

The Generosity of Grace

Thomas Robinson, January 12, 2020

2 Corinthians 8:1-15

We want you to know, brothers and sisters, **the grace** (*charis*) of God that has been granted among the assemblies of Macedonia; ² for in a **severe trial of affliction**, their **abundance of joy** and their **profound poverty** have overflowed in **the wealth of their simple generosity**.

³ For, as I can testify, it was according to their power, and even beyond their power, by their own choice, ⁴ with many pleas, begging us for **the grace** (*charis*) and the **fellowship** of this **ministry** for God's people. ⁵ This wasn't as we anticipated; rather, **they gave themselves first to the Lord** and, by the will of God, to us.

⁶ This led us to encourage Titus that just as he earlier made a start, so also he should bring **this grace** (*charis*) to **completion for you**. ⁷ What I mean is that just as you indeed **abound in everything** – in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in great eagerness, and in our love for you – that you also **abound in this grace** (*charis*).

⁸ I'm not saying this as a command, but I'm offering a way to test the **genuineness of your love** in relation to the earnestness of others.

⁹ For **you know the grace** (*charis*) of our Lord, **Jesus the Anointed King**, that **for your sakes** he **became poor**, though he was rich, so that **you by his poverty may become rich**.

¹⁰ So I'm just giving advice in this matter. This is **good for you**. Whoever last year made a start not just in simply **doing** something but also in **desiring it** – ¹¹ now finish the doing, so that your **readiness to desire** may be matched by completing it from what you have. ¹² For if the **readiness** shines through, one is well accepted according to whatever one has, not according to what one doesn't have.

¹³ Not that there should be relief for others and trouble for all of you, but some **fair balance** in the present – ¹⁴ **your abundance aiding their need**, in order that their abundance may be for your need, in order that there may be **a fair balance**. ¹⁵ As it is written,

*"The one with much did not have too much,
and the one with little did not have too little."* [Exodus 16:18]

Acts 20:32-35 Paul talks to the elders of the church at Ephesus

³² And now I commend you to God and to the message of his grace, ³³ I coveted no one's silver or gold or clothing. ³⁴ You know for yourselves that I worked with my own hands to support myself and my companions. ³⁵ In all this I've given you an example that by such work we must support those who are vulnerable, remembering the words of the Lord Jesus, for he himself said,

'It's more blessed to give than to receive.'

Luke 12:32-34 Jesus teaches his disciples

³² "Don't be afraid, little flock, for your Father has joyfully decided to give you the kingdom. ³³ Sell your possessions and give aid to others. Make yourselves purses that don't wear out– a treasure in God's realms that never runs out, where no thief is near and no moth destroys. ³⁴ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

Matthew 6:24 Jesus warns that his disciples can't serve money and possessions.

²⁴ No one can be a servant to two lords, for they'll either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You can't serve both God and Mammon.

John 3:16

¹⁶ "For God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, in order that everyone who trusts in him would not perish but have Life of the age to come."

The Grace of God & Worship through Giving

We began the new year hearing Jesus' teaching about serving God and Mammon and about being anxious about life. How can I live that in a world organized around Mammon and powered by anxious, competitive desire. Serving Mammon is our default setting.

Each Sunday: "Worship through Giving." What does it mean? Offerings aren't mere tokens.

They're a language of gratitude, spoken with money – the stuff we get in exchange for a portion of our life, energy, creativity. We all pay life to get money. It can become Mammon: getting money is fundamental. Jesus takes money very seriously: "More blessed to give..."

Paul recognized the challenge of teaching Gentiles & Jews. Traditional religion is often bargain and payment. If God is good to me, I'll pay a vow. I'll give in order to get far more. Is God good, fair? Am I getting return for my faith, worship, gifts I bring? Doesn't God owe me?

God's Reality & A Revolution of Heart and Action

As Paul taught in Macedonia and Greece, he was leading people to a "renewal of mind," a revolution in vision, understanding, and practice. He announced the Good News and called them to grasp the Love and way of life it embodied. Nothing is earned; nothing is paid. Everything is given! God starts! God gives himself, his love, his life in Jesus.

Paul's collection for poor Jews of Jerusalem challenged Greek believers. Paul calls it Grace, but they faced affliction and poverty themselves because of their faith. Is God fair? Is he good? Yes! Their suffering forced them to face seriously the question, "What really matters?" "What is my life about?" "What really lasts?" They realized that the gift of God's Grace was what gave them "abundant joy." A joy and peace that can flourish and sustain in suffering. As God had given himself to them, they gave themselves to God. They experienced the love and grace at the heart of God and desired to give. Affliction and abundant joy and profound poverty led to generosity. Embodied Grace.

Practicing the Transformation of Grace

Paul wants the Corinthians (and us, not in such desperate straits) to experience the same embodied grace. The inner revolution isn't separate from outer practice. It shines through. Desire / readiness to share resources. Persistence to really give, completing the action. Watching the action flow from giving ourselves to God to sharing love to each other.

Thankful, seemingly irrational generosity helps de-fang the bite of Mammon. We choose to live below our means in order to be generous with our means. Jesus says "Don't be afraid!" The "abundant joy" that flows from Grace and shared life is true wealth – living out God's Grace & Love in our own life. They put their treasures in God's realm in generously serving each other and those far away. It worked. God's own joy and grace bloomed in them.