

“... See That Ye Abound In This Grace, Also”

“... we exhorted Titus that as he had made a beginning before, so he would also complete in you this grace also. But as ye abound in everything, in faith and utterance, and knowledge, and in all earnestness, and in your love to us, see that ye abound in this grace also. I speak not by way of commandment, but as proving through the earnestness of others the sincerity also of your love. For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor that ye through his poverty might be become rich” (2 Cor. 8:6-9).

The response of the Macedonians to the Corinthians' purpose to send relief to Jerusalem soon proved to be a potential source of embarrassment for both Paul and the Corinthians! While the Corinthians were still dithering about raising their proposed funds; the Macedonians immediately acted and to such an extent that Paul had to be persuaded by them to take their funds for the sum they raised was “beyond their power.” And the messengers of those Macedonian churches were with Paul as he moved toward Corinth for it was his plan to sail to Judaea from Corinth. Thus Titus was sent on ahead that he might stir the Corinthians into completion of the work they earlier had begun.

So, as they abounded in faith, utterance, knowledge, earnestness, and love for Paul, they are urged to abound also in this grace, “this grace” being the providing for the physical necessities of the Jerusalem saints. Paul's statement, “I speak not by way of commandment but as proving through the earnestness of others the sincerity also of your love,” must be understood as the Hebrew expression it was. Of course he was commanding them — the phrase is but another illustration of the “not/but” expressions so common in the New Testament (see John 6:27 and 1 Corinthians 1:17 for other illustrations of this same expression). Paul negated or minimized the fact that they are in fact commanded “to abound in this grace also” to emphasize their need to prove (and proving by demonstration) that their love was sincere.

To stir these brethren to “complete the doing” Paul used two examples to stir them on, the example was that of the Macedonians. The Corinthians' determination to aid Jerusalem saints had provoked the Macedonian Christians to action. Now the action of the Macedonians was used to provoke the Corinthians to finish what they had begun.

There is a second example which served to move the Corinthians — the example of Jesus. “For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor that ye through his poverty might become rich” (2 Cor. 8:9). No nobler example could Paul place before brethren than the example of Jesus. He wrote the Philippians, “Have this mind in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who existing in the form of God, counted not the being on an equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men ...” (Phil. 2:5-7).

Jesus' advent to earth was not to some king or person of noble estate, but into the bosom of an extremely poor family. Mary and Joseph were poor in this world's goods. Mary's offering, when she presented Jesus to the Lord, was the offering of one who was unable to offer a required sacrifice (Lk. 21:22-24; Exo. 34:20; Lev. 12:6-8). Jesus once said, "Foxes have holes and the birds of the heaven have nests, but the son of man hath not where to lay his head" (Lk. 9:58). But the real reducing of Himself to poverty was not the extreme poverty His family experienced physically, it was the self-imposed poverty of His sacrificing His being on equality with the Father to taking on Himself the form of man, the creation, and as the Hebrew writer said, "Since then the children are sharers in flesh in blood, he also himself in like manner partook of the same; that through death he might bring to nought him that had the power of death, that is the devil; and might deliver all them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage" (Heb. 2:14-15). Through the poverty of Christ we can become rich, we can secure forgiveness of sins, we can be reconciled with God, and we can have the bright prospect of eternal life.

Surely with two such worthy examples before them — one human, one divine — the Corinthians would be moved to, as Paul commands, abound in this grace also. When Paul arrived, apparently his letter had its desired effect for in writings to the Romans from Corinth Paul identified the gift and those who were givers of the gift to Jerusalem as, along with others, from Achaia or Corinth (Rom. 15:26).

The Corinthians proved the sincerity of their love by action: the gifts they gave for needy saints. We prove sincerity of our love God Christ in the same way — by action. Jesus said, "If ye love me, ye will keep his commandments" (Jn. 14:15).

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