

## The Grace of God 2 Corinthians 8-9

### The Grace of God

"For you know the GRACE of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich." (2 Cor.8:9). This is one of those awesome passages that really causes you to think. Initially I was quite amazed where this passage, about the grace of God, is found. In this image, Paul uses the incarnation to reveal the grace of God. In the key chapter in the New Testament about giving, God placed this wonderful passage about grace. Paul uses this classic passage as our motivation to give. We should give because He gave us infinitely more. He gave us more than we possibly could ever return.

I love the way Paul uses words, particularly here the words rich and poor, poverty and wealth. It is up to us to figure out what type of riches and poverty he means, but with a clear view of the incarnation it becomes obvious. Jesus was "rich" in His pre-existence as God in heaven with all the prerogatives of God. These riches that Christ gave up in the incarnation have nothing to do with physical property or material wealth that we chase after. God doesn't need to purchase anything, He needs nothing outside of Himself. He alone is totally independent, and He depends on no one else and nothing else for His riches. I can think of at least three ways that God is uniquely rich. Jesus was rich in glory. I remember the way John described the glorified Christ in heaven, "His eyes were like a flame of fire...and His voice was like the sound of many waters...and His face was like the sun radiating in its strength...and when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as a dead man." (Rev.1:14-17). Jesus also was rich in power. In Jn.1:3 we are told of His power as the Creator of all things, "All things came into being by Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being"; and the author of Hebrews explains it this way, "He is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power." Jesus was also rich in worship. Hebrews 1:6 says, "Let all the angels of God worship Him." In the scene of heaven in Revelation 5, we see all the heavenly host worshipping the Lamb of God (Jesus).

In what sense then could Jesus have possibly taken on poverty? The Greek word used here for "poor" was commonly used to describe an indigent beggar beside the road. What Paul means is that though Jesus was so rich in heaven, He voluntarily laid aside His heavenly riches of glory, power, and worship to take on the flesh of man and enter a world of trouble, humiliation, and pain. Ultimately, Jesus carried this poverty to the extreme of dying the worst kind of death on the cross. Why would Jesus do this? In 2 Cor.8:9, Paul explains it by saying, "that you through His poverty might become rich." Jesus gave up His riches and became poor so that we who were spiritually bankrupt could become spiritually rich. The Apostle John said basically the same thing in the well known passage of Jn.3:16, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life."

There's Got to be a Better Way

Why did God express His love in this way? Surely there was a better (easier) way. Why did God choose this way to redeem all who would believe? Scripture gives us multiple reasons why it had to be done in this way:

1. Promises---all the promises of God in the Old Testament came true in Jesus' incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection. For God not to have sent Jesus, would have made Him a God of no veracity. Beginning with Abraham, then to all the Patriarchs and prophets, God said that He would bring a man from Abraham's descendants, from the tribe of Judah, a descendant of David, born in Bethlehem who would redeem men to God.

1. In Jesus, we have God revealed to us (John 1:18), "No man has seen God, the only begotten God...He has explained Him." We cannot know God unless He reveals Himself to us, and God is revealed by Jesus.

1. Jesus revealed who man should be, and will be in heaven. Jesus led the life that all men should. Jesus alone lived a perfect sinless life, and was our perfect example. We always have to forgive and defend Christians, but never Christ.
  
1. We need a sympathetic high priest to approach God for us. The author of Hebrews 2:17 put it well, "He had to be made like us in all things, that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people." Jesus actually experienced all the physical and emotional pain that we have to deal with, as well as rejection, humiliation, and even the tug of temptation (yet w/o sin). Therefore He is perfect to understand and represent us.
  
1. We needed a perfect willing sacrifice. Jesus alone was a voluntary righteous sacrifice. There is no other qualified to die for my sins. Only a sinless man could do it, and there has just been one of those. For centuries men brought sacrifices to God, and God passed over sins of believers because God looked forward to the perfect sacrifice (Romans 3:25). If it had been up to me, I would have sent Jesus in a couple of days before the crucifixion to minimize His rejection and punishment, but God's plan was a natural birth, childhood, adolescence, and adult life so Jesus would experience the whole ball game. He experienced a complete life of pain, humiliation, suffering, and thus proven perfection. Can you even imagine a perfect teenager? Isn't that an oxymoron? Mark Twain gave advice for parents with teenagers, "When a kid turns thirteen, stick him in a barrel, nail the lid shut, and feed him through the knot hole. When he turns sixteen, plug the hole."
  
1. We need a perfect King who is coming back to rule. We need a leader who can't be corrupted and will rule in perfect harmony with God. You say you want to end evil? Only the perfect rule of Christ can do it.
  
1. Jesus is our endowment whereby God can bestow gifts to us. We have been given spiritual gifts so we can live spiritually now. Jesus told His disciples in His last address to them that it was necessary that He die and be resurrected so that He could send the Helper, the Spirit of God.
  
1. Jesus was the only one able to deliver us from the grip of Satan. Paul said that before Christ we all "lived according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of this atmosphere, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience." The rebellion of mankind against God was Satanically inspired. Only Jesus can deliver us from this world and the ruler of this world. Without Christ we are just like prisoners on death row---dead men walking. The religions of the world are giving swimming lessons to drowning people. They don't need lessons, they need a Savior. Once you are drowning, swimming lessons are too late, you need someone to pull you into the boat.
  
1. Not only would the God/man have to die, but He would also have to be resurrected to prove that His claims are true. I am aware of no other man who has been resurrected and currently sits at the right hand of God. God confirmed in the resurrection that what Jesus did is acceptable and sufficient to save us.

1. God's attributes include both unconditional love and perfect justice. These seemingly contradictory traits come together only in the person of Jesus Christ. God's love moves Him to save us, and God's justice requires that there be a penalty for sin. Jesus' atoning work on the cross, accomplished both. Now, in spite of our sin, we can be declared righteous and look forward to being in the presence of God.

## The Greatest Love Story

In January of 1936, Edward Prince of Wales was crowned King of England. He was a bachelor and a source of much news. He was rumored to be with many ladies, but he fell in love with an American woman named Wallis Simpson. This caused a great deal of concern because she was twice married and not yet divorced. She was the object of many rumors and many affairs. The new King of England made it known that he loved this woman and intended to marry her. The Prime Minister, the hierarchy, and the clergy all agreed that they could not accept him as king if he married this flawed woman. In December of 1936, Edward gave up his throne out of love for this woman. He gave up his throne, his fame, power, and riches for love of a flawed person. They were married in June 1937. The press called it the "Greatest Love Story Ever Told".

As fascinating a story as it was, I beg to differ. Jesus' love for us was an infinitely greater love story. The glory of God in heaven that He gave up, the power that Christ willingly abdicated, and the worship that He laid aside were beyond measure. At least Wallis was attractive to the King of England and met his needs. You and I, and all the people Christ loved and died for, were unappealing in our sin. There was nothing attractive about us that could possibly make it worth His while. We were helpless, separated from God, and dead spiritually. Therefore, the love of Christ displayed in the incarnation and crucifixion was unconditional. He loved us not because of anything in ourselves—not because of any deserving attribute of ours. The love of Christ was unilateral as Paul says in Romans 5:8, "God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Or as John said in 1 Jn.4:10, "In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." The love of Christ is beyond our comprehension, and beyond the nature of man.

## How Will This Love Affect Us ?

In Ephesians 5:25-27, Paul explained how the love of God has changed us, "Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her; that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she should be blameless." I don't know about you, but when I look in the mirror I see nothing but spots, blemishes, and wrinkles. What Paul was meaning is that Jesus' atoning work on the cross has washed away all our sins, all our faults, all our guilt, and even all the secrets deep inside that nobody else knows about. We have been set apart as children of God and are considered blameless by God. We look forward to the future of the resurrection made possible by Jesus when we will be translated into our resurrection body and become fully free of this deteriorating mortal one which is so prone to sin. We actually will experience glory and being blameless

He has washed us of every spot and wrinkle. Our spiritual bank account was empty, but now the grace of God has filled it up so that we have "become rich". We are rich in grace, hope, promises, access to God, spiritual gifts, future rewards, and glory. How did this happen? It happened through Christ's poverty and God's grace.

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