

The Grace of Christ

One thing that makes the Christmas season so special to us is the giving and receiving of gifts. The Bible has a lot to say about giving and receiving, including how we give for the wellbeing of poor and lost folks. The most important thing in Christian giving is our motivation. There are many motives for giving—love and compassion for the recipient, receiving a tax break before the end of the year (!), even egotistical needs that we have sometimes to be known as generous people—but the most important motivation, the Bible teaches us, is the grace of God fully revealed in Jesus Christ. Hear what Paul says to the Corinthians about their generosity in giving to the special gift for the poor saints in Jerusalem.

2 Corinthians 8:1-9

We want you to know, brothers,¹ about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, ² for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. ³ For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, ⁴ begging us earnestly for the favor² of taking part in the relief of the saints—⁵ and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us. ⁶ Accordingly, we urged Titus that as he had started, so he should complete among you this act of grace. ⁷ But as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you—see that you excel in this act of grace also. ⁸ I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine. ⁹ For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.

Paul tells us in verse 9 that there are two profound things for us to know: 1) what Jesus did; and 2) why He did it.

I. **What Jesus did: He was rich and He became poor.**

Some of us know what it's like to be poor. Paul says that even the Macedonians gave out of their poverty. Some of the most charitable people in the world are poor people. Jesus Himself commended the poor widow who gave her two mites, saying she gave more than anyone else.

There are also those who are rich and who are very generous. We have examples here in Memphis of people who have considerable wealth who have made significant gifts to relieve the poverty of their neighbors and to help reach the lost. These folks, however, even after they give generous gifts, are still considered wealthy people. Who would intentionally give to the poor and themselves become poor in doing so? Now there are people who unintentionally become poor, having lost their wealth through unfortunate circumstances; but who would intentionally impoverish themselves for the sake of giving to others?

This is exactly what Jesus did. He intentionally became poor for the sake of other people. notice also that Jesus became poor that we might become rich. Normally when we give to charity, we are not trying to make the poor wealthy, we are only trying to put food on their table. But Jesus actually makes us wealthy through His poverty. Jesus laid aside His glory that we may share in His glory (see His prayer in John 17).

II. **Why Jesus did what He did: so that you, through His poverty, might become rich.**

The implication in this truth is that we are by nature poor. Unfortunately, we spend much of our time trying to convince ourselves and others that we actually are not in need and do not need the charity of another, even God! John addressed this issue with the Laodiceans in Revelation 3:17: “for you say, ‘I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing,’ not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.”

We can see in Genesis 3 the results of our disobedience in the curse that is pronounced upon Satan and upon humanity. We need someone to relieve the curse. That is exactly what Jesus has done through His incarnation. He came to this world to offer Himself as a sacrifice to satisfy the justice of God against our offenses against Him. Not only that: He has not only removed the condemnation, but He has replaced it with loving adoption into His family so that we have become the heirs of God. We now share in the divine nature! We know that one day we shall actually be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is!

The most important motive for generosity is the grace of God revealed in the incarnation.

Did the Achaeans (the Corinthians) heed Paul's advice? We have the answer in Romans 15:25-26. One year after Paul wrote the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians, he wrote the Romans from Corinth, encouraging them also to give to this same offering for the poor saints in Jerusalem, and here is what he says: "At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem bringing aid to the saints. For Macedonia *and Achaea* have been pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem." The Corinthians were convinced. They were generous, and they were generous because God had been so generous to them.

Discussion Questions

1. What is Paul's overall purpose in writing 2 Corinthians 8:1-9? Why was this of such importance to him?
2. What do we learn about Christian generosity in verses 1-8?
3. Why is the incarnation of Christ the ultimate motive for Christian giving?
4. From verse 9, describe what Jesus did in the incarnation.
5. From verse 9, describe why Jesus did what He did in the incarnation.
6. What are the implications of Christ's incarnation for our lives?

Going Deeper

1. How are you personally challenged by this text of Scripture? As a result of your study, what specific changes do you want to make in your life?
2. Have you received the Lord's grace in your life in such a way that you have markedly become more gracious to others?