

2 Cor. 9:6-15
Created to Give Thanks to God

6 But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.

7 So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.

8 And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work.

9 As it is written: "He has dispersed abroad, He has given to the poor; His righteousness endures forever."

10 Now may He who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food, supply and multiply the seed you have sown and increase the fruits of your righteousness,

11 while you are enriched in everything for all liberality, which causes thanksgiving through us to God.

12 For the administration of this service not only supplies the needs of the saints, but also is abounding through many thanksgivings to God,

13 while, through the proof of this ministry, they glorify God for the obedience of your confession to the gospel of Christ, and for your liberal sharing with them and all men,

14 and by their prayer for you, who long for you because of the exceeding grace of God in you.

15 Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!

One of the reasons that Paul wrote this letter that we have been reading from to the church in Corinth, was to encourage them in the process of putting together a collection for the impoverished church in Jerusalem, that's the context behind chapters 8 and 9.

Corinth was a rich city, and doing very well at this time in terms of trade. Jerusalem on the other hand, was afflicted by a severe famine, that had been prophesied by Agabus in Acts 11. The hardships the church in Jerusalem had to go through were probably made even worse by the fact that the persecution of the church was worse there than in any other part of the empire. If you were a believer in Jesus in Jerusalem, you were a minority, an outcast in Jewish society. Cast out of the synagogue, persecuted by the officials, possibly even cast into jail, tortured, or even executed. Paul you will remember had been an active persecutor of the church himself until his conversion. You can imagine that for believers in Jerusalem getting a job or making trade contacts, or sending ones children to school, was no easy thing. It must have been somewhat similar to being a Christian in modern day Pakistan, where you can have a PhD in physics, and yet have to work for subsistence wages as a brick maker, simply because you are a Christian living in the middle of an Islamic society. So in Jerusalem, Christians had to deal with Poverty, Prejudice, Persecution, and Famine.

The believers in Corinth on the other hand, were well off, probably better off financially than most other believers, but Paul was concerned in that their giving to the relief of the saints in Jerusalem (and of course when I say saints, I'm using the biblical term for believers, *hagios*, holy or set apart ones) was low. They hadn't even given as much as their poor believers to the north in Macedonia, had given. So how does Paul stir them up? Well he doesn't castigate them, he doesn't lay the law on them or tell them they aren't tithing in accordance with God's law, and he certainly doesn't write them a little Marxist economic treatise on how the wealth of the rich needs to be redistributed to the poor.

Paul doesn't do any of those things, instead he reminds them about grace, and then he reminds them that they have been the beneficiaries of God's grace in so many ways, and then he reminds them that the reason that God's grace has abounded to them is so that in turn they might have the means to do good works for others – not so that they would be praised by men like the Pharisees – but so that others would benefit and give thanks to God.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon summed up Paul's whole argument in this one beautiful phrase: ***We are as cups filled at the spring, and from us the thirsty drink and praise the fountain.***

I should be honest with all of you, this is not the same sermon that I started writing last week and had intended to preach. Why is that? Well, the events of the past few days have provided me with just too many examples of the great scriptural principle that Paul is talking about in these verses.

I tell you the truth when I say this, I praise God for what Joy and I have gone through over the last few days. Not because of the events themselves, no they were heartbreaking, horrible, and even scary as at one point, when Joy collapsed and stopped breathing for a moment and I thought seriously to myself, this can't be happening, ***O Lord please not my dear wife as well.*** Guinness doesn't list this kind of thing, but I think I may have set a record for the fastest coherent prayer in history.

No I praise God and I thank Him, because throughout this His Grace has abounded to us. First, because I have had to lean on him.

Now if you are a Christian, you will know what I am talking about here, and if you are not, then you won't and for that I am truly sorry. When you are grieving, people can sympathize with you, they can tell I'm so sorry, and you know they are. They have a common feeling with you, and that helps. But they aren't experiencing ***your*** pain, ***your*** loss, ***your*** grief, because they don't live in your heart. Now for the modern atheist, that's it, that's all there is too it. As the novelist Joseph Conrad put it "***We live as we dream – alone.***"

But for the Christian, that's not true, we are ***never*** alone. And there is one, who does live in your heart, who does experience and know, ***your*** pain, ***your*** loss, ***your*** grief. Christ doesn't just sympathize with his children, he knows and feels exactly what you are going through, and therefore you can go to Him and rest upon him in a way that is simply impossible with people. And it is only in those moments when you are forced to rest upon Him, to seek solace in Him, that you can understand what Jesus meant when he said to Paul, "***My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.***" In times of strength and self-sufficiency, that seems like a contradiction, but over the past three days, I've understood it and I'm grateful for this grace, I thank God for the helper that it is the Holy Spirit dwelling in my Heart.

But I also praise God because during the past days, his grace has abounded to us through his people. Over the past few days, I haven't once had to really worry about what would happen to my kids, or what we were going to eat, or the church being ready for worship, because of the liberal sharing of the saints with us. And for that I glorify God. I was thirsty, and you gave me water from the spring.

That is the way it should be in the church, and so rarely ever is, our culture knows less and less of what I am talking about every day, and that is one of the reasons you don't find what I am talking about in culture infected churches. Brethren hear me, I do not boast, but you cannot simply replace

the liberality of godly saints with a program. If our church becomes corporate and plastic, we will lose this grace. Don't let that happen. For my sake for your sake, for the sake of the glory of God.

Because this is what you were created for! This is what the church is to be about, not the building, that's nothing, you the church.

Children what is the chief of man? Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him for ever.

Well Paul tells you that giving thanks to God will abound when his grace, his love which is given abundantly to his people, is in turn dispersed abroad as people have need.

John 13:34 "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another.

35 "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

How will men know you belong to Christ? As the evidence of a changed heart manifests itself in your good works. You don't do good works to be saved, you only really do Good works because you are saved.

And that after all is the indescribable gift of God, that is the source, the spring, of all grace isn't it? The giving of his son?

Children, I want you to understand this point, I want you to understand the mercy of God to you and why it is so special. I want you to understand the Gospel so you will understand why Paul calls it a gift so special he can't even tell you exactly how wonderful it is. That's what he means when he says indescribable. Let me try to describe it with a story.

There was a man who committed lived in a country ruled by a just, and good, and loving king. But although he was a good king, that man hated Him. He was a bad man, he broke all the kings laws, and he rebelled against him, and so that bad man was justly condemned for his crimes against the king, and he was sentenced to be put to death. But on the day when they were going to take that bad man and chop his head off, instead of sending to the jail to fetch that bad and wicked man, the king's own son, who was very Good and had never-ever broken any of the kings laws, said "I will go in his place" and so they took the King's son and they stripped him of his royal robes, and gave him the clothes of the bad man to wear, and they took him to chopping block, and they cut his head off. And then because the King's Son had died for the crimes of the bad man, they King wrote PAID IN FULL on the list of all the crimes of the bad man. And you know just in case, the bad man doubted for a moment that all those crimes had all been paid for, the King's Son, who had died for the bad man, came back to Life! And the King Son gave that man a ring with a seal on it, so he would know that he had been forgiven.

But that isn't the end of the story, because the bad man became a new man because of what the King's Son had done, he had a new heart and he lived a very different life after that, he became a Good man. And one of the things he did, because he remembered what the Son had done for him, was to give away the things he had. And he didn't do that with a mean spirit, he loved to give them away. And the people who he gave those things to didn't praise that man, they praised the King. And do you know when that man, who had been very bad died, it wasn't terrible at all. Because you know who he went to live with? He went to live forever with the King and His Son, and they gave

him a Robe and you know he found out that of all the things he had given away, he didn't lose one of them. The King gave him much, much, more than he had ever given away.

You know who that Bad Man who became a good man is? He is every Christian. I hope that includes all of you and that you are praising God for that today.

But if not, let's pray, and ask that God would make you a Christian today, shall we?