

Grace in Practice (2 Corinthians 8:1–15)

By Pastor Jeff Alexander (4/16/2023)

Introduction

1. In this chapter (8), Paul takes up the *second* purpose for his writing this second epistle, to encourage them to follow through with their commitment to contribute to the relief of the suffering saints in Judea.
2. The heavy persecution of the saints in Judea coupled with the terrible famine that gripped that part of the world put the believers there in very desperate straits. Paul had taken it upon himself to raise an offering for those saints from the Gentile churches the Lord had established under his ministry. His plan was announced to the churches more than a year prior to this letter (1 Corinthians 16:1; 2 Corinthians 9:2:).

Now, a full year had passed, and the Corinthians had failed to fulfill their commitment. This failure gave the apostle a wonderful opportunity to develop the doctrine of giving as evidence of the grace of God.

3. Grace (*charis*) is “the merciful kindness by which God, exerting his holy influence upon souls, turns them to Christ, keeps, strengthens, increases them in Christian faith, knowledge, affection, and kindles them to the exercise of the Christian virtues” (Strong). When grace is given to one, a holy and benevolent spiritual condition results. It is this benevolent spirit that Paul appeals to in the passage before us.

This message is not to pressure anyone to give. If one has been granted the merciful kindness of God to conform to the character of Christ, that one will naturally and generously give of themselves and of their substance to benefit brethren in need. Giving is not the proof of grace, but one cannot profess to be a child of God if he is selfish, stingy, and uncaring about the needs of his brothers and sisters in Christ (Matthew 25:34–40).

I. Grace bestowed.

1. There are three aspects of grace.
 - 1) The behavior of those who have *no grace* from God is that they are rebellious, negligent, and hostile to God’s principles (Malachi 3:7–12).
 - 2) There are those who live by the standards of *cheap grace*. They profess to follow God and to live by His grace, but they redefine grace as freedom to live as they choose without fear of punishment. Essentially, they reject God’s standards as legalism, arguing that grace is freedom from the law (Matthew 5:17–20).
 - 3) True believers live by *God’s grace* (true grace), the dynamic of the living God given to certain of Adam’s race, making them believers and enabling them with the desire and ability to live in harmony with God and His Word (Philippians 2:12, 13).
2. The nature of true grace may be defined as follows: (1) Its *source* is God. (2) Its *character* is a gift, unmerited and undeserved, bestowed on His people. (3) Its *expectation* is a willing mind resulting in active obedience (8:11, 12). (4) Its *evidence* is a demonstration of a genuine love for the brethren (v. 8).

II. An Example of Genuine Grace (vv. 1–5)

1. Paul began his charge to the Corinthians to fulfill their commitment by giving them the example of the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia (northern Greece, the cities of Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea; Corinth, located in the south of Greece).
 - a. Their burden to demonstrate their great love of the brethren came as they experienced a great trial of affliction. Understanding their distressing circumstances, Paul wanted to excuse them, but they insisted that Paul include them in this project.
 - b. Although they suffered great persecution, their *joy* in the Lord evidenced a *willing spirit* to give (v. 3: “For to *their* power, I bear record, yea, and beyond their power they were willing of themselves,” AV). They insisted that they must be in this partnership (*fellowship*, v. 4). They were willing to obey God (v. 5).
 - c. This example served to prompt Corinthian obedience (vv. 6-8)
2. The sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ also served as an example in its being *selfless* and *purpose driven* (v. 9).

III. Principles Developed

1. Grace is evidenced in a sacrificial spirit, demanding more of Christ-followers than the law demanded of those under it. Grace never coerces obedience but enables it, making the spirit willing. There are no grudging workers under grace.
2. The grace of giving is universally expected of professing saints. As all the Macedonian churches had evidenced the grace of God, so the Corinthian church was expected to evidence the same grace (v. 7). Willing obedience demonstrates the sincerity of professing believers.
3. Grace always provides for the need, then blesses the provider (9:12–15).