

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. Blahely

Lesson #35

COMMENTARY ON: 8:10-15

2 CORINTHIANS 1:3-4

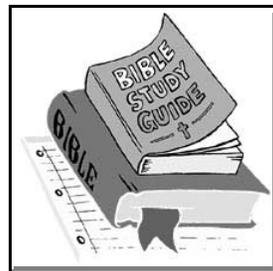
"Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God."

GODLY ADVICE

There are practical matters in which godly reasoning is required. The objective is to lead the people into a manner of life that is consistent with the faith of God's elect. In order to do this, the nature of the kingdom must be expounded. This is necessary because it causes the requirements of faith to make sense, and people will not consistently do what makes no sense to them. Here salvation by grace through faith is again seen to be vastly superior to a system of law and works. In view of this, Paul reasons gently, yet effectively, with the people, confirming that he is not urging them to do something that will be a disadvantage to them.

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 35



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.

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

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 -----

GODLY ADVICE

“ 8:10 And herein I give my advice: for this is expedient for you, who have begun before, not only to do, but also to be forward a year ago. ¹¹ Now therefore perform the doing of it; that as there was a readiness to will, so there may be a performance also out of that which ye have. ¹² For if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not. ¹³ For I mean not that other men be eased, and ye burdened: ¹⁴ But by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may be a supply for their want, that their abundance also may be a supply for your want: that there may be equality: ¹⁵ As it is written, He that had gathered much had nothing over; and he that had gathered little had no lack.” (2 Cor 8:10-15)

INTRODUCTION

This section of Second Corinthians is exposing us to “wisdom and spiritual understanding” (Col 1:9). This involves the ability to handle “accurately the word of truth”^{NASB} (2 Tim 2:15). Such handling requires a precise statement of what God has said – yet more is involved than that: much more! A proper use of the Scripture begins with a precise statement of what it says. The following represents my own perception of what is required to reason properly. These are not listed in a precise order, although I have tried to list them with a

sense of their priority, as I see things. I am quick to say that, although these are an integral part of God’s “great salvation,” I am speaking of them with a strict regard to spiritual reasoning. All of these shape HOW we perceive things, and how we reason about them.

- The knowledge and understanding of God that is by Jesus (Isa 53:11; Heb 8:11; John 17:3; 1 John 5:20).
- An grasp of the nature of the New Covenant (2 Cor 3:6-14; Jer 31:31-

34; Heb 8:8-13).

- An understanding of what God is doing in Christ Jesus (2 Cor 3:17-18; Rom 8:29-30; Eph 2:10; 1 Cor 1:9).
- An understanding of what was accomplished by Jesus, together with a grasp of why it was necessary (Gal 1:4; 2 Cor 5:18-21; Gal 3:13; Eph 1:1-12; 3:8-12; Col 1:20; Heb 2:14).
- A apprehension of the necessity, nature, and effectiveness of faith

Godly advice proceeds from a godly mind – a mind that is in harmony with “the mind of Christ” – by Given O. Blakely

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(Rom 1:16-17; Heb 11:6; Rom 5:1; Eph 2:8).

- ☛ A proper perception of the conflict of the flesh with the Spirit (Rom 7:14-25; Gal 5:16-17,25; James 4:5).
- ☛ An acute awareness of the appointed conclusion of the present heavens and earth (2 Pet 3:10-13).

CHARACTER

The knowledge of these things also had a direct impact upon human character. Those who reason on matters pertaining to life and godliness are thus effectively taught by the grace of God. As it is written, *"For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ: who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works"* (Titus 2:11-14).

Those who are so taught are truly *"strangers and pilgrims"* in the earth who *"abstain from fleshly lusts that war*

against the soul" (1 Pet 2:11). They are engaged in a quest to *"win Christ, and be found in Him, not having"* their *"own righteousness"* (Phil 3:8-9). They do not live with their own fleshly interests in mind, but live *"unto Him which died for them, and rose again"* (2 Cor 5:15).

I understand that everyone in the body of Christ is not necessarily identified by such traits – but they want to be! My purpose in mentioning these things is not to identify who is in Christ and who is not. **Rather, it is to elaborate upon who is able to reason acceptably on the things of God, and speak wisely concerning them.**

We are living in a time when the wisdom of this world has been incorporated into the thinking of the church. Areas of worldly thought that are especially prominent in the professed church are psychology, economics, philosophy, human logic, statistics, etymology and philology, sociology, and others. These have been so interwoven with supposed Bible knowledge that they have come to be equated with the truth of God itself.

For example, it is not unusual to hear someone say the Scriptures cannot be truly understood without a working knowledge of the Greek and the Hebrew languages. This is said even though there is not so much as one single original manuscript of any portion of the Scripture. However, these experts feel it is all right to depend upon various copies of the Greek and Hebrew, while being wholly distrusting of translations of those copies. Apparently God had no difficulty in preserving Greek and Hebrew expressions, but withdrew from any involvement with any other language.

It is also common for "Christian counselors" to go about their occupation relying implicitly upon the definitions

and research approaches of psychologists. They imagine that an earthly diagnosis of the human psyche has validity in the arena of the Holy Spirit, who Himself is the Expert in matters relating to the human soul and spirit. He alone can communicate with the human spirit intelligibly and profitably (Rom 8:16).

But is it now necessary to probe further into these pseudo-approaches. It ought to be evident to every believer that you cannot built a spiritual house of reason with the blocks of human wisdom. If this is not known, there really is no point to further elaborate on the matter. Such an ignorance betrays a bad heart and a stubborn spirit.

SPIRITUAL REASONING

Spiritual reasoning is characterized by a godly focus and a broad understanding of the *"good and acceptable, and perfect will of God"* (Rom 12:2). It also presumes the presentation of one's body as a *"living sacrifice to God,"* for without that, the will of the Lord cannot even be known (Rom 12:1-2). It is not possible to reason on matters pertaining to life and godliness while the individual attempting to do so is in the grip of this world.

Further, spiritual reasoning cannot be taught, so that it is learned by rote, and the thoughts of others are merely belched out without having a perception of them. Only God can give this kind of wisdom, and He only gives it to those who have wholly committed themselves to Him through Christ Jesus, and in the Holy Spirit. This is precisely why Paul prayed that believers would have the eyes of the understanding *"opened"* (Eph 1:17-18), and be *"filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding"* (Col 1:9).

VALIDITY AND ACCEPTANCE

There is a principle operative in spiritual life that is especially important

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to note. There are matters that can, in fact, be bound upon other people. The way of entering into the Kingdom is such a matter. There are no options in this area. Thus Peter commanded men to “repent and be baptized” (Acts 2:38). Philip told the Ethiopian eunuch he could be baptized if he believed (Acts 8:37). Paul told the Philippian jailor that to be saved he had to “believe on the Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 16:31).

In matters pertaining to morality, believers were to “abstain from fornication” (1 Thess 4:3). If they stole, they were to stop stealing (Eph 4:28). If idolatry in any form was among them, they were to keep themselves “from idols” (1 John 5:21). **On these things there was**

not the slightest room for failure to comply. They were areas in which God has dictated to the people. If they cannot see the sense of what He says, they are to comply anyway, with the hope that they will soon see the reason for such things.

When, however, it comes to godly reasoning, the matter is not bound upon the people beyond their ability to comprehend that reasoning – even though the reasoning is absolutely true. The fourteenth chapter of Romans deals with such issues – eating meat and observing certain days. While there is a right and a wrong way for each to be perceived, some leeway is given to those whose understanding of the ways of God

is not yet developed. Each person must be “fully persuaded” in his own mind” of the propriety of what he does, doing it exclusively “unto the Lord” (Rom 14:5). Until, however, there is spiritual maturity, reasoning on the things of God is not apt to be profitable. It is something like a blind man who hears something in the distance, and makes an attempt to describe what is making the sound. He really is not able to accurately do so.

Even when the person is mature, and his reasoning is sound and in strict harmony with the purposes of God, it cannot be bound upon another person. It is binding only on those who perceive the truth of it. That, of course, is one of the primary points of the fourteenth chapter of Romans.

This is precisely why Paul speaks with such gentle tones and spiritual care. In this matter, he will not demand the Corinthians to go beyond the perimeter of their understanding. However, he will also make every effort to enlarge their spiritual understanding, because the action for which he calls is right, and in thorough harmony with God’s will.

I GIVE MY ADVICE

^{8:10a} **And herein I give my advice**” Other versions read, “And I give my opinion on this matter,”^{NASB} “And here is my advice,”^{NIV} “And herein I give my judgment,”^{ASV} “And I show my mind herein,”^{GENEVA} “And I am giving counsel in this matter,”^{NAB} “I give you my considered opinion in this matter,”^{NJB} “I suggest,”^{NLT} and “[It is then] my counsel and my opinion in this matter.”^{AMPLIFIED}

Here again, some of the versions of Scripture are very weak, even delivering the wrong idea. Paul is not merely citing an opinion, as ordinarily perceived. The word “advice” comes from the Greek word γνῶμη (gnome-aa). Lexically it means, “the faculty of knowing, mind, reason; that which is thought of known.”^{THAYER} and “the result of one’s thinking, intention, disposition, will.”^{FRIBERG} If such thinking is independent of faith, and apart from an understanding of the purpose of God, it is nothing more

than an opinion. However, this is not the kind of thinking to which we are being exposed.

As I have pointed out before, Paul had an astute understanding of the purpose of God, even though it was hidden from men in the past ages. This was revealed to Paul, and he took hold of it. As it is written, “If ye have heard of the **dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward: how that by revelation He made known unto me the mystery;** (as I wrote afore in few words, whereby, when ye read, ye may understand **my knowledge in the mystery of Christ;** Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit: that the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel; **whereof I was**

made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power” (Eph 3:2-7). There are several things concerning this passage that ought to be noted. They will assist us in obtaining perspective.

- ☛ A special dispensation, or stewardship, was delivered to Paul. It was a dispensation, or dispensing, of understanding.
- ☛ This stewardship was given to Paul so that he might make it known to others.
- ☛ The mystery of God’s purpose was made known to Paul.
- ☛ His understanding was evident in the things that he wrote. It was not merely a claim, but something confirmed by what Paul said.

- Paul was made a minister of this knowledge.
- His ministry was given by the grace of God, and undergirded with Divine power.

It ought to be evident that the reasoning of such a person is more than a mere human opinion. An "opinion," by definition, is "a belief stronger than an impression and less strong than positive knowledge." MERRIAM-WEBSTER In the arena of natural understanding and aptitude, this may be true. However, that is not the arena in which the words of our text are delivered.

A CASE IN POINT

Faith and spiritual discernment impact the way men think. Take, for example, our father Abraham. When told he would beget a son in his old age, through his old and barren wife, Abraham reasoned in a certain way. *"Who against hope believed in hope. . . And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb): 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"* (Rom 4:18-21). Actually, **Abraham chose to think in contradiction of every form of human reasoning – hoping against hope.** Looking at things from the human point of view, there was no reason to hope – yet he hoped anyway. He did not think about his own inability or the inability of his wife Sarah. He was persuaded that what God has said, He was fully able to do.

Even though God's words to Abraham did not employ the exact words contained in his reasoning, yet that reasoning was precisely true. It was founded upon his apprehension of what God had said. **Faith reasons with the foundation stones of revealed reality, and therefore arrives at a proper conclusion.** Take, for example, Abraham's reasoning when God commanded him to offer Isaac to Him as a burnt offering (Gen 22:1-2). Genesis says that when Abraham and Isaac had arrived at the place God

designated for the offering, he said to his servants, *"Abide ye here with the ass; and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you"* (Gen 22:5). The book of Hebrews provides the details of how Abraham reasoned, thus leading him to say what he did to his servants. *"By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that*

"senses exercised" (Heb 5:14).

Paul's **"advice"** was holy reasoning, and thus it will integrate with Scripture, which is the mind of the Lord put into the language of men. Although this word is not bound upon men, it is **not** a mere human opinion. It rather represents an area of human involvement



had received the promises offered up his only begotten son. Of whom it was said, *That in Isaac shall thy seed be called: accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure"* (Heb 11:17-19). His reasoning proceeded from his faith, which was founded on his perception of God Himself, as revealed in His various communications with Abraham. Although the conclusion Abraham reached – that God was able to raise Isaac from the dead – was not a revealed one, it was a valid one. Prior to Abraham, there is no record of anyone being raised from the dead. Nor, indeed, had God represented Himself as one who did raise the dead. **Yet, that conclusion was just as valid as though it were particularly revealed by God.** That validity is perceived by a matured understanding – by those who have their

in which some liberty is given to men. That liberty, as we will find, is associated with certain advantages and disadvantages. Strictly speaking, our "liberty" is not an area of life in which we are free to do our own will, or seek our own desires. As it is written elsewhere, *"For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another"* (Gal 5:13).

In this text we are being exposed to the reasoning of an unusual man. He was a godly man with *"the mind of Christ"* (1 Cor 2:16). He had a grasp of the nature of the New Covenant, the will of God, and the purpose for which men enjoy the salvation of God. It appears to me that it is a great advantage to listen to such a man, and to regard his words with great respect and attentiveness.

MINDS THAT TRAFFIC IN HEAVENLY PLACE GENERATE VALID THOUGHTS

Godly advice proceeds from a godly mind – a mind that is in harmony with "the mind of Christ" – by Given O. Blakely

THE EXPEDIENT THING TO DO

“^{10b} . . . for this is expedient for you, who have begun before, not only to do, but also to be forward a year ago.”

fairly obvious from the ways in which

not remain here in the flesh. If He did not go away, the Comforter, who is the Holy Spirit (John 15:26), would not come.

It is good to pay particular attention to the way Paul reasons with the Corinthians. This is the rationality of a person who is living in fellowship with Christ (1 Cor 1:9), walking by faith (2 Cor 5:7), and walking in the Spirit (Gal 5:16). **This is how a person speaks** who has been given mercy from God *“to be faithful”* (1 Cor 7:25). The individual who seeks to be a *“helper”* of the joy of God’s people reasons in the following manner (2 Cor 1:24). If you wonder how a man who had been given power to edify speaks, you are being exposed to such an one (2 Cor 10:8; 13:10).



“Expedient” has to do with best, better, most profitable, and most suitable. In our text, it is something that blends more harmoniously with the good and acceptable and perfect will of God. It is a circumstance in which God is more apt to work.

Choosing the Best Course

This text is dealing with a Kingdom manner – the *“expedient”* way. *“Expedient”* means best, or most profitable – the way yielding the greatest advantage. **The truth of the matter is that there is no place for second-rate things in the work of the Lord.** The *“best”* of God is in salvation from beginning to end. That is the particular emphasis of Peter’s remark concerning our calling: *“as His Divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue”*^{NKJV} (2 Pet 1:3). The King James Version, renders the phrase *“to His glory and virtue.”* The idea is that *“glory and virtue”* are the Divine qualities that effect salvation in all of its glorious requirements and complexities. The New King James Version stresses that these were the means by which our calling itself was implemented.

EXPEDIENT FOR YOU

“ . . . for this is expedient for you . . . ” Other versions read, *“It is to your advantage,”*^{NKJV} *“what is best for you,”*^{NIV} *“It is appropriate,”*^{NASB} *“for it is to your profit,”*^{BBE} *“this benefits you,”*^{ESV} *“this will be the right course for you,”*^{NJB} *“For my doing this helps forward your own intentions,”*^{WEYMOUTH} *“because it will be helpful to you,”*^{ISV} *“for it is for your interest,”*^{WILLIAMS} *“for this offering is fitting in your case,”*^{MONTGOMERY} and *“I think it would be a good thing for you.”*^{PHILLIPS}

Expediency

The English word *“expedient”* is found seven times in the King James Version of Scripture (John 11:50; 16:7; 18:14; 1 Cor 6:12; 10:23; 2 Cor 8:10; 12:1). The NKJV uses it twice (John 11:50; 16:7), the NASB twice (John 11:50; 18:14), and the RSV three times (Matt 19:10; John 11:50; 18:14). The NIV and NRSV do not use it at all.

The Greek word from which *“expedient”* is translated is used nineteen times in the Scriptures (Matt 5:29,30; Acts 20:20 – *“profitable,”* Matt 18:6 – *“better,”* Matt 19:10 – *“good,”* John 11:50; 16:7; 18:6; 1 Cor 6:12; 10:23; 2 Cor 8:10; 12:1 – *“expedient,”* 1 Cor 7:35; 1 Cor 10:33; 12:7; Heb 12:10 – *“profit”*).^{KJV} **It is**

this word is used that it speaks of the best, most profitable, and most appropriate way of doing things.

Lexically, the Greek word *συνφέρει* (soom-fer-ei) means, *“to bring together; it is expedient, be profitable,”*^{THAYER} – as bringing two of the best things together for the greatest profit; *“to be of use, be profitable or advantageous; better,”*^{FRIBERG} *“better, it is to one’s advantage, it is helpful, good, or useful,”*^{UBS} *“useful, expedient, fitting.”*^{LIDDELL-SCOTT}

Something that is *“expedient”* is to the greatest advantage. In matters pertaining to life and godliness, it **fits best** with God’s *“eternal purpose.”* Thus Jesus told His disciples, *“Nevertheless I tell you the truth; **It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you”*** (John 16:7). Other versions say, *“it is to your advantage,”*^{NKJV} *“it is for your good,”*^{NIV} *“it is profitable for you,”*^{DARBY} *“it is better for you,”*^{NAB} *“it is actually best for you.”*^{NLT} As is evident from this text, *“expedient”* does not mean optional, or that other valid options are available. Even in the English language *“expedient”* means *“suitable for achieving a particular end in a given circumstance.”*^{MERRIAM-WEBSTER} Salvation could not possibly be accomplished in men without the Holy Spirit. That is why it was *“expedient”* for us that Jesus did

“Glory and virtue” are God’s most excellent qualities. It is not that the Lord is inferior in any of His attributes. However, there are exhibits of His Person that reveal deeper and fuller aspects of His character. There is, for example, more of God seen in His grace than there is in the creation, or nature.

The point is that there is nothing about salvation that is not excellent. The New Covenant itself is a *“better covenant”* (Heb 8:6a). It is

established upon “*better promises*” (Heb 8:6b). It is put into place with “*better sacrifices*” (Heb 9:23). It brings to men a “*better hope*” (Heb 7:19). The things that accompany salvation are appropriately termed “*better things*” (Heb 6:9). The “*substance*” that we have reserved for us is called “*a better and enduring substance*” (Heb 10:34). The country to which we are journeying is “*a better country*” (Heb 11:16).

“*Expedient*” has to do with choosing a course of action that is in harmony with these “*better things*.” It is important that this be emphasized in a day that finds the church plagued with mediocrity. People are settling for second best – if, indeed, what they are choosing even ranks that high. It has come to the point where people rarely think of living unto God in terms of what is “*best*,” or “*expedient*,” or brings the greatest advantage.

Think of how many people choose to go to inferior churches, hear inferior preachers, read inferior literature, and sing inferior songs. Paul once prayed that the saints’ love would “*abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment; that ye may approve things that are excellent*” (“*best*”^{NIV/NRSV}); *that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ*” (Phil 1:9-10). When instructing the Corinthians concerning spiritual gifts, the apostle told them, “*But covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet show I unto you a more excellent way*” (1 Cor 12:31). That way was found in true love, as expounded in the next chapter, commonly known as “the love chapter” (1 Cor 13). **From the first to the last, “newness of life” is characterized by the experience of the best, and a quest for the most excellent.** An admonition to do what is “*expedient*” leans in this direction, urging the saints to prefer what is best, bringing the greater advantage, and yielding the superior benefit.

If a person chooses to approach life upon the basis of law, preferring regimen to kingdom profitability, the Spirit summons us to ponder the

truth. “*All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any*” (1 Cor 6:12). And again, “*All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not*” (1 Cor 10:23). **Self interests are not the best interests! They are not the most profitable ones!**

If it is written, “*For even Christ pleased not Himself*” (Rom 15:3), what possible justification can be provided for those He is saving doing so? He chose the “*expedient*” thing – the thing that yielded the greater benefit, and was in strict accord with the will of the Father (John 16:7). That set the tone for the Kingdom.

There is a strain of religion being promoted that does not lead people to think in terms of what is “expedient” – what is the BEST thing to do. It is a religion in which the admonition is being summarily ignored, “*Let no man seek his own, but every man another’s wealth*” (1 Cor 10:24). It is not possible that such a religion is “*pure*” (James 1:27), or that what is being taught has come from God. Therefore the Lord reasons with us about doing the best and most profitable thing. If Jesus did what was “*expedient*,” or the most profitable, we must do so also, *for “the servant is not greater than his Lord”* (John 13:16).

This kind of teaching is necessary because of the nature of flesh. Flesh sees no advantage in depriving itself that others might receive benefit. This makes no sense at all to “*the natural man*” (Cor 2:14). The person who lives in the flesh wants to hoard what he obtains, even if it involves tearing down old barns and building new ones, only to lose it all when he dies (Lk 12:16-20). Jesus said of such a person, “*So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God*” (Luke 12:21). Because the eternal destiny of such a person is utterly dismal, Paul presses this point – not to fulfill a law, but to help the Corinthians to see. In fact, we are to live “*unto Him which died for*

them and rose again” (2 Cor 5:15).

BEGUN BEFORE

“... *who have begun before* . . .” Other versions read, “*to be doing what you began*.”^{NKJV} “*who were the first to begin*.”^{NASB} “*you were the first*.”^{NIV} “*for you who began*.”^{NRSV} “*who were the first to make a beginning*.”^{ASV} “*for you were the first to propose the idea*.”^{NLT} “*what you started*.”^{LIVING} “*you were the first*.”^{IE} and “*you made a beginning before others*.”^{MONTGOMERY}

It has been noted by someone that there are at least three different motivations for doing something.

- The deed may be done unwillingly, out of a sense of shame or fear. Thus Israel said they would do all that God had said – not because they really wanted to, but because they were afraid not to (Ex 19:8).
- We may also be forced to do something from without – by influences outside of ourselves, that compel or force us to act. Thus the parents of the blind man did not confess Christ – not because they did not want to, but because they feared the Jews, who said they would expel from the synagogue anyone who confessed Christ (John 9:22)
- We can also do a thing because we see the issues, and are moved by our own thinking to do so. Thus Paul counted everything but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ, being moved by what he understood (Phil 3:7-10).

Only the third alternative is acceptable with God – doing because you are motivated by your insight and faith. Paul, therefore, is now reasoning with the Corinthians to assist them to be willing to do what is right. That willingness actually has a greater weight than the deed that is compelled by it.

The Corinthians had started this project before the churches in Macedonia. Yet, they had not yet finished it, and the Macedonian brethren had completed their offering. The text suggests that the Corinthians were among the very first who made a commitment to send

assistance to the poor saints in Jerusalem. Thus the New Living Translation renders the verse, “*you were the first to propose the idea.*” In this sense, “*begun*” not only points to the commencement of a collection in Corinth, but to the beginning of the very idea of supporting the brethren who had fallen upon difficult times. The American Standard Version also reflects this perception: “*who were the first to make a beginning.*” Thus, in the very project itself, the Corinthian brethren had led out, apparently being some of the very first ones who saw what needed to be done for their Jewish brethren.

AN OBSERVATION

Who among us has not confronted people who quickly perceived what needed to be done, yet were not swift to actually do it. Perhaps some might be disposed to imagine that certain are gifted with seeing, while other are gifted in the area of doing. So, in this view, some suggest what needs to be done, while others actually carry it out. **That may sound perfectly reasonable to the flesh, but it is insanity in the Spirit.**

In the Kingdom of God, it is those who see who are charged with the doing of it. The person with the vision must tell it. The one who sees the need must fill it. And why is such a condition true? It is because the Lord Himself is the Dispenser of insight and knowledge. It is He who makes men aware of this or that. Philip became aware of the circumstances of the Ethiopian eunuch in order that he might meet them (Acts 8:26-29). Peter was made aware of the quest of Cornelius in order that he might assist him (Acts 10:19-21). Paul and Silas were alerted to the hunger of the people in Macedonia in order that they might feed them the good things of God (Acts 16:9).

Those who respond first have certain advantages and ministries to others. Therefore, they should all the more carry out their intentions. In Christ Jesus, ideas and willingness are not an end of themselves. **When valid, these have come from the Lord, and are therefore to be acted upon expeditiously.** Faith has a sense of this. However, when men do not fight “*the good fight of faith*” (1 Tim 6:12), keeping it with all holy

determination, they must be reminded that delaying to fulfill godly determinations is never right.

FORWARD A YEAR AGO

“... *not only to do, but also to be forward a year ago.*” Other versions read, “*and were desiring to do a year ago,*”^{NKJV} “*a year ago not only to do this, but also to desire to do it,*”^{NASB} “*not only to give, but also to have the desire to do this,*”^{NIV} “*not only to do something but even to desire to do something,*”^{NRSV} “*not only to do but to desire,*”^{RSV} “*not only to do, but also to will,*”^{ASV} “*to make a start a year before, not only to do this, but to make clear that your minds were more than ready to do it,*”^{BBE} “*not to do only, but also to will, a year ago,*”^{GENEVA} “*not only to act but to act willingly last year,*”^{NAB} “*a year ago, not only to take any action but also even to conceive the project,*”^{NJB} “*a year ago, you were the first to propose this idea, and you were the first to begin doing something about it,*”^{NLT} “*A year ago, you were the first to do something – even the first to want to do something,*”^{IE} “*Last year you were not only willing to do something, but had already started to do it,*”^{ISV} and “*which more than a year ago you not only began, but were the first to wish to do anything [about contributions for the relief of the saints at Jerusalem].*”^{AMPLIFIED}

During the year that had passed, while the Corinthians were waiting for a more convenient season, the condition of the poor saints in Jerusalem had continued. God did not forget His suffering children, but had enabled

How is it that Paul is making such an issue of this matter? Is it not possible that something had happened at Corinth that caused a delay in fulfilling what they had determined to do? To some, it might seem as though this would be the most charitable way of thinking. After all, we are to “*speak evil of no man*” (Tit 3:2), for love “*thinketh no evil*” (1 Cor 13:5). However, there is more to this matter than Paul and the Corinthians.

Paul is acquainted with the manner of the Kingdom, and how the Lord works among His people. His perceptions are not developed within the framework of a psychological view of men. The “*knowledge of God*” (2 Pet 1:2) directs the way he thinks about such matters. Take, for example, this cardinal principle of the Kingdom: “*For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure*” (Phil 2:13). It does not say that God works within us to “*will*” OR to “*do*,” but “*both to will AND to do.*” Further, both the willingness and the doing are “*according to His good purpose.*”^{NIV}

What, then, can be said of those who will something that is obviously good and in strict harmony with the revealed purpose of God? Is there anyone who imagines that was “*willed*” could justifiably be ignored? **Who would defend a one year lapse between wanting to do something for the Lord and actually doing it?** Did God work “*to will*” in the person way in advance of the need? Did He intend only for the people involved to

Paul is acquainted with the manner of the Kingdom, and how the Lord works among His people. His perceptions are not developed within the framework of a psychological view of men.

people with fewer resources than the Corinthian brethren to give beyond their means. This, however, did not remove the responsibility of the Corinthians to carry through with their resolve – their willing and zealous resolve. It was a good intention, conceived at the proper time.

think about assisting their brethren, but never to get to the doing of it? Is this really the manner in which God works? Keep in mind that the Corinthians had made their desire known, for it had provoked many others to also give to the cause. In fact, the “*churches in*

Macedonia” had been among those provoked by the excellent desires of the Corinthians. Thus Paul writes later, “For I know the forwardness of your mind, for which I boast of you to them of

Macedonia, that Achaia was ready a year ago: **and your zeal hath provoked very many**” (2 Cor 9:2).

For those who live by faith, noble

ambitions are to be viewed as things to be carried out. If they have, in fact, come from God, they are not to be left on the shelf of neglect in favor of doing other things.

LET’S GET TO THE DOING OF IT!

“^{11a} Now therefore perform the doing of it . . . ”

Having reasoned with the Corinthians, Paul now exhorts them to act upon the truth. Both good intentions and truth that are not acted upon bring no profit to the one possessing them.

people (Acts 17:2; 18:4,19). When Paul spoke with Felix, he “**reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgement to come**” (Acts 24:25).

A powerful testimony is one in which the believer can give “**a reason of the hope that is in**” them (1 Pet 3:15). In reasoning after a godly manner, the

spiritual lives by simply doing what they are told – like the house of Cornelius being baptized because of Peter’s commandment (Acts 10:48). But spiritual life cannot be sustained by such a posture. Hearts must eventually be opened to perceive “**what is the hope of His calling, and what [is] the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of the power to us-ward who believe**” (Eph 1:18-19). **That quality of understanding will compel a person to do what is right without having to be repeated exhorted to do so.**



There is a certain absence of this kind of reasoning in the present American church. There is more of a bent to strictly authoritarian approaches, whether through a clergyman, a collection of elders, church board, or some other form of rule. **Those who are true leaders in the body of Christ ought to be able to present flawless reasoning for the things they themselves say ought to be done.** Methinks there could be a collapse of many religious purposes if there was a demand for solid spiritual reasoning in matters where some form of disagreement exists.

THEREFORE

Now therefore . . . ” Other versions read, “**but now,**”^{NKJV} “**so that,**”^{RSV} “**Then,**”^{BBE} “**Now therefore,**”^{DOUAY} “**So now,**”^{ESV} and “**Having started the ball rolling so enthusiastically.**”^{LIVING}

It is important to perceive the manner of godly reasoning, and its role in spiritual life. **Good reasoning is a godly trait, and is a means through which the Spirit works upon the hearts of men.** You may recall that in His dealings with wayward Israel the Lord said, “**Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool**” (Isa 1:18). When Samuel spoke to Israel he said, “**Now therefore stand still, that I may reason with you before the LORD of all the righteous acts of the LORD, which he did to you and to your fathers**” (1 Sam 12:7).

When Paul was in the synagogues, he “**reasoned**” with the

nature of both right and wrong courses of action become more apparent.

The word “**therefore**” introduces a particular line of reasoning. In it Paul will urge the Corinthians to do what they have determined, confirming that their intentions were good ones. He will also integrate the propriety of doing what they determined with the Word of God and the nature of redemption. Because those with a “**sound mind**” can process the truth profitably, the words that follow will have a powerful constraining influence upon the people.

Something to Note

We ought to note how Paul is going about moving the Corinthians. He is not doing so as an authoritarian, whose word was to be obeyed – even though he was in a position of delegated authority (2 Cor 12:12). **He knows that at some point the people of God must do what is right because they see the issues correctly, and thus want to do what is right.** They very well may begin their

PERFORM THE DOING

“**. . . perform the doing of it . . .**” Other versions read, “**but now you must also complete the doing of it,**”^{NKJV} “**But finish doing it also,**”^{NASB} “**finish the work,**”^{NIV} “**by your completing it,**”^{RSV} “**make the doing of it complete,**”^{BBE} “**perform ye it also in deed,**”^{DOUAY} “**finish doing it as well,**”^{ESV} “**complete the action as well,**”^{NJB} “**you should carry this project through to completion,**”^{NLT} “**perform the thing which ye began to do,**”^{FNT} “**finish doing it now!**”^{IE} and “**Finish it.**”^{PHILLIPS}

The action that is now urged is the taking up of the collection the Corinthians had determined to gather,

and had apparently already started gathering. It was a noble ambition, but all of that nobility will be lost if what was determined is not actually done. The Corinthians were not to do as Felix did when he knew what was right. After hearing Paul's reasoning he said, "when I have a more convenient season, I will call for thee" (Acts 24:25). There is no record that he ever followed through with that decision.

The importance of finishing is a concept woven throughout the entirety of salvation. Setting the tone for all Kingdom activity, Jesus is revealed to be "the Author and **Finisher** of our faith" (Heb 12:2). When addressing the matter of the "work" God had given Him to do, Jesus said, "My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me, and to **finish His work**" (John 4:34). Speaking of the work He is doing among Israel, it is said of God Himself, "For **He will finish the work, and cut it short in righteousness: because**

a short work will the Lord make upon the earth" (Rom 9:28). It is God's nature to do things this way.

When Zerubbabel was used to complete the building of the Temple, his hands grew weary, as the work stretched over a long period of time. God sent a special word to him through the prophet Zechariah – a word designed to assure him of the faithfulness of the God who called and commissioned him. "The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; **his hands shall also finish it: and thou shalt know that the LORD of hosts hath sent me unto you**" (Zech 4:9).

Jesus spoke of the reproach of an individual who was not able to complete what he started out to do: "For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to **finish it?**

Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to **finish** it, all that behold it begin to mock him, Saying, This man began to build, and was not able to **finish**" (Luke 14:28-30).

See, "finishing" what has been begun is a Divine manner. It is a characteristic of the working of the Spirit of God, and is therefore to be a trait of God, and is therefore to be a trait of the godly. To determine a good deed, resolve to do it, and then come short of its completion is reproachful. It is completely out of harmony with the nature of God and His working. That is why Paul urges the Corinthians to finish gathering the funds they had determined to give to the poorer brethren in Jerusalem.

The delay of the doing of it was not something the grace of God would support. The Holy Spirit would not assist them to avoid this collection.

READINESS AND PERFORMANCE

" 11b . . . that as there was a readiness to will, so there may be a performance also out of that which ye have."

The nature of Paul's extensive reasoning on this matter is especially noteworthy. We do well to ponder **how** he is going about the noble work of moving the people of God to actually do what they themselves had determined to do – a determination that is doubtless traced to Divine influence. That is, it was God who put this desire in their hearts, for, as it is written, "For it is God which worketh in you both **to will** and to do of his good pleasure" (Phil 2:13). Is it possible that God would work "to will," and not work "to do" as well? Indeed, it is not, for that would contradict His nature. If **He** does what He has determined, how could He possibly move someone to desire something, then not empower them to **do** it? God had not changed His mind about this matter. It was the Corinthians that had become distracted from this honorable cause. Therefore Paul will labor to open their eyes, which he had been commissioned to do (Acts 26:18).

READINESS TO WILL

" . . . that as there was a readiness to will . . . " Other versions read, "as there was a readiness to desire it,"^{NKJV} "so that your eager willingness to do it,"^{NIV} "so that as you had a ready mind,"^{BBE} "so that as there was a readiness to be willing,"^{DARBY} "that as your mind is forward to be willing,"^{DOUAY} "so that your eager willingness,"^{NAB} "your enthusiastic idea at the start,"^{LIVING} "You planned it eagerly,"^{IE} "so that your eagerness to undertake it,"^{ISV} "and "with as much efficiency as you showed readiness to begin."^{PHILLIPS}

In our culture, the word "readiness" is not common. Perhaps that reflects the self-centered nature of the society in which we live – a society that has been cultured by opportunists. When the world promotes self interests, it is only because they intend to exploit those interests by obtaining gain from supplying what is desired.

However, in spiritual life, "readiness" is a critical factor, for it deals with the heart. This word appears three

times in the King James Bible.

- ☛ "These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with **all readiness of mind**, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so" (Acts 17:11).
- ☛ "Now therefore perform the doing of it; that as there was a **readiness to will**, so there may be a performance also out of that which ye have" (2 Cor 8:11).
- ☛ "And having in a **readiness to revenge all disobedience**, when your obedience is fulfilled" (2 Cor 10:6).

The NIV employs this word in two other texts.

- ☛ "See what this godly sorrow has produced in you: what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what concern, what **readiness to see justice done**. At every point you have proved

yourselves to be innocent in this matter"^{NIV} (2 Cor 7:11). Here the KJV reads, "what avenging of wrong."

- ☛ "And with your feet fitted with the **readiness that comes from the gospel of peace**"^{NIV} (Eph 6:15). Here the KJV reads, "the preparation of the Gospel of peace."

The RSV uses this word in one additional text.

- ☛ "For I **know your readiness**, of which I boast about you to the people of Macedonia, saying that Achaia has been ready since last year; and your zeal has stirred up most of them" (2 Cor 9:2). Here the KJV reads, "I know the forwardness of your mind."

The word "readiness" is translated from the Greek word προθυμία (proth-oo-mia). Lexically it means, "zeal, spirit, enthusiasm; inclination, readiness of mind,"^{THAYER} "willingness, readiness, eagerness, zeal,"^{FRIBERG} and "eagerness to engage in some activity or event."^{LOUW-NIDA}

This speaks of a determined disposition of mind. This is an inward posture that makes a person eager to something – zealous to fulfill what has been purposed. Thus, when the Bereans received the Word with "all readiness of mind," they were inclined toward that word, zealously receiving it and probing the Scriptures to confirm its reality. When Paul wrote of a "readiness to revenge all disobedience," he was speaking of a forwardness to punish all disobedience, reacting properly to all willful breeches of the Divine will.

In this text, Paul is pointing out the frame of mind and determination of heart that compelled them be the first to suggest that a collection be gathered for the poor saints in Jerusalem, and to be the first to actually begin the gathering of that collection. No one talked them into this. Their willingness was not the result of coercion or pressure. It was their sensitivity to the situation that moved them – their understanding of the circumstances of their brethren.

A Kingdom Trait

The Psalmist declares that this

kind of willingness would characterize the reign of the coming Messiah. He spoke of the "rule" of the coming Savior in the very presence of His enemies – enemies that were destined to be His public and unquestionable footstool. That rule is nothing less than "the day of salvation" in which we are presently living. It is the time of Divine "acceptance," when the deliverance of the captives is being preached, and the brokenhearted are being healed. Of this time the Spirit moved the Psalmist to write, "The LORD shall send the rod of Thy strength out of Zion: rule Thou in the midst of Thine enemies. **Thy people shall be willing in the day of Thy power, in the beauties of holiness from the womb of the morning: thou hast the dew of thy youth**" (Psa 110:2-3). Other versions read, "Your people shall be volunteers,"^{NKJV} "The people will volunteer freely,"^{NASB} and "Your people will offer themselves

This is the manner of the kingdom of Christ. It is how people respond who actually believe, and therefore receive His word. The message of the Gospel, when believed, produces this kind of willingness. The Holy Spirit, when He is not quenched, works this kind of response in the hearts of men.

Where "readiness to will" is not found, there is a serious deficiency. We have a condition that contradicts the revealed nature of the New Covenant. **There is no religious posture that can compensate for a lack of this kind of spirit.** There is no teaching that can be embraced that offsets the lack of willingness. There is no work, activity, or duty that can make up for the absence of a "readiness to will" – a forwardness and zeal to want to do the will of God.

This is precisely why Paul is so

In this text, Paul is pointing out the frame of mind and determination of heart that compelled them be the first to suggest that a collection be gathered for the poor saints in Jerusalem, and to be the first to actually begin the gathering of that collection. No one talked them into this.

willingly."^{NRSV}

The idea is that the people will not be motivated by slavish fear, as Israel was at threatening Sinai. The day of salvation would be marked by another trait. **The people would eagerly embrace the Word of God, zealously enter into His work, and immediately obey His word.** That is why it is written of the response of the Jews to Peter's message, "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls" (Acts 2:41). It is why the Ethiopian eunuch eagerly asked, "See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?" (Acts 8:36). Saul of Tarsus possessed this kind of willingness, as revealed in his words, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" (Acts 9:6). The Philippian jailor displayed the same spirit in his words, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:30).

forward to commend the spirit in which the Corinthians had originally determined to gather a collection for their needy brethren. **They were acting in strict consonance with the heavenly kingdom, the New Covenant, and the nature of salvation.** However, Paul must now lead them to consider the appropriateness of the same kind of readiness in the matter of doing what they had before determined.

A PERFORMANCE

" . . . so there may be a performance . . ." Other versions read, "so there may also be a completion,"^{NKJV} "may be matched by your completion of it,"^{NIV} "matched by completing it,"^{NRSV} "you may give effect to it,"^{BBE} "so it may be also to perform,"^{DOUAY} "so that the fulfillment may be proportionate to your enthusiasm for the project,"^{NJB} "may be equaled by your completion of it,"^{AMPLIFIED} and "show that you can complete what

you set out to do." PHILLIPS

Think of it this way: a noble desire that is not fulfilled loses its nobility – it is nothing more than something left incomplete. It is a desire that is like the vineyard of a sloth, which, Solomon wrote, speaks of a man that lacks understanding. *"I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding; and, lo, it was all grown over with thorns, and nettles had covered the face thereof, and the stone wall thereof was broken down"* (Prov 24:31). A good and godly desire that is not fulfilled is like an unfinished project – like a man who laid a foundation for a tower, but was not able to finish the building of it (Lk 14:28-30).

If it is true that God works in His children *"both to will and to act of His good purpose,"*^{NIV} (Phil 2:13), then how is it possible for the failure to fulfill a godly determination to be acceptable? Where is there any room in Christ for such a circumstance?

The word *"performance"* speaks of completion, or bringing to a conclusion what has been determined. Lexically, the word means, *"to bring to an end, accomplish, perfect, complete,"*^{THAYER} *"finish, end successfully,"*^{FRIBERG} and *"to bring an activity to a successful finish,"*^{LOUW-NIDA}

Just as they had a readiness, zeal, and intention to be willing, or **want** to take up this collection, now Paul urges them to complete the collection with the same commitment and zeal. As things stood, the action did not match their zealous commitment. That condition put them out of synch with the whole nature of salvation and its various involvements.

THAT WHICH YE HAVE

" . . . also out of that which ye have." Other versions read, *"out of what you have,"*^{NKJV} *"by your ability,"*^{NASB} *"according to your means,"*^{NIV} *"as you are able,"*^{BBE} *"out of whatever you have,"*^{LIVING} *"Do whatever you can,"*^{IE} *"in proportion to your means,"*^{WEYMOUTH} *"in*



keeping with what you have,"^{ISV} and *"according to your ability and means."*^{AMPLIFIED}

This word is given in anticipation of fleshly attempts to justify further delay, for the flesh demands it receive, not that it should give. In this respect it is like the daughters of the horseleech, *"crying, Give, give"* (Prov 30:15).

The meaning is twofold. First, God expects them only to give what they **can** give. Second, their giving is to be in **proportion** to what they have. There is to be a proper and godly correlation between what is given and what is possessed. For example, the poor widow who cast *"two mites"* into the Temple treasury appeared to have given the least of all. Yet, Jesus affirmed of her gift, *"Verily I say unto you, That this poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury"* (Mark 12:43). How is it that such an assessment could be made? It is because of the principle enunciated in our text: *"it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not"*² (Cor 8:12). If, for example, a man had one billion dollars, and gave one million to the Lord, he would have given less than the poor widow Jesus observed. Why? Because she gave everything she had: *"she of her want did cast in all that she*

had, even all her living" (Mark 12:44). She gave 100% of what she had. The man with a billion dollars, in giving one million dollars, would have given one tenth of one percent of what he had. Although he was actually a miserable giver, the world would account his gift to have been by far the greatest.

When our text says to give *"out of that which ye have,"* it is speaking of giving proportionately. This principle is spelled out more specifically in Paul's word in First Corinthians, concerning this very same collection. *"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"* (1 Cor 16:2). Other versions read *"in keeping with his income,"*^{NIV} *"whatever extra you earn,"*^{NRSV} *"in measure as he has done well,"*^{BBE} *"in whatever degree he may have prospered,"*^{DARBY} and *"in proportion to what is given."*^{AMPLIFIED}

All of this is set within the context of the posture of believers, which is that of *"strangers and pilgrims on the earth"* (Heb 11:13). **It also postulates that it is more comely to use excesses, or more than we need, for the work of the Lord than for ourselves.** There are those who make a practice of amassing great debts, only to fulfill their own covetousness. To them, reasoning like this makes no sense at all. However, this text clearly teaches us that when we realize an abundance of income, there are noble kingdom purposes for which it can be used. **In fact, it strongly suggests that this is precisely why the Lord has allowed us to prosper.** There are no hard and fast laws on this matter. It is an issue of the conscience, and thus must be settled on an individual basis.

But be sure of this, it **is** something that **is** intended to be settled. This is not an area of the life of Christ's body that is to be neglected, or treated as non-essential. Rather, it is an area where God's glory can shine forth.

THE SANCTIFYING EFFECTS OF A WILLING MIND

¹² *For if there be first a willing | mind, it is accepted according to that a | man hath, and not according to that he*

Godly advice proceeds from a godly mind – a mind that is in harmony with "the mind of Christ" – by Given O. Blakely

hath not."

Right here we come to grips with a much neglected aspect of Kingdom life, or "newness of life." As I have already said, one of the traits of New Covenant life, lived out under the gracious administration of the exalted Christ, is **willingness**. It is written of His gracious administration, "The LORD shall send the rod of thy strength out of Zion: rule thou in the midst of thine enemies. **Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power, in the beauties of holiness from the womb of the morning: thou hast the dew of thy youth. The LORD hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek**" (Psa 110:4). The text makes clear this is speaking of the present ministry of Jesus, who is, at this time, a "priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek" (Heb 5:6,10; 6:20; 7:11,17,21).

This kind of willingness was revealed from the very first, when Christ poured forth the Spirit on the day of Pentecost. Those who heard the word of the exalted Christ "gladly received his word" (Acts 2:41). When Philip preached in Samaria, "the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake" (Acts 8:6). In Antioch of Pisidia, when the Gentiles heard the word of the Kingdom, "they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord" (Acts 13:48). When a Philippian jailor heard the Gospel of Christ he "rejoiced, believing in God with all of His house" (Acts 16:34). When the Thessalonians heard the Gospel they "received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God" (1 Thess 2:13).

There is a perfect consistency in this throughout the Scriptural record of the spread of the Gospel of Christ. **Wherever the Gospel was believed there was willingness! Wherever Christ was received there was willingness.** There are no exceptions to this. Willingness is an unwavering characteristic in those who have faith. **Faith is never unwilling.** It never balks at the word of the Lord, never pulls back from submitting to the King of kings. It never recoils at a word from God, or stubbornly refuses to follow the Lamb whithersoever He goes. It is said of the purified, "These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever He

goeth" (Rev 14:4). Jesus said of His people, "My sheep know My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me" (John 10:14).

Our Generation

Men in this generation have grown accustomed to a lack of willingness within the professing church. They speak of it as though it was the normal mode of kingdom life. How often I have heard foolish preachers and teachers say, "But you know how we are, we seek our own will instead of the will of God." Or, "We are just like those Israelites of old." Or, "God has to knock us down to get our attention" . . . etc., etc. But this is nothing more than idiotic prattle, and has no place in any word addressed to the saints of the most High God. **Recalcitrance did exist in Israel – but that is because they were not born again.** What is more, if that same spirit is found today, it is because of a lack of "newness of life," and strongly suggests the people

And why are all of these approaches employed? **It is because the people are NOT willing.** But who is asking **WHY** the people are not willing? I do not hear this question being raised. Explanations are provided that suggest this is simply the way people are, and thus their peers have rushed to their aid. **But this is not the kind of people God creates in Christ Jesus!** Unwillingness and stubbornness are not the characteristics of the "new man" that is "renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him" (Col 3:10). We are pointedly told that the new man is "created in righteousness and true holiness" (Eph 4:14) – and a lack of willingness is neither righteous nor holy!

Where there is no willingness, the power of God is not present. There can be no question about this for the Spirit has spoken: "Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power" (Psa 110:3).

Wherever the Gospel was believed there was willingness! Wherever Christ was received there was willingness. There are no exceptions to this. Willingness is an unwavering characteristic in those who have faith. Faith is never unwilling.

have **not** been born again.

The Reason for Modern Methodologies

Today, we are seeing the employment of divers methodologies to move people to do what is right. The modern church has even saw fit to hire professional motivators to talk people into a state of willingness. Carnal incentives are offered to provoke people to do what is expected of them. We even have men writing books that move people to live a disciplined life for a certain number of days, performing the same religious routines over and over, until at last they supposedly will become a part of their lives. Others teach people to force themselves to make daily journals, telling them that eventually they will develop good habits, and those habits will carry them through life with the blessing of God upon them.

FIRST A WILLING MIND

"For if there be first a willing mind . . ." Other versions read, "For if the readiness is present,"^{NASB} "For if the willingness is there,"^{NIV} "For if the eagerness is there,"^{NRSV} "For if there is a ready mind,"^{BBE} "If the will be forward,"^{DOUAY} "As long as the enthusiasm is there,"^{NJB} "If you are really eager to give,"^{NLT} "If someone is ready,"^{IE} "For, assuming the earnest willingness,"^{MONTGOMERY} "If a man is ready and willing to give,"^{WILLIAMS} "For if the [eager] readiness to give is there,"^{AMPLIFIED} and "the important thing is to be willing to give as much as you can."^{PHILLIPS}

When anything is given to God – anything – there is a Divine requisite: something that must precede the gift. "First a willing mind" – "an [eager]

readiness.”^{AMPLIFIED} There must first be a happy inclination to do this – a forwardness to give of ones substance to a cause that pleases the Lord, and is in harmony with His will.

For some, this may offer an opportunity to excuse themselves from giving. Thus the person may reason, “I really do not want to give, so I do not have to do so.” That may be good reasoning to the flesh, but it is utter foolishness before the throne of God. Such a person has considered the needs of the saints (as in this text), and “*shut up his bowels of compassion*” (1 John 3:17a). Rather than being willing to give to his needy brother, he has been willing to withhold what was in his hand. John says of such a person, “*how dwelleth the love of God in him?*” (1 John 3:17b). He further says of such a person, “*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?*” (1 John 4:20). **It simply is not possible to love God and not love His people also!** Those who profess they have managed to accomplish such a feat have only lied, just as surely as Ananias and Sapphira!

Where there is not “*first a willing mind,*” the Gospel has not been properly perceived. Something is fundamentally wrong when a person refuses to honor the Lord and assist his brethren with his substance. However, if a person will heartily embrace the Gospel, taking hold of it with “*both hands*” [like the wicked take hold of evil—Micah 7:3] that Gospel

among God’s people who are reluctant to give of their substance to the Lord, or to causes that are set before them in His name. They may reason they do not have enough to give to the Lord, and are barely making it through life with what they have. This is precisely the kind of situation that is being addressed in this text. Paul is going to show such poor souls that their reasoning is flawed. **They are not thinking properly, and their thoughts are leading them to rob God, and put a blotch upon their claim to identity with Him.** He will not set a hard and fast law before them, but will state the manner in which Kingdom life is lived out. He will leave the matter in our hands, knowing that faith will do the right thing.

IT IS ACCEPTED

“ . . . it is accepted . . . ” Other versions read, “it is acceptable,”^{NASB} “the gift is acceptable,”^{NIV} “a man will have God’s approval,”^{BBE} “a man is accepted,”^{DARBY} “the basis on which it is acceptable,”^{NJB} “it is acceptable and welcomed.”^{AMPLIFIED}

The “it” is the gift that is given. IF the person first desires with his heart to give the gift, then what he gives will be “accepted.” The word “accepted” comes from a word meaning, “well-received, accepted, acceptable,”^{THAYER} “very acceptable, welcome,”^{FRIBERG} and “pertaining to that which is particularly acceptable, and hence quite pleasing, very acceptable.”^{LOUW-NIDA}

By saying the gift is “accepted,” the text means God Himself will sanction it and receive it favorably. This word “accepted” is used a number of times in

ministering the gospel of God, that the offering up of the Gentiles might be acceptable, being sanctified by the Holy Ghost” (Rom 15:16).+

- ☛ “*That I may be delivered from them that do not believe in Judaea; and that my service which I have for Jerusalem may be accepted of the saints*” (Rom 15:31).
- ☛ “*(For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succored thee: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation)*” (2 Cor 6:2).
- ☛ “*Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ*” (1 Pet 2:5).

The word “acceptable,” as confirmed by its use in Scripture, does not suggest that there are other alternatives or actions that will, in fact, be honored by God. When, for example, the Spirit speaks of the “*offering up of the Gentiles*” being “*acceptable,*” he means that any other kind of offering will be rejected – that God will decline to receive it. When He speaks of the offerings for the poor saints at Jerusalem being “*accepted of the saints,*” he means to compare that with them refusing or rejecting the offering because of some perceived deficiency. When the Lord speaks of the day of salvation as “*a time accepted,*” He means men were not received by God in this sense in previous times. The day of salvation is a time when God is doing “*a new thing*” (Isa 43:19). He is welcoming people He did not welcome before. When the Spirit moved Peter to speak “*spiritual sacrifices*” that were “*acceptable to God through Jesus Christ,*” He means to compare such offerings with sacrifices God did **not** receive (Isa 1:12-13; Ezek 20:39; Mal 1:10), and in with He was **not** well pleased (Psa 40:6; 51:16; Heb 10:6,8).

Thus, in this text, Paul is speaking of a condition that moves God to receive what the individual or individuals has given. While men are prone to place the emphasis upon **what** men give, here the accent is placed on **God’s reception** of

1st A WILLING MIND → **IT IS ACCEPTED**
NOT WHAT YOU WHAT YOU DO NOT HAVE

will work willingness within them.

A Word to Those Who Are Reluctant to Give

Occasionally there are those

Scripture. The way in which it is used establishes its meaning.

- ☛ “*That I should be the minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles,*

the gift. What is it that causes the gift to be acceptable to Him? That is the point.

ACCORDING TO WHAT YOU HAVE

“... according to that a man hath . . .” Other versions read, “according to what one has,”^{NKJV} “in the measure of what one has,”^{BBE} “the basis . . . is what someone had,”^{NJB} “in accordance with what he has,”^{WILLIAMS} and “in proportion to what a man has.”^{AMPLIFIED}

In this matter, the issue is not **who** gives the gift. It is not the **nature** of the gift itself. It is not the **amount** of the gift. It is not even the **timing** of the gift, or **when** it is given. Even though these are not the point here, there are times when such things **are** the issue.

• For example, there are times when **who** offers the gift makes a difference. God said to Israel, “*When ye come to appear before Me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread My courts?*” (Isa 1:12). They themselves were out of place in the presence of the Lord.

• There were times when the **nature** of the gift was an issue. Again God said to Israel, “*And if ye offer the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? and if ye offer the lame and sick, is it not evil? offer it now unto thy governor; will he be pleased with thee, or accept thy person? saith the LORD of hosts*” (Mal 1:8).

• There were also times when the **amount** given was an issue with God. “*Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings . . . Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse*” (Mal 3:8,10).

In this text, however, a different measure is applied to the activity of giving. He states that the amount of the gift is not the point, but **the proportion** of that gift. **That is, how much of the individual’s goods REMAIN after the gift has been given?** Using this standard of measurement, Jesus said a poor widow who gave but two small mites, gave “*more than they all*,” because she “*out of her poverty put in all the livelihood that she had*”^{NKJV} (Luke 21:4). The proportion of her giving was larger.

If a person has only meager resources, yet gives proportionately from them, the gift is logged in the heavenly ledger, as it was, as a large gift, and due recognition of it will be made. If a person with many resources gives a small proportion of those resources, the gift may appear quite large in comparison with the one with slender resources. But it will not be so regarded by the God of heaven. If it is argued that the small gift will not provide enough assistance to the needy, one must consider that the Lord Himself is managing the Kingdom. He will give a surplus to some of His good stewards, who will, in turn, assist in the cause. That is actually what this text is teaching, as will be confirmed by the verses that follow. This circumstance is why Paul speaks as he does, largely ignoring the amount that is needed and given, and focusing upon the spirit in which the gift is given. **This is precisely why what is left determines the acceptability of the gift more than what**

possess, thus introducing jeopardy.

As in all matters of stewardship, obligation is proportionate to ability. If a person has much, he is expected to give much. If he does not have much, he is not expected to give much. This transfers into all facets of Kingdom life. **If, for example, a person has a quick and ready mind, he is expected to handle the truth more thoroughly, seeing more in the text, and gaining larger perspectives than those who do not have such powers of reason.** If an individual is gifted to speak, and to deliver a word with certain clarity, he is expected to deliver more compelling words, and speak more skillfully, according to the ability God has given to him. **Those with certain aptitudes are expected to develop them, and to use them in the work of the Lord.**

If it is true that God has “*set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased Him*” (1 Cor 12:18),

If a person has only meager resources, yet gives proportionately from them, the gift is logged in the heavenly ledger, as it was, as a large gift, and due recognition of it will be made.

is given.

This also confirms why half-hearted and mere token gifts are not acceptable. The perception of this transforms both the manner and proportion of our giving.

NOT ACCORDING TO WHAT YOU DO NOT HAVE

“... and not according to that he hath not.” Other versions read, “*not according to what he does not have*.”^{NASB}

The Lord does not expect everyone to give the same amount. That would require no sacrifice on the part of the wealthy, and would cause an undue burden to the poor. **The percentage of the gift is NOT measured by the greatness of smallness of the need.** Nor, indeed, is it an amount required from each person that is disproportionate to what they

then it is equally true that **He has provided for the thorough equipping of His people.** If His aim is that we “*grow up into Him in all things, which is the Head, even Christ*,” then we may expect this to take place by means of “*the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love*” (Eph 4:15-16). **There is no purpose for a congregation in which this is not taking place.** Such a congregation is only taking up space, and is nothing more than a distraction.

This very principle is being worked out in the offering being gathered from all of the churches for the poor saints in Jerusalem – each one giving as they are able. Collectively, the body of Christ is doing the work of Christ.

ONE IS NOT EASED WHILE THE OTHER IS BURDENED

¹⁸ *For I mean not that other men be eased, and ye burdened.*

We are being exposed to sound spiritual reasoning – one of the characteristics of “newness of life.” If it is true that the “new man” is “renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him” (Col 3:10), then reasoning holds a prominent place among the saints. In this case, “knowledge” is not merely the acquisition of facts, many of which have no immediate relevance to life in Christ Jesus. Rather, this is essential knowledge that is acquired within the framework of spiritual experience, and through the power of the Holy Spirit, by faith. **It forms a holy boundary within which sound and profitable reasoning takes place.**

Let us draw near in our hearts to this text, and listen to the manner of Paul’s reasoning. It will be characterized by both tenderness and firmness.

I MEAN NOT

“For I mean not” Other versions read, *“For this is not,”*^{NASB} *“Our desire is not,”*^{NIV} *“I say not this,”*^{ASV} *“I am not saying this,”*^{BBE} *“It is not in order,”*^{DARBY} *“Neither is it,”*^{GENEVA} *“Of course, I don’t mean,”*^{NLT} *“Truly, not,”*^{PNT} *“It is not my mind,”*^{TNT} *“I do not urge you to give in order that,”*^{WEYMOUTH} *“I do not want it to be,”*^{WILLIAMS} and *“For it is not [intended].”*^{AMPLIFIED}

In holy purposes there are things that are deliberately avoided, as well as things that are targeted objectives. Often, what we “do **not** mean” is nearly as important as what we do mean. The reason Paul mentions this stems from the fleshly tendencies that were found among the Corinthians. As confirmed in his first Epistle, they tended to draw wrong conclusions. This was owing to the carnality that was among them, for the fleshly mind always leads us to think in the wrong way. Therefore, Paul tells them what he did **not** intend to do in pressing them to complete the collection

they themselves had determined to receive for their needy brethren.

OTHER MEN EASED

“ . . . that other men be eased” Other versions read, *“that others might be relieved,”*^{NIV} *“that there should be relief for others,”*^{NRSV} *“that others may get off free,”*^{BBE} *“for others release,”*^{YLT} *“that those who receive your gifts should have an easy time of it,”*^{LIVING} *“just to give them some relief,”*^{IE} and *“that other people be eased and relieved [of their responsibility].”*^{AMPLIFIED}

In Christ Jesus, there is no place for removing responsibility from one group of people, only to transfer it to another. The church is “the body of Christ, and members in particular” (1 Cor 12:27). Christ’s “body” is a functional one, appropriately called “the fulness of Him that filleth all in all” (Eph 1:23). That is, those who have been “joined unto the Lord” (1 Cor 6:17), are nothing less than the repository of Christ’s own Person, so that they become His hands and feet on earth. He not only imparts to them His own nature, but is working among men through that imparting. Paul alludes to this circumstance in his classic expression, *“I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me”* (Gal 2:20).

Therefore, in keeping with the very nature of the kingdom of God, Paul is not willing to remove any opportunity from the saints in which God can work through them. He has no heart for shaping the work of the Lord so that only a select few can participate, for such a condition destroys very concept of “the body of Christ,” bringing the work of the Lord to a grinding halt. Oh, that this truth were more prominent in our time!

YOU BURDENED

“ . . . and ye burdened.” Other

versions read, *“and for your affliction,”*^{NASB} *“while you are so hard pressed,”*^{NIV} *“and pressure on you,”*^{NRSV} *“and ye distressed,”*^{ASV} *“while the weight comes on you,”*^{BBE} *“and you grieved,”*^{GENEVA} *“and leave yourselves in hardship,”*^{NJB} *“and that you suffer from having too little,”*^{NLT} *“and ye brought into cumberance,”*^{TNT} *“and ye pressured,”*^{YLT} *“at your expense,”*^{LIVING} *“while you are unduly pressed,”*^{WEYMOUTH} and *“you be burdened and suffer [unfairly].”*^{AMPLIFIED}

If it is true that the redeemed are the body of Christ, then it is also true that for it to be in a state of sound health, every member must be working. It is written, *“ . . . Christ: from whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love”* (Eph 4:15-16).

Even though the Corinthians were probably able to give more – significantly more – than other churches, that did not mean there was no responsibility for the poorer churches to contribute to the needs of the Jerusalem saints. Having much did not mean that an undue burden was to do be placed upon those possessing it. It was not the misery that was to be shared, but the opportunity to be liberal in the sharing of what was possessed – whether that possession was great or small. **There is no intention to transfer impoverishment, bringing relief to the oppressed, only to create another group of the oppressed ones.**

Paul will now reason upon this matter. This is necessary because the flesh can easily use this bit of knowledge to justify withholding ones resources from the needy, thereby neglecting saints that could, in fact, be helped. The “old man” will use such an occasion to justify possessing a surplus, even if it means others must suffer because of it.

THE EXISTENCE OF THE BODY OF CHRIST POSTULATES A SHARING OF RESPONSIBILITIES

SPIRITUAL EQUALITY

“14 But by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may be a supply for their want, that their abundance also may be a supply for your want: that there may be equality”

If there is a work to be done, it is, from the very first, intended to be a **complete work**, not a partial one. Further, the work itself is designed for the whole body, just as tasks performed by the body of flesh and blood require a cooperation of all of the members.

and similar matters, in mind. Here is what it means to live unto God.

AN EQUALITY

“But by an equality, . . .” Other versions read, *“that there may be a fair balance,”*^{NRSV} *“But so that things may be equal,”*^{BBE} *“but on the principle of equality,”*^{DARBY} *“but that as a matter of fairness,”*^{ESV} *“I only mean that there should be some equality,”*^{NLT} *“But that you should divide with them,”*^{LIVING} *“There should be a balance,”*^{IE} *“but that,*

. . . that now at this time . . .” Other versions read, *“at this present time,”*^{NASB} *“Right now,”*^{NLT} *“in the present emergency,”*^{WEYMOUTH} and *“in the present crisis.”*^{WILLIAMS}

The people of God must come to the point where they can adjust to the circumstances, allowing God to work through them. As Paul writes, the disadvantage is found with the saints in Jerusalem, and the advantage is found with the saints in Corinth. This does not mean the brethren in Jerusalem had been negligent of their duties, and had thus fallen upon hard times. Neither, indeed, does it mean that the brethren in Corinth had been more diligent, and thus were suffering no lack. The circumstances can easily change within a short period of time, so that the riches of the Corinthians take wings and fly away (Prov 23:5). Permanency is not a trait of riches. And, praise the Lord, neither is it a necessary trait of poverty. Both are temporary situations, and the saints must learn how to respond in them.

In this text, Paul affirms that the Corinthians presently had more than they really needed in order that they might supply the need of their brethren, who had less than they needed.

If, for example, a heavy object is to be lifted, the whole body must work together. All of the fingers must work with the hands to grip the object. The wrists, the forearms, the biceps, and the shoulders must throw themselves into the work. There is need for the neck and the head to involve themselves to keep everything in synch. The upper and lower back, the legs, and the feet have their role to play as well. If any of these parts are not functioning well, it will create a disproportionate amount of work for the other members. It is even possible that the work may not be able to be accomplished in a timely manner, or perhaps not at finished at all.

by equalization of the burdens,”^{WEYMOUTH} and *“but to have equality [share and share alike].”*^{AMPLIFIED}

The word *“equality”* is an intriguing one. It comes from a word meaning *“equity, fairness, what is equitable,”*^{THAYER} *“equality, fairness,”*^{FRIBERG} and *“the state of being equal – equality (in the sense of having equal features or characteristics).”*^{LOUW-NIDA}

So it is in the body of Christ. The saved have been called away from purely self-interests into a *“common salvation”* in which they possess a *“common faith”* (Jude 1:3; Tit 1:4). They are now working in a common cause – *“the good and acceptable, and perfect will of God.”* **Sin causes people to live only for themselves – or, at least, with themselves being the primary ones.** However, in the work of the Lord, Jesus is the primary person, and His will is the fundamental will. The following words are written with this,

Here the emphasis is not on the churches equally sharing their possessions with the needy saints. Rather, a comparison is being made between the deficiency of the saints in Jerusalem with the sufficiency of the saints in Corinth. We are being exposed to the marvelous manner of the Kingdom. Rather than giving equal resources to the brethren in Jerusalem and in Corinth, there was poverty found in one group and opulence in the other. **We will see that this is a Divine arrangement that allows those with much to transfer some of their excess to others, therefore becoming laborers together with God.** The Lord Himself is in this circumstance, and Paul perceives it.

Thus, Paul draws their attention to the present time. For the brethren in Jerusalem, it was a crisis. For the brethren in Corinth, it was an opportunity. For the Jewish brethren, they had to seek grace to receive. For the Grecian brethren, they had to seek grace to give. In the flesh, there were two differing circumstances. In the Spirit it was a single circumstance in which both groups were being called to participate.

A SUPPLY FOR THEIR WANT

“. . . your abundance may be a supply for their want . . .” Other versions read, *“your abundance being a supply for their want,”*^{NASB} *“your plenty will supply what they need,”*^{NIV} *“your abundance being a supply for their want,”*^{ASV} *“that from those things of which you have more than enough at the present time, their need may be helped,”*^{BBE} *“your abundance for their lack,”*^{DARBY} *“your surplus . . . should supply their needs,”*^{NAB} *“your surplus at present may fill their deficit,”*^{NJB} *“Right now you have plenty and can help them,”*^{NLT} *“your abundance may succor their lack,”*^{TNT} *“you have more than you need, while they are in need,”*^{IE}

AT THIS TIME

Godly advice proceeds from a godly mind – a mind that is in harmony with “the mind of Christ” – by Given O. Blakely

"your superfluity having . . . supplied their deficiency," ^{WEYMOUTH} *"your abundance . . . is a supply for their need,"* ^{MONTGOMERY} and *"your surplus over necessity . . . going to meet their want."* ^{AMPLIFIED}

Why are there circumstances in which some saints have very much, while others have very little? While this is not intended to be an all-inclusive answer, a principle here is made known that sheds some refreshing light on some of life's difficulties.

In this text, Paul affirms that the Corinthians presently had more than they really needed in order that they might supply the need of their brethren, who had less than they needed. Admittedly, this strikes covetousness down to the ground, for a covetous spirit imagines that surplus invariably means the individual possessing it is intended to have more. In this case, however, the surplus, or *"abundance,"* is intended to meet the need of some other member of the body of Christ.

This is not to be viewed as an ongoing situation, or a permanent arrangement. Paul is careful to place this within the context of *"the present emergency"* ^{WEYMOUTH} or *"crisis."* ^{WILLIAMS} This is seen as a disruption of the normality of life, a circumstance that should not surprise us. After all, we are *"pilgrims and strangers"* in the earth (1 Pet 2:11; Heb 11:13). Therefore, we should not expect the characteristics of permanency to attend our sojourn here, whether for good or for evil. Additionally, Satan is the *"god of this world"* (2 Cor 4:4), and has focused his attention upon those who *"keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus"* (Rev 12:17). From time to time, he is given leave by God to assault the saints – as confirmed in the cases of Job (Job 1-2), Joseph (Psa 105:17-20), Israel in Egypt (Ex 1:12-16), the early saints following Pentecost (Acts 8:1-4), Paul (2 Cor 12:7), and others.

However, no person living by faith is isolated from the other members of the body of Christ. We are emphatically told that we are *"members one of another"* (Rom 12:5; Eph 4:25). Other versions read, *"individually members of one another,"* ^{NKJV} *"each*

member belongs to all the other," ^{NIV} and *"individually we are parts one of another [mutually dependent on one another]."* ^{AMPLIFIED}

This is all by Divine design, and is an appointed means employed by Jesus to care for His people. Paul labored this very point to the Corinthians in his first epistle. *"But now there are many members, but one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you'; or again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you.' On the contrary, it is much truer that the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary; and those members of the body, which we deem less honorable, on these we bestow more abundant honor, and our unseemly members come to have*

working with him. As it is written, *"Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me"* (Acts 20:34). On other occasions, instead of being the one who ministered to the needs of others, it was others who ministered to him. Again it is written, *"Now ye Philippians know also, that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church communicated with me as concerning giving and receiving, but ye only. For even in Thessalonica ye sent once and again unto my necessity"* (Phil 4:14-16).

This manner of the kingdom is precisely why Paul said of his life, *"Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am,*

If there is a work to be done, it is, from the very first, intended to be a complete work, not a partial one. Further, the work itself is designed for the whole body, just as tasks performed by the body of flesh and blood require a cooperation of all of the members.

more abundant seemliness, whereas our seemly members have no need of it. But God has so composed the body, giving more abundant honor to that member which lacked, that there should be no division in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it" (1 Cor 12:20-27). ^{NASB}

At the time, the Jerusalem brethren appeared less honorable. Yet, when it came to the Gospel being brought to the Gentiles, they were more honor, for the Gentiles were given to share their spiritual resources (Rom 15:27).

As I understand this text, no one is intended to be a permanent supplier or a permanent receiver. On the one hand, Paul once labored with his hands to provide for himself and those who were

therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Phil 4:13).

The thing that I want to stress here is that Paul was not saying life was a series of random events that tossed poor souls from one side of life's ship to another. He was not saying he was a victim of circumstance, and yet had learned to adapt to mere uncertainty. Rather, this is the manner of the kingdom. It is what is involved in having the treasure of the knowledge of God in an earthen vessel. **The body of Christ is so arranged that there is an interdependence within it. Life is so ordained that we need one another.** If we do not see it at first, God will soon teach it to us. There are times when we are like the good Samaritan, ministering to the needs of others. There are other times when we

are like the man that fell among thieves, and lay wounded on the road needing the help of others.

For those who are weak in the faith, this appears to be a most miserable circumstance. It is as though we are thrown to the winds of chance, not knowing what will befall us from day to day. However, we must subdue this kind of thought, for it is coming from the flesh, not the Spirit. The words that follow confirm that this is the case. In no sense has God abandoned His people.

A SUPPLY FOR YOUR WANT

“ . . . that their abundance also may be a supply for your want . . . ” Other versions read, *“that their abundance may also supply your lack,”* NKJV *“that their abundance also may become a supply for your want,”* NASB *“so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need,”* NIV *“so that their abundance may be for your need,”* NRSV *“that their abundance also may become a supply for your want,”* ASV *“so that if you are in any need they may be a help to you in the same way,”* BBE *“so that their surplus may also supply your needs,”* NAB *“so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need,”* NIB *“and another time their surplus may fill your deficit,”* NJB *“Then at some other time they can share with you when you need it,”* NLT *“Some day, you may be in need, and they will have more than they need,”* LIVING *“their superfluity may in turn be a supply in your deficiency,”* WEYMOUTH and *“so that [at some other time] their surplus in turn may be given to supply your want.”* AMPLIFIED

The apostle knows the manner of life in this world. Now the Corinthians had plenty. Their resources were apparently more than adequate for their needs. However, that could very well come to a sudden halt, like the tragedy that occurred in New Orleans in August of 2005. Who has not heard of dreadful floods, hurricanes, tornadoes, droughts, and the likes, that have suddenly diminished the resources of the people, leaving them poor and helpless? A sudden illness may occur, a failure in the economy, the collapse of the company from which you derive your income. Who does not know that such things can surely occur. We presently occupy a realm of uncertainty – at least from our

point of view. That is why James counseled, *“Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that”* (James 4:13-15).

I well remember the time following my retirement from industry when I trusted a man with my resources,

tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings” NIV (Luke 16:9). Again, Jesus referred to this principle of spiritual life when He said, *“And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise”* (Luke 6:31).

I find this to be an exceedingly practical text – one that can be a great source of comfort. It should be apparent that this is a perspective that cannot be gendered by law. Nor, indeed, is it the promotion of a worldly communism,

This is exactly what the Spirit is saying in this text. He is awakening the saints to the fact that they are in an uncertain world that can find them in sudden need. Therefore they should use their resources in a wise manner, so that in their time of need, they too will be considered by others.

to prepare our home for us. I meant well. I thought of the Lord and His work in my decision. Yet, my decision resulted in the sudden loss of all of my resources. I did not know what a day was going to bring forth, and thus was, in a sense, a slave to temporality. Yet, in the whole matter we committed our souls to the Lord, casting our care upon Him – and He brought us through. He used members of the body to assist us in practical ways, as well as encouragement and edification, so that we did not have to negotiate the trial alone. During our walk of faith, we had made it a point to assist God’s people, sharing our resources with them, making home their home, and our goods theirs as much as we were able. And now that we experienced hardship, God’s people rallied to our assistance.

This is exactly what the Spirit is saying in this text. He is awakening the saints to the fact that they are in an uncertain world that can find them in sudden need. Therefore they should use their resources in a wise manner, so that in their time of need, they too will be considered by others. Jesus once said, “I

where the community shares everything alike. This is not a regimented system, but the evidence of body-life, in which the members have a genuine care for one another. It is a condition that only fervent love one for another can produce – a love that is the result of the love of God being shed abroad in our hearts. It is a love that recognizes the temporality of this world, and the necessity of making investments in the world to come (Rom 5:5). It is a blessed day indeed when the heart can recognize these things.

THAT THERE MAY BE AN EQUALITY

“ . . . that there may be equality.” Other versions read, *“that there may be a fair balance,”* NRSV *“making things equal,”* BBE *“that there may be fairness,”* ESV *“In this way, everyone’s needs will be met,”* NLT *“In this way each one will have as much as he needs,”* LIVING *“in this way things are fair,”* ISV *“and so burdens be equalized,”* MONTGOMERY and *“in that way we share with each other.”* PHILLIPS

See, there is something more to life than our own circumstance. We are not given resources for ourselves alone,

nor are we the primary persons in the world. The picture I see is something like this. The Lord sees the body of Christ as a whole. He knows their necessities, and



what they need to survive without undue distraction, being able to live quiet and peaceable lives in all godliness and honesty. He is fully capable of supplying all of their needs, and more. Yet, He has not chosen to do this on a purely individual basis. It is true that we are individuals – **but we are more than individuals!** We are part of a body, and are members of one another. Our lives have been integrated with one another. Within that context, the Lord has chosen for our needs to be met by others, as well as ourselves.

The most notable example of this is the maturation of spiritual life – growing up into Christ in all things (Eph 4:15). How is it that this will take place? God has appointed that it is accomplished within the context of the church, which is Christ's body. We *“serve one another”* (Gal 5:13), speak to one another (Eph 5:19), teach and admonish one another (Col 3:16), comfort and edify one another (1 Thess 5:11), exhort one another (Heb 3:13), and consider and exhort one another (Heb 10:24-25). Jesus gives the resources, but does so through *“the entire body,”* knitting us together by the individual *“joints and ligaments”* of that body (Col 2:19) – that which *“every joint supplieth.”*

The same principle is carried out in the arena of untimely outward circumstances over which the individual has no control. When it comes to the body of Christ, I understand this text suggests that no one is intended to always be poor, or always be rich. At least, they are not to live as though that was the case. There is a sense in which believers who are always poor can be a contradiction of this principle. I certainly do not wish to build a theological box out of this text. Rather, it seems to me that the text opens the door of hope to the hopeless. Whereas the poor saints in Jerusalem were currently deprived of resources, Paul affirms there is a principle of *“equality”* at work. **He suggests that it is quite possible that the people who are now receiving assistance may very well be giving it at another time.** Life is to be lived with this possibility in mind. The fact that Jesus is *“Lord of all”* (Acts 10:36) removes all doubts that this is possible.

S e c t a r i a n i s m , o r denominationalism, interferes with the principle of *“equality.”* It narrows the borders of the body of Christ, shutting out those whom Christ has *“received to the glory of God”* (Rom 15:7). Sometimes it expands the borders, freely receiving those whom God Himself has rejected. The whole situation has produced all manner of confusion, and introduced hardships that are not necessary.

Different Kinds of Need

It ought to be noted that there are different kinds of need. Some of them are legitimate, and some are not. In the case of the saints in Jerusalem, the need was induced by famines, and carried forward by persecution. There is, however, a need that is brought on by slothfulness and indolence. Solomon spoke of a tillable and possibly productive vineyard. However, its potential was not realized because it was owned by a sloth. Thus the king wrote, *“I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding; and, lo, it was all grown over with thorns, and nettles had covered the face thereof, and the stone wall*

thereof was broken down” (Prov 24:31). Such a person is not eligible for support. In fact, Paul said of the individual within the church who refused to work, *“For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat”* (2 Thess 3:10).

There are others who, because of old age, fall upon hard times and require support. Among them are widows – believing widows. **The church is taught to carefully consider how people conducted their lives when they had adequate resources.** Concerning the support of widows (as took place at the beginning of the church, Acts 6:1), the following instruction is given. *“Let not a widow be taken into the number under threescore years old, having been the wife of one man, well reported of for good works; if she have brought up children, if she have lodged strangers, if she have washed the saints' feet, if she have relieved the afflicted, if she have diligently followed every good work. **But the younger widows refuse:** for when they have begun to wax wanton against Christ, they will marry”* (1 Tim 5:9-11).

It is understood that this is speaking of regular, or ongoing, support. However, my point is that the sharing of ones resources is to be governed by godly knowledge and understanding. We are stewards of our resources, and are to take the handling of them seriously.

SUMMATION

The *“equality”* to which this text refers does not mean equal amounts for all. Rather, the equalization takes place when the surplus, or over-abundance, of the prospering ones, is used to meet the needs of the suffering ones. This is to be seen as a deliberate circumstance, orchestrated by the Lord Himself, in the interest of His people. In it, He employs His own people in His faithful care of the church. This causes His wisdom to be seen by angelic hosts, thanksgiving to rise from those helped, and participation by others in His work.

THE WORK OF THE LORD IS NOT INTENDED TO BE ACCOMPLISHED BY A FEW RELIGIOUS PROFESSIONALS. EACH MEMBER HAS BEEN STRATEGICALLY PLACED IN THE BODY OF CHRIST, AND IS INTENDED TO BE A FUNCTIONAL PART OF THAT BODY.

NOTHING LEFT OVER, YET NOTHING LACKING

¹⁵ *As it is written, He that had gathered much had nothing over; and he that had gathered little had no lack.*

We will now be exposed to the

good and evil” (Heb 5:13-14).

AS IT IS WRITTEN

“As it is written . . . ” Other versions read, “As it says in the

Now, Paul will apply the principle of this text to the circumstance of the Corinthians. He is applying spiritual reasoning to their condition – reasoning that, of necessity, is founded upon Scripture.

proper handling of Scripture: i.e. *“Handling accurately the word of truth”* NASB (2 Tim 2:15). This use of Scripture will pass no known hermeneutical test. **There is no scientific law or principle of interpretation that will allow for such a use of Scripture.** Using human reasoning, you will not be able to trace the logic of this particular employment of Scripture. It will not be a good example of contextual preaching or teaching. In fact, the text will be taken completely out of its context.

In order to handle the Word of God like this, there must be a love for and an apprehension of the truth itself. The *“knowledge of God”* must also be in possession, as well as the comprehension of His *“eternal purpose.”* This is a classic example of a person who is instructed in the workings of the kingdom of God. Jesus said of such a person, *“Then He said to them, Therefore every scribe instructed concerning the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure things new and old”* (Mat 13:52).

There is such a thing as being able to *“use,”* or employ for godly purposes, Scripture in an appropriate manner. Of this use Scripture affirms, *“For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both*

Writings,” ^{BBE} *“as Scripture says,”* ^{NJB} *“Do you remember what the Scriptures say about this?”* ^{NLT} *“agreeing to that which is written,”* ^{TNT} *“according as it hath been written,”* ^{YLT} *and “It is like this Scripture.”* ^{IE}

Spiritual reasoning involves anchoring our thoughts in Scripture – a “thus saith the Lord.” The strength of preaching is not found in human logic, oratory, or natural abilities of persuasion. Rather, it is its integration with the *“seed”* of the kingdom, which is the word of God (Luke 8:11). When it comes to preaching and teaching, if God has not said it in Scripture, man has no right to declare or expound it as though it had any relevance whatsoever to what God is offering or doing. No man has a right to preach or declare an institutional agenda, a human interpretation, the postulates of worldly science, or purely private opinions. The thoughts of God’s people must not be anchored to such things. At the very best, whatever value they may appear to have is only minuscule. It can even be inhibitive of spiritual progress, and harmful to the saints. The closer reasoning is to the world, and the more harmonious it is with purely human reasoning, the more poisonous it becomes. This is precisely why worldly academic credentials can never qualify a person to minister in the name of the Lord.

Although Paul appears to have

been a man with an unusually disciplined and gifted mind, and although he was subjected to the best of Jewish teaching, he never presented any of these things as giving any weight to what he said. When he wanted to place a foundation under what he said, he referred to the Word of God. He did not sift that word through Jewish tradition, but took it back to the Lord Himself. The supreme proof of the truth of what he affirmed was the Word of God itself. If what he declared could not be supported by that word, he did not say it. Even when he offered his sanctified judgment, he did so as one who had received mercy to be faithful (1 Cor 7:25), always associating those judgments with Scripture, and Divine purpose as revealed in salvation.

In my judgment, there has been a staggering departure from this form of reasoning. It is not unusual to find professed preachers and teachers paddling about in the shallow and contaminated waters of human wisdom, often acknowledging they are not experts in the Word and purpose of Almighty God. If ever the church is going to advance in its appointed conformity to the image of God’s Son (*Rom 8:29), it must rid itself of such men, refusing to hear or support them. The uninformed have been no role whatsoever in the shaping of the thoughts of God’s people. Wherever they are found, they are nothing more than imposters and emissaries of the devil.

In affirming the entrance into, and ministry within, this world, the Gospels refer to what is *“written”* no less than fifty times (Matt 2:5; 4:4,6,7,10; 11:10; 21:13; 26:24,31; 27:37; Mk 1:2; 7:6; 9:12,13; 11:17; 14:21,27; 15:26; Lk 2:23; 3:4; 4:4,8,10,17; 7:27; 10:20,26; 18:31; 19:46; 20:17; 21:22; 22:37; 23:38; 24:44,46; John 2:17; 6:31,45; 8:17; 10:34; 12:14,16; 15:25; 19:20,22; 20:30,31; 21:25). **They never declare what is written in the tradition of the elders, or the writings of Josephus, or any one else that was uninspired.** The book of Acts has holy men referring to what is written eight times (Acts 1:20; 7:42; 13:29,33;

15:15; 21:25; 23:5; 24:14). The Epistles and Revelation refer to what is “written” fifty-nine times (Rom 1:17; 2:15,24; 3:4,10; 4:17,23; 8:36; 9:13,33; 10:15; 11:8,26; 12:19; 14:11; 15:3,4,9,15,21; 1 Cor 1:19,31; 2:9; 3:19; 4:6; 5:11; 9:9,10,15;

apparently approximated a single ordinary serving.

- Because excess manna could not be stored, except for the Sabbath day, there was no point to gathering more

Corinthians. He is applying spiritual reasoning to their condition – reasoning that, of necessity, is founded upon Scripture.

HE THAT GATHERED MUCH AND HE THAT GATHERED LITTLE

“... He that had gathered much had nothing over, and he that had gathered little had no lack.” Other versions read, “he who had taken up much had nothing over, and who had a little had enough.”^{BBE} “He who gathered much had no excess, and who gathered little was nothing short.”^{DARBY}

In strict accordance with the word of the Lord, the person who “gathered much” did so because of what every man “should eat”^{NASB} (Ex 16:16a), and according to “the number of persons” dwelling in each tent^{NASB} (Ex 16:16b). If, for example there were six members in a household – a husband, a wife, three children, and a grandparent – six omers of manna would be gathered – “an omer apiece according to the number of persons each of you has in the tent”^{NASB} (Ex 16:16). This was the standard.

The grown men would require more manna than the children. The children would require less than the mother. The mother might require more than the aged grandfather. Yet, there would be no lack for the household. The surplus the children did not require could be consumed by the grown men. The extra that the mother may have required could be obtained from the excess of the aged grandfather. Thus, everyone’s needs were met by a gathering that was equal for each person.

Paul is saying that the same principle is operative in the body of Christ – particularly as regards practical matters. In this case, the poorer brethren in Jerusalem had gathered little of the resources required to sustain life in the body. On the other hand, the brethren in Corinth has gathered more than they needed, and could therefore share with the less fortunate brethren in Jerusalem.

All of this is seen as intentional – arranged by the Lord in order to the proper functioning of the body. It was a means for subduing any inordinate desire for the accumulation of worldly goods. It

AN OMER A PIECE ACCORDING TO THE NUMBER OF PERSONS



10:7,11; 14:21; 15:45,54; 2 Cor 3:2,3,7; 4:13; 8:15; 9:9; Gal 3:10,13; 4:22,27; 6:11; Phile 1:19; Heb 10:7; 12:23; 13:22; 1 Pet 1:16; 5:12; 2 Pet 3:15; 1 John 2:14,21,26; 5:13; Rev 1:3; 2:17; 5:1; 13:8; 14:1; 17:5,8; 19:12,16; 20:12,15; 21:12,27; 22:18,19).

It should not be necessary to say anything more on the importance of what is “written.”

This particular reference is taken from the book of Exodus, and pertains to the gathering of the manna. “So when they measured it by omers, he who gathered much had nothing left over, and he who gathered little had no lack. Every man had gathered according to each one’s need” (Ex 16:18).^{NKJV} Before we begin, there are several things to note in this text.

- A consistent means of measure had to be used – an “omer” (about five pints). This was a convenient measure that allowed for a proper gathering of the manna. It

than was needed. “And Moses said, Let no man leave of it till the morning. Notwithstanding they hearkened not unto Moses; but some of them left of it until the morning, and it bred worms, and stank: and Moses was wroth with them” (Ex 16:19-20).

- The gathering was therefore to be every day, and strictly according to need. “This is the thing which the LORD has commanded: ‘Let every man gather it according to each one’s need, one omer for each person, according to the number of persons; let every man take for those who are in his tent’” (Ex 16:16).^{NKJV}

- The objective was for each household to have enough for their need. This was determined by two things: the appetite or capacity of each individual, and the number of people in the household.

Now, Paul will apply the principle of this text to the circumstance of the

was also the Lord's appointed means of providing for His people. Additionally, it contributed to the mortifying of the deeds of the body, like *"covetousness, which is idolatry"* (Col 3:5).

While it is true that this does not blend well with the manner of life promoted in our particular society, we do well to carefully ponder what has been taught. Lest we fail to see the reasoning behind this, it must be remembered that the Jewish brethren had contributed to the spiritual welfare of the Gentiles. In fact, this is the purpose for this line of reasoning. This is spelled out in Paul's epistle to the Romans. *"For it hath pleased them of Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor saints which are at Jerusalem. It hath pleased them verily; and their debtors*

they are. For if the Gentiles have been made partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister unto them in carnal things" (Rom 15:26-27). This is not, then, a call to general philanthropy, although there is certainly nothing wrong with going good *"to all men."* However, this good is to be done especially to those who are members of Christ's body. As it is written, *"And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith"* (Gal 6:9-10).

The church must not lose this perspective. We are especially obligated to assist needy brethren who have contributed to our faith. Thus the elders who *"rule well"* – laboring hard *"in the*

word and in the doctrine," are to be counted *"worthy of double honor"* (1 Tim 5:17). In our text, the Jewish brethren, whose *"root"* the Gentiles are presently enjoying with all of its spiritual *"fatness"* (Rom 11:17), are to be the objects of special consideration. What was given to them was being enjoyed by the Gentiles, and they were not to forget it.

Every person is to have a part, *"laying aside a sum of money in keeping with his income"* ^{NIV} (1 Cor 16:2). In so doing, the love of the brethren will be both cultured and expressed, their attachment to the world would be minimized, and the needs of the people of God would be met. In all of this God is glorified, His people edified, and His truth advanced. The light of God's glory shines in such conduct.

CONCLUSION

It should be apparent that this kind of reasoning is exceedingly rare in the contemporary church. It is important that we be able to decipher why this is so. As with the church in Corinth, this is the direct result of carnality – and carnality has no place in the body of Christ. The situation at Corinth confirmed that the closer one is to this world, the more hard and obtuse the heart becomes. These were people who had received a multiplicity of spiritual gifts – and it was even in an abundant measure (1 Cor 1:7). Yet, they had come to handle these gifts like little children who were devoid of judgment.

There was a lot of activity going on among them, but it was not all commendable. In the sweeping influence of their religious activities, they had forgotten about their own willing pledge to come to the aid of their poorer brethren. This was a deplorable condition which required correction. Paul went about this correction with the *"gentleness of Christ"* (2 Cor 10:1). He sought to ensure that the Corinthians themselves made some advance in the faith, while giving heed to the need of their brethren.

It is important that we make sure our religion is not vain. James wrote, *"If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain. Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world"* (James 1:26-27). These days men often speak derisively of *"religion,"* as though it was something disassociated from God. This is not, however, the case.

The words *"religion,"* and *"religious"* have to do with the outward conduct of those professing faith. In the case of the Jews, their *"religion"* was largely contained in ceremonies. Paul alludes to this in Acts 26:5, and Galatians 1:13 and 14. In Christ Jesus, *"religion"* is not mere ceremony. It rather takes the form of *"good works,"* to which we have been appointed, and in which we are to walk. As it is written, *"For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them"* (Eph 2:10). James identifies some of them

as being the visitation of the fatherless and widows in their affliction (to meet their need), and not allowing the spot of the world to be found upon us (James 1:27). John says this has to do with supplying *"this world's good"* to the brethren who are in legitimate need of it (1 John 3:17). His treatise of the subject confirms how important it is.

There are some questions that will inevitably arise concerning this kind of activity. There are people who are perpetually poor and needy. Some of this is legitimate – like Lazarus, a beggar full of sores, who was a daily laid at the gate of a certain rich man (Luke 16:20). There are also brethren who fall upon hard times due to natural calamity and misfortunes over which they have no control – like the poor saints in Jerusalem.

Wherever there is some doubt as to the legitimacy of the need, men should seek wisdom from above, as they are enjoined in Scripture (James 1:5). It does seem to me that this is an area in which there can be general improvement among the churches.

EVERY MEMBER OF THE BODY IS TO DO ITS OWN PART IN THE WORK OF THE LORD

Godly advice proceeds from a godly mind – a mind that is in harmony with "the mind of Christ" – by Given O. Blakely

Our next Hungry Saints Meeting will be held on Friday, 9/30/2005. In this session, we continue our current series of lessons on the Epistle of Second Corinthians. The thirty-sixth lesson will cover verses sixteen through twenty-four of the eighth chapter: **“THE PROOF OF YOUR LOVE.”** All genuine spiritual works pass the test of sincerity. They can hold up under the examination of godly men. 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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