 13:5). To be “in the faith” is to be living within the circumference of faith, so that faith is the prevailing factor in life. **If we have no faith, we cannot possibly have the things that come by means of that faith.**

DEFINING FAITH

Faith cannot be strictly defined academically. It is best defined by pointing to what it does. For example, “Now faith is the **substance** of things hoped for, the **evidence** of things not seen” (Heb 11:1). Other versions read, “assurance” and “conviction,”^{NASB} “being sure” and “certain,”^{NIV} “substantiating” and “conviction,”^{DARBY} “realization” and “evidence,”^{NAB} “guarantee” and “prove,”^{NJB} “the ground of things” and “the evidence of things,”^{PNT} and “assurance (the confirmation, the title deed)” and “conviction of their reality (faith perceiving as real fact what is not revealed to the senses.”^{AMPLIFIED}

It ought to be obvious that language tends to break down when defining faith. It is as though language is too restricted – like Isaiah’s bed and

covers: “For the bed is **shorter** than that a man can stretch himself on it: and the covering **narrower** than that he can wrap himself in it” (Isa 28:20).

The word “substance” – “faith is the substance” – comes from a word meaning “that which has foundation, is firm, hence, that which has actual existence; a substance, real being.”^{THAYER} Faith **does not cause** something to become “substance,” or real, but **confirms** that fact to the heart. Contrary to some of the theology found among professed believers, faith **does not create**, or cause to come into existence. **Faith confirms to the heart what already exists, or what has already been determined by the Lord.** This confirmation is independent of the natural senses, for eternal verity is not accessible by those natural aptitudes.

EXCLUSIVELY TOWARD GOD

Furthermore, the ultimate object of faith is God Himself. In the Spirit’s exposition of faith, he not only notes that it is “substance” and “evidence,” but that it relates exclusively to coming to God: “But without faith it is impossible to please **Him**: for he that cometh to **God** must believe that **He** is, and that **He** is a rewarder of them that diligently seek **Him**” (Heb 11:6).

I do not believe there is any instance in Scripture of “faith,” as defined in Hebrews 11:1, that has to do with idols, things impersonal, or anyone other than God and Christ. Some explain “faith” by saying everyone lives by this principle, whether saved or lost. Thus they speak of men laboring for wages with faith they will be paid, or sitting on a chair with faith that it will hold them up. However, this is all a lot of nonsense, for such trust is based upon sight and human experience. **Faith deals with things that cannot be seen or confirmed by the human senses.**

Nor, indeed, is the word “faith” used to denote a body of doctrine, as some affirm. This view considers Scriptures like Acts 6:7 (“obedient to **the faith**”), 13:8 (turning someone “away from **the faith**”), 14:22 (“continue in **the faith**”), 16:5 (“established in **the faith**”), and 24:24 (“concerning **the faith** in Christ”), to mean the body of teaching that relates to Christ. Jude 1:3 is also said to refer to a

Promises and commitments made in faith by honest and good hearts are to carried to their completion– by Given O. Blakely

body of teaching, when believers are told to “contend for **the faith** which was once delivered to the saints.” The same view is taken of Galatians 1:23, where Paul is said to have “preached **the faith** which he once destroyed” (Gal 1:23). This particular argument is based upon the tense of the Greek term, which is “dative of advantage,” ROBERTSON which etymologically refers to “the thing believed,” rather than in “trust.”

The flaw in this reasoning is that “faith” is never **doctrinally** expounded or defined in relation to a set of teachings. It is always based upon the firm reality of God and Christ and what they have done. Faith is consistently related to coming to God, believing that He is, and that He is the Rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. **The true object of faith, or the ultimate thing that is believed, is not a doctrinal system, or a set of tenets, but God Himself.** It is true that there are specific things that are certainly “believed among us.”

- ☛ We “believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God” (Acts 8:37).
- ☛ “We believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they” (Acts 15:11).
- ☛ “Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him” (Rom 6:8).
- ☛ “We believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him” (1 Thess 4:14).
- ☛ The Gospel itself contains things said to be “most **assuredly believed** among us” (Luke 1:1).

However, I question the position that the things “we believe” are appropriately described as “**THE faith**” (Acts 6:7; 13:8; 14:22; 16:5; 24:24; 1 Cor 16:13; Gal 1:23; Jude 1:3). Nor, indeed, does “continuing” or “growing” in the faith mean that we are simply more thoroughly acquainted with the body of doctrine. Even language scholars who refer to this position modify their remarks by saying it is a “possible meaning,” and that some “hold to this view.”

If men insist on assigning “*the faith*” to a doctrine, then it must be “*the doctrine of Christ*” (Heb 6:1; 2 John 1:9), or “*the doctrine of God*” (Tit 2:10), for “**faith**” must have God and Christ as its ultimate object, else it is no faith at all.

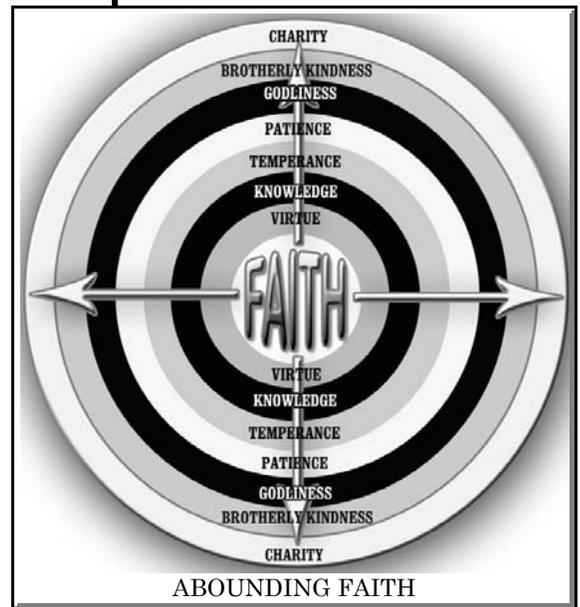
Some have said that faith is “the absence of doubt.” This, however, is not an adequate explanation of faith. It is not what faith does **not** do, but what it **does** that gives it such value. Faith **convines** the heart that God Himself and what He has declared are real, even though the human senses cannot corroborate that reality. **Faith itself is the basis, or foundation, of what is embraced.** It is to the spirit what sight, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching are to the flesh. **Faith attests to the heart that God is true, and that what He has said and done are unquestionably trustworthy and right.** Thus, when the Scripture says “*Abraham believed God,*” it is referring to his faith. We know this because of the following. “*For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness*” (Rom 4:3). Later, referring to this very occurrence, the Spirit explains, “*faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness*” (Rom 4:9). In further elaborating on Abraham “believing,” or upon his “faith,” the Spirit says, “*He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; and being fully persuaded that, what He had promised, He was able also to perform. And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness*” (Rom 4:20-22).

You see how Abraham’s faith, as made known in him “believing,” had to do with God Himself, not with a compilation of certain teachings concerning God. His faith involved his persuasion that God was able to do what He had said. **For those in Christ, faith involves the persuasion that God has accomplished in Christ Jesus exactly what He has declared.** There is also a persuasion that what Jesus is presently doing pertains to

us, and that what He has promised will surely come to pass. While all of this may be viewed intellectually as contained in a body of teaching, **our faith is not in the teaching, but in the One who delivered it.**

ABOUNDING IN FAITH

What is intended by saying the Corinthians abounded “*in faith*?” Does it mean they were more conversant with the body of doctrine that had been delivered to them? Technically, this may very well have been the case, but that is not the point of Paul’s word. He was not merely saying they were theologically sound, and better versed in Apostolic doctrine. Rather, like the Thessalonians, their faith was growing “*exceedingly*” (2 Thess 1:3). **The things of God were becoming more real and substantive to them than the things of this world.** Their consciousness of the Lord Himself was more acute than their concern for life in this world. The “*assurance of things hoped for*” was multiplying, and thus changing the whole course of their lives.



This is precisely what had moved them to deal with the thorny problem of a fornicator in their midst. **When God and Christ, together with the things they have revealed, become more real in our hearts than the delusions of this world, it has a significant impact upon how we live – what we say and do.** It will move us to deal with sin as God requires, and to

appropriate the benefits He has placed before us. There are no exceptions to this rule. **Faith does not fail to obey.** It does not fail to obtain. There is a kingdom competency in faith that cannot be obtained in any other way. The Corinthians were abounding in faith.

It ought to be noted that where faith is not abounding, nothing else is of any measurable consequence. Faith is the sanctifying element in things pertaining to life and godliness. It is the single “gift” to which all other virtues are added. This is the point made by Peter in his first epistle to scattered believers. *“And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue*

knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity”(2 Pet 1:5-7). Other versions bring out the role of faith. Thus other versions read, *“in your faith supply . . . ”*^{NASB} *“make every effort to support your faith with . . . ”*^{NRSV} *“make every effort to supplement your faith . . . ”*^{RSV} and *“joining . . . to your faith,”*^{BBE}

This is a vivid picture of faith growing, or abounding. It is the impetus of faith itself that causes the other graces to begin to flourish. That is, as our faith becomes stronger, these precious qualities begin to surface. Their presence

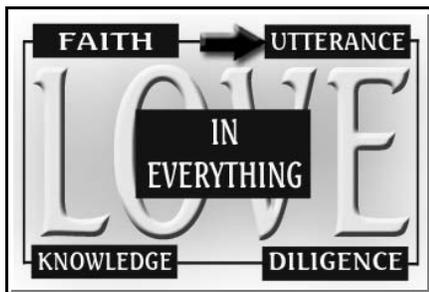
does at least two things.

- First, they confirm that the faith we have is genuine.
- Second, to the degree that they are in us and abound, they *“keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ”*^{NIV} (2 Pet 1:9).

The Corinthians had confirmed their faith was real by responding to the words of Paul appropriately, quickly, and with earnestness. Now Paul will go on to show there is more involved in spiritual growth than recovery.

ABOUNDING IN UTTERANCE

“To . . . and utterance . . . ” Other versions read, *“in speech”*^{NKJV} *“of the word,”*^{ASV} *“word,”*^{DARBY} *“discourse,”*^{NAB} *“eloquence,”*^{NJB} *“such gifted speakers,”*^{NLT} *“so many good preachers,”*^{LIVING} *“you can tell the message,”*^{IE} *“readiness of speech,”*^{WEYMOUTH} *“expression,”*^{WILLIAMS} *“in expressing yourselves,”*^{AMPLIFIED} and *“you can express that faith in words.”*^{PHILLIPS}



This is speaking after the manner of the Kingdom. A person who “abounds” in “utterance” is not merely a gifted speaker – like an orator. Such a speaker is of great worth before mere men – able to capture the attention of men with words that may, or may not, be profitable. Paul had already made clear to the people that “excellency of speech” was not necessarily an advantage in delivering the word of the Lord. Referring to his own manner of presentation he wrote, *“And I, brethren, when I came to*

you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God”(1 Cor 2:1). That is, **he did not rely upon such speech to make the Word of God effective in the hearts of men.** While faith can sanctify the ability to speak, the ability to speak itself has no sanctifying influence in the presentation of the truth. **The truth of God in the mouth of an insightful person who is crude in speech, is more effective for the glory of God than that same word spoken by a gifted speaker with no spiritual understanding.** Paul, therefore, is not commending the Corinthians for merely being gifted speakers.

The idea here is that many of the Corinthian believers were able to articulate their insights, and to speak with great effectiveness among lovers of the truth. Perhaps this is one reason why certain gifts were mentioned in Paul’s letter to the Corinthians – namely, “prophets” (1 Cor 14:3-5,24,29-32,37), those who could deliver “the word of knowledge” (1 Cor 12:8a), those who could deliver “the word of wisdom”(1 Cor 12:8b), and those speaking in divers languages, or “tongues” (1 Cor 2,4,13). Rather than these texts setting forth the unwavering standard for all churches, it appears to me that Paul was elaborating on the spiritual abilities that were resident in Corinth.

It is apparent from the instruction given to the Corinthians in the twelfth through fourteenth chapters of First Corinthians, that much speaking was found among them. While some difficulties had arisen because of the childish use of these God-given abilities, they appear to have been very adept at actually delivering the Word of God.

Another church that excelled in the ability of “utterance” was the church in Antioch. It is said of that congregation, *“Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers: as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul”*(Acts 13:1).

This is the kind of speaking to which Peter refers: *“If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God”*(1 Pet 4:11). Paul also referred to this manner of “utterance:” *“Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbor: for we are members one of another”*(Eph 4:25).

It is a great blessing when any gathering of believers is characterized as abounding “in utterance.” **This means there is a capacity to administer much edification.** Such people speak *“unto edification, and exhortation, and comfort”*

Promises and commitments made in faith by honest and good hearts are to carried to their completion– by Given O. Blakely

(1 Cor 14:3). They are able to speak *“not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words”* NASB (1 Cor 2:13). They speak *“words of faith”* that tend to nourish the household of faith (1 Tim 4:16).

Spiritual Babylon does not allow for the development of good kingdom speaking. Very few within the average assembly are able to profitably communicate the truth to others. This condition betrays faulty and misdirected leadership. One of the primary responsibilities of good leaders is to commit the things of God *“to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also”* (2 Tim 2:12). Rarely is anyone able to say to an American congregation, *“Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do”* (1 Thess 5:11). The brethren in Rome were also *“able to admonish one another”* (Rom 15:14).

The Ephesians brethren were told, *“And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord”* (Eph 5:18-19). The Colossians were admonished, *“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in*

your hearts to the Lord” (Col 3:16).

The area of singing is fast becoming one of the most unprofitable areas in the American churches. With a vast and insightful heritage of psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, we are now being deluged with songs that are infantile in both content and musical expertise. Men and women are being taught to lisp some aspect of truth in the language of toddlers, so that the most memorable thing about the singing is what accompanied the songs, and not the songs themselves. Even though we are expressly exhorted to TEACH and ADMONISH one another, we are being led to the spiritual playpens to toss about novel little tunes with few and nearly meaningless words. Very rarely is an extended thought developed in these little musical ditties. Sentences are repeated over and over like the mantras of idolaters – incantations that do not promote godly meditation, or allow the singer to freely navigate in the fertile field of truth.

Is all of this just an innocent trend? Indeed, it is not! **It is a flagrant violation of the revealed purpose of singing, which is to teach and admonish one another.** This is one more area in which spiritual *“utterance”* is being suppressed. Leaders who tolerate this nonsense are no leaders at all – not as God counts leaders. If our singing does not *“feed the flock of God,”* it is a waste of

time. **It is no more right to sing drivel than it is to preach it.**

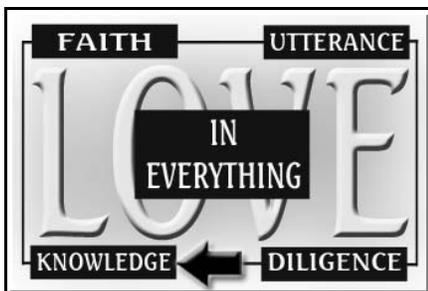
It is time for the church to demand that an emphasis and format be adopted within the assembly that allows for the culturing of godly *“utterance.”* If this costs the careers of some, and a depletion of frolicking educators, so be it! Novices, or *“babes in Christ,”* have no place in leadership – even in singing and the direction of youth. This is not a mere opinion, it is a matter of revelation (1 Tim 3:6; 1 Cor 3:1; Heb 5:12-13; 1 Pet 2:2). There is no valid ministry that deals with the culturing of souls that can be placed into the hands of the unlearned, and those who cannot correctly handle the Word of God. **It is unfortunate that a great number of purported “ministries” within the professed church, are nothing more than seasonal experiences from which people must eventually recover.**

Here, at The word of Truth Fellowship, God has blessed us to be abounding in *“utterance.”* From the younger to the older, brothers and sisters are becoming more and more effective in articulating the things of God. This is a treasure to be guarded with great zeal, and to be used for glory of God.

God hasten the day when churches – any of them – can be said *“abound in utterance!”* It is no glory to be deficient in this area, nor is there anything about the salvation of God that promotes such a deficiency!

ABOUNDING IN KNOWLEDGE

⁷⁶ *“... and knowledge...”* Other versions read, *“understanding,”* NJB and *“so much learning.”* LIVING



A SPECIAL KNOWLEDGE

This is *“knowledge”* of a higher order, for in Christ the knowledge acquired from this world provides nothing of eternal value. **This knowledge pertains to a certain familiarity with the vast domain of eternal things – of God Himself, the Lord Jesus Christ, the *“eternal purpose,”* and the *“great salvation”* of God.** This is knowledge that involves an acquaintance with things that cannot be accessed or known by those who are not born again.

WORLDLY KNOWLEDGE

Earthly knowledge cannot enhance our acquaintance with heavenly realities. If the *“princes of this world,”* were so abysmally ignorant of the *“Lord of glory”* that they crucified Him (1 Cor 2:8), how can the world order contain secrets that augment revelation, or provide a key to spiritual understanding? If, in all the realm of nature, and during all the course of time, *“Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him”* (1 Cor 2:9), how is it remotely possible for the

well of worldly wisdom to yield anything that can enable us to better grasp the truth of God.

What possible advantage can there be before God that does not extend beyond the boundary of the rudimentary? Gathering everything within the sphere of this world – its most astute observations, and its most precise expressions – the Scriptures affirm. *“Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after **the rudiments of the world**, and not after Christ”* (Col 2:8). And again, *“Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from **the rudiments of the world**, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances”* (Col 2:20). *“Rudiments”* are elementary things – **NOT elementary in the Kingdom of God, but elementary in comparison to the things God has revealed.**

If we were able to reach into Christendom and, in one fell swoop, extract everything that is rooted in the wisdom of this world, and is nothing more than the *“rudiments of the world,”* very little would remain. **The structure of much, if not most, of contemporary religion is built upon the eroding pillars of the wisdom of this world.** The church is being taught to view and assess humanity through the microscope of psychology. All manner of human teaching is being sprinkled upon the church as though it had some sanctifying effects upon the elect of God. Men are being told that the secret to understanding the Bible is knowing Greek and Hebrew. Others are told that a special hermeneutical principle is required to bring a proper understanding of the Word of God. Others outline for us a contextual approach to Scripture that leaves us reading the Bible like an intellectual robot. Differences between men and woman are being defined by psychological principles. Sin is being defined by physiological diagnoses, hereditary traits, and chemical genes. Instead of learning to distinguish good and evil, Christians are being taught a flesh-card approach to right and wrong, stuffing second-hand knowledge into the molds of habit and routine.

This has now become the standard approach to developing

“knowledge” within the church. Christian colleges have zealously taken up the cause, contributing to the redefinition of mankind, flesh, sin, need, gifts, leaders, ministries, and kingdom qualifications.

One of the chief flaws in this whole approach is that only a select few can advance in this kind of *“knowledge.”* It is not for the whole body of Christ, but only for those who are in the limelight, or play some role in management. It should be readily apparent that this is not the kind of *“knowledge”* to which our text refers. Rather, worldly knowledge is the kind that *“puffs up”* (1 Cor 8:1).

THE IMPORTANCE OF KNOWLEDGE

There are matters concerning which the people of God are to be knowledgeable. In Christ, an ignorance of

*glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation **in the knowledge of Him**”* (Eph 1:17). The aim for the church is to become united in this knowledge. Thus gifts have been placed within the church to promote *“the edifying of the body of Christ **“till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ”**”* (Eph 4:13).

There is a *“surpassing value”*^{NASB} in knowing Christ – a value that is worth the deliberate and aggressive forfeiture *“of all things”* (Phil 3:8). This is a *“knowledge”* with which we are to be filled. As it is written, *“For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be **filled with the knowledge of**”*

In its broadest definition, the knowledge of our text is “the knowledge of God” (1 Cor 14:34) – acquaintance and familiarity with Him. This knowledge is ministered to us through our perception of the Lord Jesus Christ – “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”

these things is lethal, causing one to be *“alienated from the life of God”* (Eph 4:18). **In its broadest definition, the knowledge of our text is “the knowledge of God”** (1 Cor 14:34) – **acquaintance and familiarity with Him.** This knowledge is ministered to us through our perception of the Lord Jesus Christ – *“the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ”* (2 Cor 4:6). This is the knowledge against which the things of this world are aligned. Therefore God has provided us with powerful spiritual weaponry through which we are *“casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself **against the knowledge of God**”* (2 Cor 10:5).

The Divine objective is to have us increase in this knowledge. Those who know this fervently pray *“That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of*

His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding” (Col 1:9). Thus we are to be found *“increasing in the knowledge of God”* (Col 1:10), and growing *“in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ”* (2 Pet 3:18). Judging from the state of the average American church, you would not think these words were even given by the Holy Spirit. If they are known, they are certainly not being taken seriously.

The “knowledge” of reference is the appointed means through which Divine resources are appropriated.

☛ **Grace and peace are multiplied to us through this means.** *“Grace and peace be multiplied unto you **through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord**”* (2 Pet 1:2). Does anyone imagine they can receive a lot of

grace and peace from God while remaining fundamentally ignorant of Him and His will? Such a circumstance is not even possible. The channel through which grace and peace come to us is *“the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord”* – the discernment of who They are and what They are doing.

- **Everything pertaining to life and godliness is provided through this knowledge.** *“According as His divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him that hath called us to glory and virtue”* (2 Pet 1:3). What do you need to live unto the Lord and be godly? It is all obtained through your knowledge of the Lord. If your knowledge is small, the supplies will be small. If it is large, they will be abundant.
- **We escape the world’s pollution through this knowledge.** *“For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning”* (2 Pet 2:20). Do the contaminations of this world seem to cling to you? Now you know why. Are you able to rid

yourself of the defilements of this present evil world? Now you know why. It is because you have *“the knowledge of the Lord and Savior.”*

- **The spirit of wisdom and revelation – the ability to discern and handle – of God is found in this knowledge.** *“That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him”* (Eph 1:17). When you are able to apply the truth to life’s circumstances, and perceive the hand of the Lord with spiritual profit, it is because of your *“knowledge of Him.”*
- **An increase in spiritual fruitage is traceable to a corresponding increase in this knowledge.** *“For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ”* (2 Pet 1:8). The *“things”* to which he refers are faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love (1:5-7). The presence of these graces confirm that there is a growth in your knowledge of the Lord.

To abound in knowledge is to

flourish in the cognition and understanding of God Himself, and what He is doing in Christ Jesus (Jer 9:23-24). It is to be more thoroughly acquainted with the Person, accomplishments, and ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ (Phil 3:8-10). It is to be *“filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding”* (Col 1:9-10). It involves being able to discern both good and evil without having to attend a variety of workshops (Heb 5:14).

The Corinthians were now abounding in this kind of knowledge, and Paul was quick to declare he had seen it. This had been confirmed by their recovery, as confirmed by their handling of the fornicator in their midst.

It is also to be understood that here *“knowledge”* includes the idea of wisdom or prudence – that is, knowing **how to handle** the *“knowledge”* that is realized by fellowship with the Father and with the Son (1 Cor 1:9; 1 John 1:3).

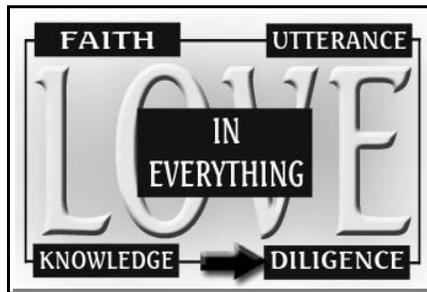
Take time to ponder the churches you know are abounding in this kind of knowledge. Should you be fortunate to think of many of them, take time to give God thanks for their presence. They have a sanctifying influence among the sons of men. We do well to stand behind them in our labors and prayers.

ABOUNDING IN DILIGENCE

“^{7d} . . . and in all diligence . . .”

Other versions read, *“all earnestness,”* NASB *“complete earnestness,”* NIV *“utmost eagerness,”* NRSV *“of a ready mind,”* BBE *“and all carefulness,”* DOUAY *“concern for everything,”* NJB *“such enthusiasm,”* NLT *“all ferventness,”* PNT *“very eager to help,”* IE *“unwearied zeal,”* WEYMOUTH *“perfect enthusiasm,”* WILLIAMS and *“all zeal.”* MONTGOMERY

It should be increasingly apparent to you that we are dealing with matters that are scarcely known among professing Christians. **Yet, these are not qualities that set us apart from other members of the body of Christ – even though it may appear this is true.** These are the Kingdom standard. They are the



kind of things grace produces, and the direction toward which the new creation moves. **If they are not found in those who say they are believers, we have every reason to question the reality of their profession.** This is how newness of life

expresses itself, and where such expression is not found, the Holy Spirit has been grieved and quenched.

THE IMPORTANCE OF DILIGENCE

Here is a quality that is frequently mentioned. It is apparent that it is integral to the new creation, and plays an indispensable role in walking in newness of life. In his practical admonitions concerning daily living, Solomon mentioned diligence eleven times (Prov 4:23; 7:15; 10:4; 11:17; 12:24,27; 13:4; 21:5; 22:29; 23:1; 27:23). Following their deliverance, one of the first things God said to the Israelites involved their diligence: *“If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the*

LORD thy God, and wilt do that which is right in his sight, and wilt give ear to his commandments, and keep all his statutes, I will put none of these diseases upon thee, which I have brought upon the Egyptians: for I am the LORD that healeth thee"(Ex 15:26). In the giving of the Law, Moses referred to **diligence** eleven times (Lev 10:16; Deut 4:6; 6:7,17; 11:13,22; 13:14; 17:4; 19:18; 24:8; 28:1).

- ☛ Apollos, for example, *"spake and taught **diligently** the things of the Lord"*(Acts 18:25).

- ☛ Those who have been gifted by God to *"rule,"* are to do so *"with **diligence**"*(Rom 12:8).

- ☛ A brother who was especially recommended was one who *"oftentimes proved **diligent** in many things"*(2 Cor 8:22).

- ☛ A widow who was supported by the church was required to *"have **diligently** followed every good work"*(1 Tim 5:10).

- ☛ **Diligence** is associated with maintaining *"the full assurance of hope unto the end"*(Heb 6:11).

- ☛ We are told that God is a *"Rewarder of them that **diligently** seek Him"*(Heb 11:6).

- ☛ Believers are to be found *"Looking **diligently** lest any man fail of the grace of God: lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled"*(Heb 12:15).

- ☛ We are to give *"all **diligence**"* to add certain spiritual qualities to our faith (1 Pet 1:5-7).

- ☛ We are solemnly admonished to *"give **diligence** to make your calling and election sure"*(2 Pet 1:10).

- ☛ We are also exhorted, *"be **diligent** that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless"*(2 Pet 3:14).

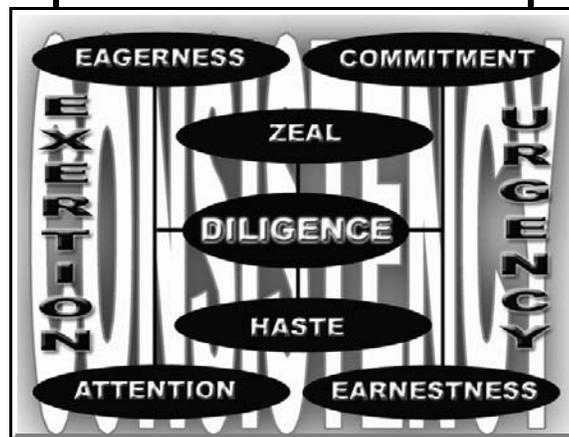
In our dealings with the Lord, diligence is an imperative, not an option. Spiritual life demands it, for it is being

lived out in a hostile realm

WHAT IS DILIGENCE?

The word *"diligence"* is translated from the Greek word *σπουδή* (spoo-day), which has a lexical meaning of, "haste, earnestness in accomplishing, promoting, or striving after anything," ^{THAYER} "as a quality of genuine commitment, zeal, diligence, eagerness; as an expression of active concern devotion, care, goodwill," ^{FRIEBERG} "to do something hurriedly with implication of associated energy; to do quickly," ^{LOUW-NIDA} and "haste, zeal, pains, exertion; take pains to do a thing; with great attention to; zeal, earnestness, seriousness; urgently." ^{LIDDELL-SCOTT}

Diligence involves a readiness to



comply with the requirements of God, and to carry them out without delay and to their fullest extent. There is also a certain consistency in diligence that is associated with faithfulness and thoroughness – traits that are found within the *"new man."*

In Corinth, their preachers and teachers were zealous to deliver the Word. The people extended themselves to hear that Word. They also assisted one another in addressing matters that needed attention. All of this was confirmed in their response to Paul's instruction concerning handling the fornicator amongst them. Discharging their responsibility required an extraordinary amount of diligence.

- ☛ The word sent by Paul had to be delivered to the people.

- ☛ The people had to hear, receiving the message and determining to obey it.

- ☛ The people had to come together in agreement among themselves, with the Lord Jesus, and with the spirit of Paul.

- ☛ The fornicator had to be delivered over the Satan for the destruction of the flesh.

- ☛ They had to purge the offender from their assembly.

There is no way to accomplish such details without diligence. By the grace of God, all of the traits of diligence were present: eagerness, commitment, zeal, haste, attention, and earnestness. There was the willing exertion of effort, and a sense of urgency that characterized their efforts.

What Paul had given them to do was the sort of requirement that can be easily ignored, or postponed, or performed in a sloppy manner – all of which are totally unacceptable before the Lord. Anyone who has been "in the church" for some time is well acquainted with the kind of spirit that tends to pervade the assemblies. To find an assembly where the members are eager to meet more than once a week is getting to be exceedingly difficult.

The existence and duration of powerful expositions of Scripture is being diminished with a rapidity that staggers the minds of those who are hungry and thirsty for righteousness. Such traits, however, are not to be treated as though they are acceptable to God, even if they are ordinary among men.

The absence of *"diligence"* betrays a very serious spiritual condition. **It is a circumstance that puts the people out of harmony with the God of heaven.** God is diligent in His dealings with men. The Lord Jesus is diligent in upholding all things by the word of His power, and making intercession for us. The Holy Spirit is diligent in his indispensable ministry of leading the saints in subjugating the flesh, and producing in them the qualities of the Divine nature. The holy angels are diligent in their ministry to those who are the heirs of salvation. **There is nothing within the circumference of salvation, which is**

exceedingly broad, that is in any way characterized by a lack of diligence. Nothing about grace encourages a lack of diligence. The Holy Spirit does not

contribute to such a state, and the Word of God never commends or excuses it. Wherever “*diligence*” is found, the Spirit of the Lord is at work, conforming people

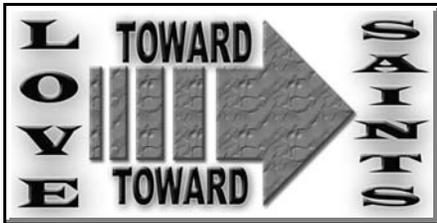
to the image of Christ. Wherever it is not found, there is no comforting assurance that the Lord is among the people. It is no wonder diligence is commended.

ABOUNDING IN LOVE FOR GOD’S SERVANTS

“⁷⁶ . . . and in your love to us . . .

” Other versions read, “in the love we inspired in you,”^{NASB} “in our love for you,”^{NRSV} “In love from you to us,”^{DARBY} “your charity towards us,”^{DOUAY} “and love for us too,”^{NJB} “and such love for us,”^{NLT} and “and in the love that is in you, implanted by us.”^{WEYMOUTH}

Another evidence of the progress of the Corinthians was their love toward Paul and Timothy. It also was something that was “*abounding*” – going beyond the ordinary.



Thus love was confirmed by the way the Corinthians received Paul’s directions. From one point of view, they were most difficult. However, when they regarded as from the Lord, their deep love for Paul was made more fully known. Paul has expressed his perception of this love in several preceding remarks.

• **At the report of their love.** “Great is my boldness of speech toward you,

great is my glorying of you: I am filled with comfort, I am exceeding joyful in all our tribulation” (2 Cor 7:4).

• **When Titus made their state known.** “Nevertheless God, that comforteth those that are cast down, comforted us *by the coming of Titus*” (2 Cor 7:6).

• **By their fervent mind toward Paul** – i.e., their desire to see him, and for his welfare. “And not by his coming only, but by the consolation wherewith he was comforted in you, when he told us your earnest desire, your mourning, *your fervent mind toward me*; so that I rejoiced the more” (2 Cor 7:7).

• **Their zeal in doing what he said.** “For behold this selfsame thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, *what clearing of yourselves*, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal, yea, what revenge! In all things ye have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter” (2 Cor 7:11).

• **Their love bolstered his confidence in them.** “I rejoice therefore that *I have confidence in you* in all things” (2

Cor 7:16).

In this case, their love toward Paul was “*in deed and in truth*” (1 John 3:18). Paul’s depiction of the abounding love of the Corinthians is that of a mighty river that was streaming toward him, as though focused upon him. His wise, loving, and tender treatment of them had unleashed a torrent of brotherly love, confirming that God was at work within them.

It ought to be noted that a love that is not demonstrable is no love at all. Such love is only pretentious, and has no value. God confirmed His love by **what He did**: “Hereby perceive we the love of God, because *He laid down his life for us*: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren” (1 John 3:16). Christ’s love for church is also confirmed by what He did and what He does. “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also *loved the church, and gave Himself for it*” (Eph 5:25). And again, “For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but *nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church*” (Eph 5:29). Just as surely, abounding love is exhibited in our preference for one another. Such love confirms we have really passed from death to life. “We know that we have *passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren*. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death” (1 John 3:14).

ABOUNDING IN THIS GRACE

“⁷⁷ . . . see that ye abound in this grace also.” Other versions read, “see that you abound in *this gracious work* also,”^{NASB} “see that ye also excel in *this grace of giving*,”^{NIV} “so we want you to excel also in *this gracious undertaking*,”^{NRSV} “so you may be *full of this grace in*

the same way,”^{BBE} “so that you excel in *this act of grace* also,”^{ESV} “may excel in *this gracious act* also,”^{NAB} “see that ye abound in *this gracious work* also,”^{NAU} “then make sure that you excel in *this work of generosity* too,”^{NJB} “not I want you to excel also in *this gracious ministry*

of giving,”^{NLT} “see that ye *be plenteous in this grace* also,”^{PNT} “even so see that ye are *plenteous in this benevolence*,”^{TNT} “Now I want you to *be leaders* also in the spirit of cheerful giving,”^{LIVING} “Now, be rich with *this special gift of love*,”^{IE} “see to it that *this grace of liberal giving*

Promises and commitments made in faith by honest and good hearts are to carried to their completion– by Given O. Blakely

also flourishes in you,”^{WEYMOUTH} “the more we want you to be rich in this work of kindness,”^{ISV} “you must see to it that you grow rich in this gracious contribution too,”^{WILLIAMS} “[see to it that you come to the front now and] abound and excel in this gracious work [of almsgiving] also,”^{AMPLIFIED} and “Could you not add generosity to your virtues?”^{PHILLIPS}

WHAT IS HE WRITING ABOUT?

Precisely what is “this grace” to which Paul refers? It is the collection for “the poor saints in Jerusalem” – the gathering of a special offering for them. Paul is saying their giving – financial giving – should be an area in which they abound as they were in faith, utterance, knowledge, diligence, and love. They should allow the grace of God to flow over their finances, and constrain their hearts to liberal giving. Later he will tell them that “God loveth a cheerful giver” – a propitious, willing, and liberal giver (2 Cor 9:7).



If it is true that we have “freely received,” then it is also true, that we ought to “freely give” – without regard to any cost or in convenience to ourselves (Matt 10:8). On one occasion Paul reminded the elders of Ephesus to remember the words of the Lord Jesus. “I have showed you all things, how that so laboring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how He said, It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35).

Excellence in spiritual qualities should spill over into the area of benevolence. Although this is a much neglected area among professing Christians, the person who is not liberal is walking on very tenuous ground. I understand that there are measures of

grace that enable a person to excel in an unusual way in “giving.” However, this is a facet of life in which much is revealed concerning each one of us. The spirit of Achan (Josh 7:21), and of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-10), has no place in the church.

Here is a spiritual aptitude that can be developed significantly within the household of faith – the ability to incorporate the characteristics of our strengths into other aspects of our lives. For the Corinthians, the “abounding” nature of their faith, utterance, knowledge, diligence, and love should also characterize their giving. It is not right to be abounding in one grace, while meager in another – to rise to a full potential in one area of spiritual life, yet be nearly ready to die in another.

Who can justify the existence of such inequalities? Could it be true that there is some aspect of life that grace cannot strengthen and bring to its fulness? Is this the kind of grace that is made known in the Gospel of Christ? Is there sufficiency in Him or not?

THE ADDITION FACTOR

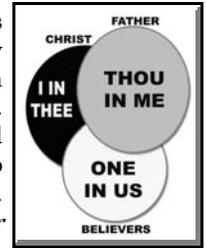
I refer to this consideration as THE ADDITION FACTOR, or, as Peter says it, adding to our faith. Paul challenges the Corinthians to become excellent in taking a collection as well as speaking a word. In

what possible way would it be comely for them to abound in addressing their own deficiencies, but be beggarly in addressing the needs of their brethren? How could anyone justify advancing in certain vital and personal graces and virtues without it having any effect upon those of the family of God who were lacking?

JOINED TO THE LORD

Spiritual life, in its very essence, is union with God through Jesus Christ. It is not essentially life that centers in our own personal improvement, although that is absolutely essential. When Jesus prayed for those who would believe on Him through the word of the Apostles, He was very pointed about it. He pled for

the Father to so bless them that they would be “one” with Him and the Father. He prayed they would be incorporated into the Divine family. “Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on Me through their word; that they all may be one: as thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in Us: that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me . . . I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that Thou hast sent Me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved Me” (John 17:20-21,23).



The union that is formed between believers and the Father and the Son is a productive one. It is not a mere technicality. Believers share, in their measure, with the Father in His attention toward the righteous (Psa 34:15). They participate with Jesus in loving and caring for the church (Eph 5:29). They join with the Father and the Son in seeking and saving the lost. They are participants, not spectators. This is why believers are referred to as “laborers together with God” (1 Cor 3:9), “ambassadors for Christ” (2 Cor 5:20), and “joint heirs with Christ” (Rom 8:17). It is why God is said to be working within us “both to will and to do of His good pleasure” (Phil 2:13).

With this in mind, how could the Corinthians possibly justify ignoring the condition of their brethren in Jerusalem? What kind of explanation could they possibly offer for delaying to do what they had said they would do? Paul knows that such a response is wholly out of keeping with both the nature and objective of our being “joined to the Lord.” Therefore, without shame, he pleads the case for a hearty response among the Corinthians to the need of the “poor saints in Jerusalem.” The fact that they have excelled in faith, utterance, knowledge, diligence, and love, confirms that they are able to do this also. There is a spiritual competency among them. Therefore, Paul will press this matter with holy relentlessness.

Promises and commitments made in faith by honest and good hearts are to carried to their completion– by Given O. Blakely

NOT BY COMMANDMENT

^{8a} *I speak not by commandment* . . . Other versions read, “I am not speaking this as a command.”^{NASB} “I am not commanding you,”^{NIV} “I am not giving you an order,”^{BBE} “I do not speak as commanding it,”^{DARBY} “I am not saying you must do it,”^{NLT} “not according to a commandment do I speak,”^{YLT} “I am not saying this in the spirit of a command,”^{WILLIAMS} “I give this not as an order [to dictate to you],”^{AMPLIFIED} and “I don’t want you to read this as an order.”^{PHILLIPS}

Here is a most marvelous expression of the nature of New Covenant. Those with a propensity toward Law will see nothing of value in this text. It speaks of an order that vastly differs from that of Law, or mere compulsion. **If a person is duty-centered, doing only what is necessary, they are totally profitless in the Kingdom.** Jesus referred to this principle when He said, “So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, **We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do**” (Luke 17:10).

I have long associated with a people who asked, “Do we HAVE to do this or that?” How long I have heard expressions like, “Does the Bible say we HAVE to go to church?” Or, “God has not commanded tithing, so we do not have to do so.” Or, “Does the Bible command us to take the Lord’s supper every week?” Or, “Is it wrong to take the Lord’s Supper more than once a week?” Or, “Do I have to witness to others?” You can probably come up with a list of your own.

Is this a proper stance for the believer – one in which **only** what is required is done? To the legalist it sounds perfectly reasonable. However, to the person who lives by faith, it borders on insanity, and is seen as utter foolishness.

AN ABUNDANT ECONOMY

Are we to imagine that all God offers in salvation is the bare requirements – just enough to get us out of hell and into heaven? Is that the kind of thing God has represented Himself as doing? Is not His salvation called a “great

salvation” (Heb 2:3). Is not the life that He provides us in Christ referred to as “life more abundantly” (John 10:10)? The mercy by which we have been begotten is called “abundant mercy” (1 Pet 1:3). What we receive in Christ Jesus is the “abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness” (Rom 5:17). Does that sound meager? When God gave us the Holy Spirit He lavished the gift upon us. As it is written, “the Holy Spirit, which He poured out on us **abundantly**” (Titus 3:5-6). We are told of the “riches of His goodness” (Rom 2:4), the “riches of His

remembered that Paul had “obtained mercy of the Lord to be faithful” (1 Cor 7:25). **That is, he was trustworthy in his application of the truth as well as in his affirmation of it.** He had a grasp of the truth that enabled him to use it correctly, and apply it with spiritual expertise. That makes his words faithful ones – words that did, in fact, convey the mind of the Lord.

Now Paul speaks to the Corinthians as one who perceives the scope and nature of the redemption that

It is, for example, possible to love God, not because you have to, but because He first loved you (1 John 4:19). It is possible to offer our bodies as a living sacrifice unto God, not because we are required to do so, but “by the mercies of God”

grace” (Eph 1:7), the “riches of Christ” (Eph 3:8), and “all riches of the full assurance of understanding” (Col 2:2).

How do we speak to the people of God in such a marvelous economy? How are they to be motivated? Do we bring out the scourge of Law, and threaten them with punishment? Do we set before them maximums and minimums, and supply them with the yardstick of ordinances and statutes? Is that the way it is done? Must we set before them a commandment before they are obligated?

PAUL’S APPROACH

For some, the expression “I speak not by commandment” means God did not tell Paul to say this. Therefore, they reason, this is nothing more than an opinion. Hence, it is an option, not a necessity. Paul uses similar language elsewhere (1 Cor 7:6,12,25; 2 Cor 11:7).

First, let us dispense with the nonsense that affirms such sayings, spoken without a commandment from the Lord, have no real weight, and are nothing more than opinions. It must be

is in Christ Jesus. He knows the impact that truth has upon a tender heart. He knows how the Savior ministers to His own body, and how various members of the His body play a critical role in that ministry. Therefore, he does not come to them in the spirit of Moses, but in the spirit of Christ.

Grace operates under a different principle, moving men by love, and motivating them by promise. It reasons from a different perspective, sees a fuller picture, and offers a greater incentive.

It is, for example, possible to love God, not because you have to, but because He first loved you (1 John 4:19). It is possible to offer our bodies as a living sacrifice unto God, not because we are required to do so, but “by the mercies of God” (Rom 12:1). It is a blessed day indeed, when men come out from under the whip of the Law into the domain where men are moved by their heart.

THERE ARE COMMANDMENTS

This does not mean there is no commandment regarding our attention to

the needs of our brethren. Jesus spoke of almsgiving. *“But rather give alms of such things as ye have; and, behold, all things are clean unto you”* (Luke 11:41). He told His disciples, *“Sell that ye have, and give alms; provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth”* (Luke 12:33).

Paul reminded the Galatians of what the Apostles told him, *“Only they would that we should remember the poor; the same which I also was forward to do”* (Gal 2:10). The Hebrew believers were told, *“But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased”* (Heb 13:16). Believers are

admonished concerning meeting the needs of the saints: *“Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer; distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality”* (Rom 12:12-13). Concerning assisting the poorer Jewish brethren, Paul reminded the Roman saints, *“For if the Gentiles have been made partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister unto them in carnal things”* (Rom 15:27). The Ephesians were exhorted, *“Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labor, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth”* (Eph 4:28). John wrote, *“But whoso hath this world’s good, and seeth his brother have need, and*

shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?” (1 John 3:17).

Let none imagine that God has not spoken directly to the matter of assisting believers that are in a state of need. If a person can only be moved by a “commandment,” there are commandments on this matter, and they are very specific. However, Paul has not chosen to use that method. He resorts to a higher motivation that is more in keeping with the nature of the New Covenant. This is the way of charity, which Paul elsewhere refers to as “a more excellent way.” Tender hearts will sense the power of this approach.

BY OCCASION OF THE FORWARDNESS OF OTHERS

“^{8b} . . . but by occasion of the forwardness of others . . .” Other versions read, “by the diligence of others,”^{NKJV} “through the earnestness of

Corinthians because of a commandment to do so. He has rather been moved to strongly exhort the Corinthians because of the zeal that he has seen in “the

rise to spiritual excellence become the standard by which others can be tested. For example, it is possible to encourage fervent and effective prayers by pointing to Elijah. *“The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit”* (James 5:18).

Let none imagine that God has not spoken directly to the matter of assisting believers that are in a state of need. If a person can only be moved by a “commandment,” there are commandments on this matter

The entire eleventh chapter of Hebrews approaches faith in this manner. After defining faith as “the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen,” and declaring “it is impossible” to please God without faith, the Spirit calls upon us to consider those who had excellent faith. He parades before us Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Israel, Rahab, Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, and the prophets (Heb 11:4-32). In doing this, we are being provoked to see them as examples, not as mere heroes. They set forth the potential of faith – the faith that we ourselves possess.

others,”^{NASB} “by comparing it with the earnestness of others,”^{NIV} “using the ready mind of others,”^{BBE} “Through the zeal of others,”^{DARBY} “by the carefulness of others,”^{DOUAY} “by your concern for others,”^{NAB} “even though the other churches are eager to do it,”^{NLT} “because of the ferventness of other,”^{PNT} “because other are so fervent,”^{TNT} “by the occasion of the forwardness of others,”^{WEB} “the standard of other men’s earnestness,”^{WEYMOUTH} “by the enthusiasm of others,”^{ISV} “by [pointing out] the zeal of others,”^{AMPLIFIED} and “by what I have seen in others of eagerness to help.”^{PHILLIPS}

churches of Macedonia.” He has witnessed them rise to meet the need of supporting the poorer brethren in Jerusalem, even though they were themselves in a “great trial of affliction,” and were in “deep poverty” besides. He has brought the zeal of these churches to the attention of the Corinthians in order to move them to rise to excellence in their giving. He does not consider the Macedonians unique in their giving, as though they were the only ones who were able to “abound” in the grace of benevolence.

A KINGDOM MANNER

In the Divine economy, those who

By pointing to the response of the churches in Macedonia Paul is putting the accent on the power of faith. The

Paul is not moved to stir up the

Macedonians did not have access to any grace that was not also available to the Corinthians. Grace could be just as effective in another part of the world, and under a differing set of circumstances. There were not special heavenly supplies that could not be accessed by faith in Corinth as well as faith in Macedonia. In fact, the financial condition of the brethren in Corinth suggested that they should actually have dwarfed the giving of the Macedonians. Instead, they had fallen behind the accomplishments of those who possessed less.

Thus Paul, already stirred up by the generosity of the Macedonians, seeks to provoke the Corinthians to love and good works by also making them aware of the excellence of their brethren in Macedonia.

OUR OWN ASSEMBLY

The response of our own assembly to the things of God has been widely reported. Although we are a group of no consequence within the framework of sectarianism, the things that come out of this assembly have few comparisons in the world. The scope of understanding that is revealed through the various members, and the remarkable variety of materials being made available to the world is staggering to consider. **Yet, we have done nothing that any group of devoted believers could not do.** We enjoy a “*common salvation*” and a “*common faith*.” Every single spiritual resource to which we have access is available to any and every person who leaves all to follow Jesus, and is strong in faith, giving glory to God. In every way, this is a “*common salvagion*.”

There is a sense in which the **spiritual accomplishments of an assembly become the standard for others.** They are a demonstration of what can happen when people really walk in the newness of life. It is, for example, possible for eight and ten year old children to make insightful remarks in the assembly of the righteous. It is possible for those with no formal training to become competent and edifying speakers. It is possible for the “*common people*” to have a working knowledge of the Scriptures, familiarity with the nature and benefits of the New Covenant, and the ability to hear and speak of them intelligently. These are not unusual things in the Spirit. The existence of them anywhere establishes a sort of standard to which all who lack them must aspire.

PROVING THE SINCERITY OF LOVE

“^{8c} . . . **and to prove the sincerity of your love.**” Other versions read, “*I am testing the sincerity of your love,*”^{NKJV} “*I am testing the genuineness of your love,*”^{NRSV} “*to prove . . . that your love also is genuine,*”^{RSV} “*proving . . . the sincerity also of your love,*”^{ASV} “*as a test of the quality of your love,*”^{BBE} “*approving also the good disposition of your charity,*”^{DOUAY} “*prove the naturalness of your love,*”^{GENEVA} “*This is one way to prove your love is real,*”^{NLT} “*allowing the unfeignedness of your love,*”^{PNT} “*prove I your love whether it be perfect or no,*”^{TNT} “*This is one way to prove your love is real, that it goes beyond mere words,*”^{LIVING} “*I am only testing to see if your love is true,*”^{IE} and “*I am trying to prove the reality of your love.*”^{MONTGOMERY}

These are hard words for the flesh – in fact, the flesh cannot receive them at all. Paul does not take for granted that all men know that the Corinthians love the brethren, as we are all enjoined to do (John 13:34; 15:12,17; Rom 13:8; 1 Pet 1:22; 1 John 3:11,23). He himself has now been convinced of the genuineness of the Corinthians love toward him (7:7; 8:7). However, the validity of their love cannot be measured by their affection for him alone. **Real love – the kind that confirms**

we have passed from death to life – is exhibited by our attitude toward “the whole family” of God (Eph 3:15). Thus we read, “*We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death*” (1 John 3:14).

Is it really necessary to “*prove the sincerity of your love?*” Is it not enough simply to say we love God’s people, and

relentlessly to substantiate that point. Nevertheless, this is not the truth. **“Love of the brethren” is not a private matter.** Nor, indeed, can anyone boast that they love God’s people without passing tests of their sincerity.

Solemnly we are told, “*But whoso hath this world’s good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how*

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let it rest at that? Isn’t our love for the people of God a personal matter that ought not to be tested and inquired into by other brethren? Indeed, the flesh thinks this is the case, and will argue

dwelleth the love of God in him?” (1 John 3:17). Again, it is observed, “*If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God*

whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from Him, That he who loveth God love his brother also" (1 John 4:20-21). **Thus, our love for God Himself is confirmed by our love for His people** – a love that comes to their aid in times of distress. Therefore we read, "My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; **but in deed and in truth**" (1 John 3:18).

AN INTUITIVE LOVE

The love of the brethren is, from a human point of view, an intuitive love. By definition, intuition is "quick and ready insight . . . the power or faculty of attaining to direct knowledge or cognition without evident rational thought and inference." MERRIAM-WEBSTER In Christ Jesus, this knowledge is actually acquired from the Lord Himself, and is thus a higher form of intuition. Thus we read, "But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: **for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another**" (1 Thess 4:9).

continued steadfastly in "the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers" (Acts 2:42). Faced with the inconvenience of being away from home, and no doubt running out of resources because they remained in Jerusalem longer than they had originally planned, the brethren quickly rose to the occasion. They did not need to be admonished, but "**sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need**" (Acts 2:45).

Several months after Pentecost, with the church continuing to grow, it began to experience serious opposition (Acts 4:23-31). With numbers growing, and inconvenience and necessity rearing their ugly heads, the brethren again rose to the occasion. They did not require a special word from any of the apostles to consider one another. Instead, it is

brethren which dwelt in Judaea- which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul" (Acts 11:27-30).

When the Spirit is not quenched, and men and women live by faith, this is the kind of thing that happens. "Christ in you" (Col 1:27) reacts no differently to His people than He did when He was upon earth. That is what I mean by saying the love of the brethren is an intuitive love.

Now Paul puts the love of the Corinthians to the test. He already knows what real love does. It has been demonstrated in "the churches of Macedonia," who, though in a great trial of affliction, did not think of themselves when they heard of needy brethren. **That is what love does – the love that is taught men by the Lord Himself.** That love, if present in the Corinthians, had fallen asleep, for they had not followed through with their commitment to "the poor saints which" were "at Jerusalem" (Rom 15:26). If, however, their love for God, Christ, himself, and Christ's brethren is genuine, they will quickly recover from their lethargy, and do what they had promised a year ago.

SOME IMPLICATIONS

This case has several implications for us. **If the need of the poor saints in Jerusalem proved to be an occasion in which the sincerity of the Corinthian's love was tested, it casts a new and fresh light on opportunities that are set before the saints.** If it is true that the exalted Jesus is governing the whole world with the interest of His people in mind (Eph 1:22-23), **then opportunities are nothing less than doors that He has opened.** It is not coincidence when we become knowledgeable of genuine kingdom needs. If, in the case of our own fellowship, people from eleven different nations ask us to share what we have seen with them, this is not happenstance. If we give due consideration to such inquiries, God will confirm their validity to our hearts and conscience. Should our hearts attest to this validity, the opportunity is actually a call from heaven to enter that opened door.

This case has several implications for us. If the need of the poor saints in Jerusalem proved to be an occasion in which the sincerity of the Corinthian's love was tested, it casts a new and fresh light on opportunities that are set before the saints.

When the "new man" perceives a needy brother or sister, he immediately seeks the means to bring assistance to the needy one. There is no need for lengthy explanations, or for a lecture on the necessity of loving in word and deed.

Some examples of this kind of love will suffice to confirm what I have said.

On the day of Pentecost "devout men out of every nation under heaven" were present (Acts 2:5). Following the events of that day, when 3,000 souls "gladly received" Peter's word, "and were baptized," these brethren remained in Jerusalem. Rejoicing in the glory of God's salvation, they all

written, "And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: **neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own: but they had all things common**" (Acts 4:32).

When Agabus, a prophet from Jerusalem, "signified by the Spirit that there should be a great dearth throughout all the world," the brethren immediately responded. They did not need to be admonished to consider whether or not their brethren would be in need. It is written, "Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, **determined to send relief unto the**

OPEN DOORS ARE TEST OF OUR FAITH AS WELL AS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR OUR INVOLVEMENT

Promises and commitments made in faith by honest and good hearts are to carried to their completion– by Given O. Blakely

KNOWING THE GRACE OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST

“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.”

In this text we are witnessing the wisdom of a “wise master builder” (1 Cor 3:10). **Having before him a valid work of the Lord, he is calling the saints into that work.** First, he alerts them to the legitimacy of the cause. Then he brings to their remembrance their earlier commitment to the cause. Next he brings to their attention the superior response of brethren who were less able than they were. Additionally, he shares why he is going to such lengths to plead this case, declaring he was testing their love. Now, he delivers the strongest argument of all – the action of the Lord Jesus.

There is a certain sequence in these approaches. They proceed from the lowest to the highest; from the weakest to the strongest; from the most obvious to the least obvious. Viewed as a tree, he proceeds from the branches to the roots.

This kind of approach is necessitated because of the nature of spiritual retrogression. When people go

things that are more readily apparent to the natural faculties. Therefore in bringing people back to the place of spiritual clarity, it is often necessary to reason from the most obvious to the least obvious – from the most apparent to the least apparent. Paul will now make an appeal to the strongest and most foundational fact. **All of the other reasoning is of no lasting value until this is seen.** Godly action must be based upon a firm and unshakeable foundation.

When it comes to moving the people of God, everything must eventually get back to Christ Jesus Himself. He, and He alone, is the “sure foundation” upon which all valid kingdom labors are built. As it is written, “*Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste*” (Isa 28:16; 1 Pet 2:16). And again, “*For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ*” (1 Cor 3:11).

YE KNOW

“*For ye know . . .*” Other versions read, “*For you seem*”^{BBE} “*You are well aware,*”^{NJB} “*For by experience you know,*”^{WILLIAMS} “*For you are becoming progressively acquainted with and recognizing more strongly and clearly,*”^{AMPLIFIED} and “*do you remember.*”^{PHILLIPS}

The knowledge of the essential elements of the Gospel are assumed to be known among the saints. Where this condition does not exist, the people have either been subjected to a flawed Gospel, or they have not believed the Gospel.

This text presumes that the preaching of the Gospel included some elaboration of the point now being made. This was a common perspective, at some

time known and embraced by them all. The expression “*we know*” postulates that what follows has, in fact, been proclaimed and embraced. The alarming thing about

this text is that it is not at all commonly known among professed believers. For many, this is a startling revelation of things hitherto unknown. This condition confirms the remarkable extent of “*falling away*” that has taken place in the American church. While we blush to acknowledge such a condition, we do know the reason for its presence. **It is because men have diverted the emphasis of the church to lesser things** – things that do not require a sturdy and consistent proclamation of the Gospel.

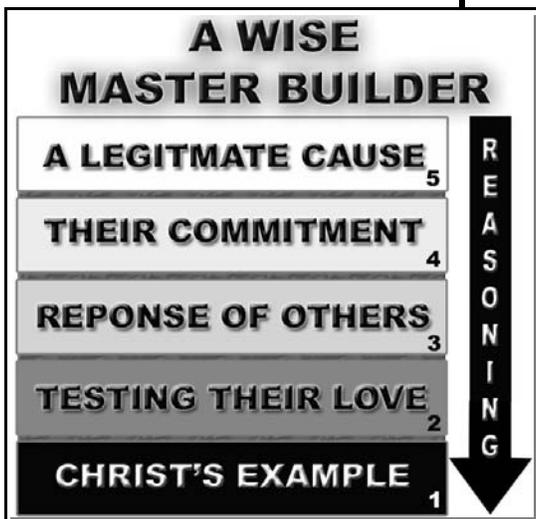
THE GRACE OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST

“*. . . the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ . . .*” Other versions read, “*the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ,*”^{NRSV} “*the generosity of our Lord Jesus Christ,*”^{NJB} “*how full of love and kindness our Lord Jesus Christ was,*”^{NLT} “*the liberality of our Lord Jesus Christ,*”^{TNT} “*the gracious love of our Lord Jesus Christ,*”^{IE} “*the condescending goodness of our Lord Jesus Christ,*”^{WEYMOUTH} “*the unmerited favor shown by our Lord Jesus Christ,*”^{WILLIAMS} and “*the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ (His kindness, His gracious generosity, His undeserved favor and spiritual blessing).*”^{AMPLIFIED}

Here salvation is traced to “*the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.*” This is not an ambiguous reference to grace, or some vague generality. It refers to something specific, as indicated in the New Revised Standard Version – “*the generous act.*” This is something that was done kindly and lovingly. Whatever it refers to, Jesus did it willingly, out of goodwill, and in tender mercy. In this “*act*” there is a revelation of the Lord Himself – specifically how He went about to bring the ultimate benefit to us. We will find that the benefit was procured at great personal expense to Christ.

Grace is consistently associated with things being done or accomplished, rather than mere potential. I do not believe you will ever read of “*grace*” independently of some accomplishment. Take note of how the Spirit uses “*grace.*”

☛ **Continue** in grace (Acts 13:43).



backwards, drawing back, the first things that become obscure are the **foundational** things. The last things that become obscure are the more obvious ones –

- ☛ Saved through grace (Acts 15:11).
- ☛ The gift of **righteousness** by grace (Rom 5:15).
- ☛ **Speaking** through grace (Rom 12:3).
- ☛ A **partaker** by grace (1 Cor 10:30).
- ☛ Being **strong** in grace (1 Tim 2:1).
- ☛ **Justified** by grace (Rom 3:24).
- ☛ Grace **reigns** through righteousness (Rom 5:21).
- ☛ Abundant **labors** by grace (1 Cor 15:10).
- ☛ Our lives in this world **conducted** by grace (2 Cor 1:12).
- ☛ Made **acceptable** by grace (Eph 1:6).
- ☛ **Forgiveness** by grace (Eph 1:7).
- ☛ **Speech** sanctified by grace (Col 4:6).
- ☛ Everlasting **consolation** and good **hope** through grace (2 Thess 2:16).
- ☛ Grace brings large measures of **faith** and **love** (1 Tim 1:14).
- ☛ Jesus **tasted death** for every man by the grace of God (Heb 2:9).

Grace, then, is an appointed means to the accomplishment of God-ordained objectives. Where there is no need for something to be done, there is no need for grace! In this text, there was something that needed to be done for men, and for God as well.

THOUGH HE WAS RICH

“... that, though He was rich . . .” Other versions read, “though He had wealth,”^{BBE} “being rich,”^{DARBY} “Though He was very rich,”^{NLT} “though He was so very rich,”^{LIVING} and “He was rich beyond our telling.”^{PHILLIPS}

The saga of redemption begins with some understanding about the Savior BEFORE His entrance into the world. We do not have a lot of details about the Savior before He was made flesh. There is enough, however, for us to grasp a sense of what was involved in saving our fallen race. Here are some

references to the glorious and “rich” condition of the Savior prior to His incarnation.

- ☛ “But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; **whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting**” (Micah 5:2)
- ☛ “In the beginning was the Word, and **the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him; and without Him was**

earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: **all things were created by Him, and for Him**” (Col 1:16).

- ☛ “And **He is before all things, and by him all things consist**” (Col 1:17).

Prior to coming into the world, the Lord lacked nothing – He was “rich.” He not only was “with God,” He “was God!” He was in no way dependent upon anything or anyone. He had no weakness. He had no need to obtain something outside of Himself. He was “rich” in the fullest and ultimate sense of the word.

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not any thing made that was made” (John 1:1-3).

- ☛ “What and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up **where He was before?**” (John 6:62).
- ☛ “Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, **Before Abraham was, I am**” (John 8:58).
- ☛ “And now, O Father, glorify Thou Me with Thine own self with **the glory which I had with Thee before the world was**” (John 17:5).
- ☛ “But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, **by whom are all things, and we by Him**” (1 Cor 8:6).
- ☛ “Who, being **in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God**” (Phil 2:6).
- ☛ “For by **Him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in**

FOR YOUR SAKE HE BECAME POOR

“... yet for your sakes He became poor . . .” Other versions read, “He became so very poor,”^{LIVING} and “He became very poor.”^{IE}

Jesus did not become “poor” by circumstance, but by choice. **Jesus was deprived of something** – He “became poor.” Something was taken from Him – He “became poor,” **This is the One who made all things, and for whom they were all made.** He is the One who “became poor.”

In His incarnation, the Savior, from one point of view, became impoverished.

- ☛ First, He consented to enter into a special body, made for Him so that He could die (Heb 10:5-10).
- ☛ Second, He emptied Himself to become a servant, and was “made in the likeness of men” (Phil 2:7).

- Third, He submitted to a condition in which He was not only subject to temptation, but “suffered being tempted” (Heb 2:18; 4:15).
- Fourth, He was found in a condition that was straitening to Him, subjecting Him to certain restrictions (Luke 12:50).
- Fifth, although He was the Creator, and had no deficiency or lack, in coming to earth He experienced hunger (Matt 4:2), thirst (John 19:28), and weariness (John 4:6).

be ravished by the powers of darkness (Lk 22:53), to be judged by Pilate (John 19:11), and murdered by men (Acts 7:52). That death, however, involved much more than what He experienced at the hands of men. He was “smitten of God” (Isa 53:4), “made to be sin” (2 Cor 5:21), “made a curse” (Gal 3:13), and, “forsaken” by God (Matt 27:46). In doing this, Jesus “tasted death for every man” (Heb 2:9).

Such awful experiences are encapsulated in the expression, “He became poor for our sakes.” He was deprived of the prerogatives or rights of

“. . . that ye through His poverty might be rich.” Other versions read, “so that through His need you might have wealth.”^{BBE} “by His poverty might be enriched.”^{DARBY} “so that you being poor He could make rich.”^{LIVING} “Why? So that you could become rich – because He was poor.”^{IE} “in order that you, through His poverty might grow rich.”^{WEYMOUTH} and “in order that by His poverty you might become enriched (abundantly supplied).”^{AMPLIFIED}

THE RICHES OF THIS WORLD

Those who affirm that this richness has to do with silver, gold, and possessions, insult our intelligence, demean God’s great salvation, and blaspheme the Lord’s Christ. Such folly is not innocent, nor should it be treated as though there was no much as an infinitesimal particle of truth in it. **If deliverance from this world is integral to salvation, then a primary inheritance in it is nothing more than an absurdity.**

Nowhere is any person in Christ encouraged to seek after riches – nowhere! Those who dare to engage in such pursuits are candidly told, “*But those who crave to be rich fall into temptation and a snare and into many foolish (useless, godless) and hurtful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction and miserable perishing. For the love of money is a root of all evils; it is through this craving that some have been led astray and have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves through with many acute [mental] pangs*”^{AMPLIFIED} (1 Tim 6:9-10). **It requires a foolish and hard heart for a person to read such sobering words, and then engage in a quest for this world’s riches.**

The Scriptures recognize that there are some people in Christ who do possess wealth already. **The possession of wealth is not wrong – a quest for wealth is!** There is a special admonition to those who already have wealth. “*As for the rich in this world, charge them not to be proud and arrogant and contemptuous of others, nor to set their hopes on uncertain riches, but on God, Who richly and ceaselessly provides us with everything for [our] enjoyment. [Charge them] to do good, to be rich in good works, to be liberal and generous of heart, ready to share [with others], In*

Jesus did not become “poor” by circumstance, but by choice. Jesus was deprived of something – He “became poor.” Something was taken from Him – He “became poor,” This is the One who made all things, and for whom they were all made. He is the One who “became poor.”

- Sixth, He was in a state where he grew in wisdom, and in stature, and in favor with God and man (Lk 2:52).
- Seventh, while in the earth, the grace of God was upon Him (Luke 2:40).
- Eighth, he experienced strong crying and tears (Heb 5:7).
- Ninth, the power of darkness was given dominion over Him for a specified duration of time (Lk 22:53).
- Tenth, He gave His “back to the smiters, and His cheeks to them that plucked out the hair” (Isa 50:6).
- Eleventh, He “humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Phil 2:8).

There is a sense in which this pertains to His single act of laying down His life (John 10:17-18; Romans 5:19). In this single act He “laid down His life” (1 John 3:16; John 10:17). He submitted to

Deity, sheathing the sword of omnipotence.

All of this, we are told, was “for your sakes.” There was a benevolent purpose that moved Jesus to do this. It was not a mere display of Divine restraint. This is the only way God could effectively deal with sin, and thereby resolve the human dilemma.

In the ultimate sense of the word, Jesus filled our need when He was in a “great trial of affliction.” In His death He bruised the dead of the serpent, delivering a mortal bruise to him (Heb 2:14). He plundered principalities and powers, bringing about liberty for the captives (Col 2:15). He blotted out the bill of indebtedness that belonged to us (Col 2:14). In His death He reconciled us to God (Col 1:21), and made peace (Col 1:20). He was “crucified through weakness” (2 Cor 13:4), but the result of that “weakness,” and the staggering poverty that it revealed is marvelous beyond description.

THAT YE MIGHT BE RICH

this way laying up for themselves [the riches that endure forever as] a good foundation for the future, so that they may grasp that which is life indeed" AMPLIFIED (1 Tim 6:17-19).

These words are not difficult to understand. Those who have riches are not to set their hopes on having more of them, for they are "uncertain." Instead, they are to "use" their riches to do good works, using them generously toward others. In this way, the handling of their goods will impact upon their eternal destiny.

Jesus did not have to die and be raised from the dead for you to be wealthy in this world. The very notion that this is the case betrays a state of spiritual blindness. Job was rich (Job 1:3). Abraham was rich (Gen 13:2). Solomon was rich (1 Kgs 10:23). Hezekiah was rich (2 Kgs 20:13,15). Joseph of Arimathea was rich (Matt 27:57). Zacchaeus was rich (Lk 19:2). No redemption was required for them to have riches: no death of a substitute, no forsaking of the Beloved One by the Father, and no tasting of death for every man! The Lord Jesus Christ did not have to "become poor" in order for them to have those riches!

THE RICHES THAT REQUIRED JESUS' POVERTY

The riches to which our text refers DID require Jesus to become "poor." These are riches that no man could obtain if Jesus did not "become poor." These are the "riches" that transfer into "the world to come." Death cannot separate you from them, nor can they be left to someone else upon your departure from the vale of tears.

The "riches" that we obtain must be of the same order as those that Jesus forfeited. You cannot buy temporal treasures with an eternal currency, nor can you buy eternal things with a temporal currency. Who is not able to see this? It is too plain for anyone to have difficulty perceiving it. The exchange must be of the same spiritual gender.

There are "true riches" – real

wealth that transcends the natural order, and extend into the world to come (Lk 16:11). The salvation of God introduces us to this category of riches – **riches that required the Lord Jesus to become poor if we were to possess them.** Here are a few of them.

- The "riches of His goodness" (Rom 2:4).
- The "riches of His glory" (Rom 9:23; Eph 3:16).
- The "riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God" (Rom 11:33).
- The "riches of His grace" (Eph 1:7).

riches, Jesus had to become "poor."

Allow me to say this another way. **We are saved by Christ's humanity, which is the essence of His poverty.** In order for the Word to "become flesh," He had to "become poor."

THE POINT OF THE STATEMENT

The point of this statement concerning Christ's poverty resulting in us becoming "rich," is powerful and compelling. **How can any person, knowing the poverty that was required for him to enjoy eternal riches, balk at the idea of being inconvenienced, or losing some of his possessions, for the sake of bettering his brethren?** Does

How can any person, knowing the poverty that was required for him to enjoy eternal riches, balk at the idea of being inconvenienced, or losing some of his possessions, for the sake of bettering his brethren?

- The "riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints" (Eph 1:18).
- The "exceeding riches of His grace" (Eph 2:7).
- The "unsearchable riches of Christ" (Eph 3:8).
- God's "riches in glory by Christ Jesus" (Phil 4:19).
- The "riches of the glory of the mystery" (Col 1:27).
- The "riches of the full assurance of understanding" (Col 2:2).
- Being "rich in good works" (1 Tim 6:18).
- The "riches" of "the reproach of Christ" (Heb 11:26).
- Being "rich in faith" (James 2:5).

In order for us to possess these

Barnabas presently have any regrets about selling a parcel of land and laying the proceeds "at the apostle's feet" (Acts 4:37)? And, do you suppose that Ananias and Sapphira are presently relishing the fact that, during the very same occasion, they chose to keep back a part of the money they gained by selling one of their possessions (Acts 5:1-2)?

If the Corinthians would only consider what it cost Jesus for them to "come behind in no gift," they would be forward to take up a sizeable collection for their poorer brethren in Jerusalem. Perhaps they would also be able to see they were enjoying the spiritual "fatness" of the Jewish olive tree, and not their own (Rom 11:17). They owed these people something! **The strongest argument for liberality is salvation itself, which is characterized by abundance from beginning to end.** That abundance has come to us at a great personal cost to the Savior – and Jesus is not presently the worst for it.

AN ABUNDANT SALVATION IS GREATLY OBSCURED BY MEAGER GIVING

Promises and commitments made in faith by honest and good hearts are to carried to their completion– by Given O. Blakely

CONCLUSION

Thus we have come to see a vein of spiritual reasoning that is most glorious. **Noble causes are deserving of noble and insightful effort.** We also see that there is no subject – even an exceedingly practical one like taking up a collection – that is not seen differently when the person and work of Christ are considered. Christ Jesus has a sanctifying power in every consideration,

and we do well to cause that to be known.

Also, when we are dealing with matters that have to do with the saints of God, even if it is their temporal needs, we are on holy ground. We must not take such matters lightly, or imagine ourselves incapable of meeting needs that have been providentially brought to our attention.

It is good for every gathering of believers to determine among themselves that they will not allow an open door to be set before them without giving due heed to it. It is also good to resolve they will not permit those who are in more difficult circumstances to outdo them in meeting the needs of the people of God. Now, let those with ears hear what the Spirit has said to the churches.

Our next Hungry Saints Meeting will be held on Friday, 8/19/2005. In this session, we continue our current series of lessons on the Epistle of Second Corinthians. The thirty-fifth lesson will cover verses ten through 15 of the eighth chapter: **“GODLY ADVICE.”** Although dealing with an offering, there is a godly practicality revealed in this text that displays the nature of life in Christ Jesus. Even in this matter Divine ability and inclination are taken into consideration. Our meeting will begin at 7:00 P.M. You are invited to bring your family and friends for fellowship around the Word of God. Refreshments are served afterward, with a time of extended fellowship for everyone.

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A place where believers can meet, fellowship, be edified, and express themselves.

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COMMENTARY on Daniel: <http://wotruth.com/Daniel.htm>

COMMENTARY on Colossians: <http://wotruth.com/Colossians.htm>

COMMENTARY on Second Corinthians: <http://wotruth.com/2Corinthians.htm>