

## LENDING TO THE LORD.

– *SEPTEMBER 5. – 2 COR. 9:1-11. –*

"For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, tho he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that we through his poverty might be rich." – 2 Cor. 8:9.

OUR lesson inculcates Christian benevolence – alms giving. It is addressed to the Corinthian Christians and is on behalf of Christians in and about Jerusalem. A question arises why collections should be made for the Christians at Jerusalem more than for the Christians at Corinth. There were three reasons: (1) A severe famine had prevailed in the vicinity of Jerusalem. (2) Jerusalem was not a commercial city, and therefore money was less plentiful. (3) It would appear that the classes who received the gospel in and about Jerusalem were chiefly the poor, and we can readily judge from the open persecutions of the truth there that there was also a great deal of quiet opposition to all who sympathized with the gospel of Christ. As small shop people they were probably boycotted; and as laborers they probably were as far as possible rejected except as necessity might demand their services. On the contrary, the cities of Greece, Macedonia and Asia-Minor were prosperous; and as far as we may judge the class of society which accepted the gospel was in many cases the better element.

This was indicated in our last lesson by the statement that the "chiefs of Asia" dissuaded Paul from going before the people at the colosseum. These chiefs of Asia were generally quite wealthy and prominent men. We remember also in the same lesson the fact that the books of magic, which were burned after the owners had accepted Christ, represented a very large amount of money. Probably, therefore, their owners were correspondingly wealthy. We remember also the favorable decision of the town clerk at Ephesus; and the fact that Tyranus was so in sympathy with the Apostle's teaching as to permit the use of his schoolroom. We recall the conversion of Serges Paulus,

the deputy governor, at Paphos; also Dionysius, one of the professors in Mars Hill college at Athens; and Damaris [R2211 : page 261] of the same city; and Justus of Corinth; and Crispus, chief ruler of the synagogue in the same city.

The question naturally arises, Why should the same gospel attract the well-to-do and middle classes in Greece and Asia-Minor and Thessalonica, and attract few outside the poorer class at Jerusalem? The answer would seem to be (1) that among the Jews who had long been acquainted with the true God, the true religion and the gracious promises of the Messiah, a *religious pride* had developed, especially amongst the wealthy and the learned. And because their religious system was in advance of every other religious system in the world, the learned attributed a like superiority to themselves individually – they "trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others."

This was the secret of Israel's being "blinded" to the gospel. The leaders and theologians were so self-conscious, and relied so implicitly upon their interpretations of the divine promises as centering in themselves, that they could not regard the humble Nazarene and his unlearned followers except as impostors. And when, later, the gospel began to be preached to the Gentiles their opposition was increased; for it was utterly contrary to every thought of their religious pride that God would accept either the humble Jews or the Gentiles to his favor, and reject themselves, the leading representatives of his cause and work.

But amongst the Gentiles the case was very different: while the illiterate masses were firmly bound in the superstition of their various religions, those who were of an honest mind among the better educated were quick to discern that many of the features of their own religions were superstitions merely. They had probably, previously, been somewhat attracted to the Jewish religion as being much more reasonable than their own, as we find that the Gentiles readily resorted

to the Jewish synagogues; but the Jewish religion would necessarily be unsatisfactory to them since it would appear to be very narrow, limiting the divine blessings in a special manner to Israelites – a people whom they considered rather inferiors in the arts at that time. But, the gospel, throwing wide open the door to those who desired righteousness, truth and goodness, of every nation, people, kindred and tongue, would naturally commend itself to the class we describe as being the most reasonable explanation of the Jewish doctrines and their grand eventual outcome, and long hidden meaning.

At all events, the saints at Jerusalem were poorer than were the saints in Corinth. It was therefore appropriate that the Apostle should suggest to the latter the propriety of sending a gift to the former. Living at a time when the conveniences for transferring money were very inferior to the very poorest known to-day, the only possible method seemed to be that the various congregations should send their gifts at the hand of the Apostle when he would go to Jerusalem the following year. And Paul's words intimate that the suggestion made by him nearly a year before, to the Corinthian brethren, had been well received, and the collections zealously entered upon. For this reason it was "superfluous" for him to write in this connection particulars respecting the necessity for and propriety of this collection; but he hints to them that there was a bare possibility that the work zealously begun a year before might not have been patiently carried out, and that after he had boasted somewhat to others of their love and zeal for the Lord, he would regret if coming to them, enroute to Jerusalem, it should be found that after all they had failed to have their donation ready.

In his previous epistle to the Corinthians he had suggested methodical charity, saying, "Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given instructions to the Churches at Galatia, even so do ye. On the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God has prospered him, that there be no gathering when I come."

It was the Apostle's experience, as it is the experience of all thoughtful people, that systematic charity is better than spasmodic charity: not only is the result generally larger, but the influence upon the giver is more beneficial: it keeps an object before the mind, a service to be rendered as unto the Lord. And with many the opportunity for serving the Lord's cause with money is almost the only opportunity for service. Of course, where a consecrated child of God can do so it is far better that he should give to the saints after the manner of Paul and his traveling associates – giving spiritual gifts and blessings, either by public preaching, or by house to house visiting: presenting the truth either by the printed page or by tongue or both.

But there are others so circumstanced in life through lack of talent, or strength, or opportunity (hindered by prior mortgages upon their time – family obligations) that practically their only chance for serving the Lord and manifesting their love for him is through their gifts to his cause and to his people. For such to be deprived of the opportunity of exercising themselves in the Lord's service in this manner either through a lack of a cause needing their assistance, or through lack of instruction respecting this method of divine service, would be to deprive them of an important opportunity of service, and correspondingly to deprive them of the blessings which always follow every service to the Lord, whatever its character.

We notice, therefore, that the Apostle felt very free to recommend to the Church the grace of giving and to even press upon them the fact that their liberality **[R2211 : page 262]** *in proportion* to their ability, would in a large degree be an index of their love for the Lord and the gospel. But, here we note in contrast, that the same Apostle did not ask alms of these believers when first they received the Lord's grace; lest they should in any manner get the impression that the gospel was being preached from mercenary motives – for lucre's sake. Accordingly, we find that rather than mention money the Apostle preached to these very same Corinthian brethren for more than a year without a suggestion as to remuneration; laboring with his own hands at his trade of tent-

making, rather than be chargeable to any. He reminds them of this later on in this same epistle. – 2 Cor. 11:7-9.

Let us note also the change which the full appreciation of the gospel wrought upon the believers at Corinth. At first they were so negligent of their privilege that seemingly they never thought of volunteering financial assistance to the Apostle while he was serving them by the labor of his own hands, and receiving some assistance from believers in other places. But, after the grace of God entered more fully into their hearts and they began to appreciate the value of the truth which they had received, – that it had brought them priceless blessings of hope and joy and faith and **[R2212 : page 262]** character – they had a zeal, a "forwardness" to do something financially in the Lord's service. And now that the Apostle was absent from them, and after his course had proved to them that he sought not their money but themselves, to do them good; he felt free to draw their attention to the great blessing that would come from liberality in the Lord's cause in proportion to their ability and love.

Urging this matter he gave them a parable, saying, "He that soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he that soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully." And this reminds us of the proverb, "There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth; and there is that withholdeth more than is proper, but it tendeth to poverty. The liberal soul shall be made fat: and he that watereth shall be watered also himself." (Prov. 11:24,25.) The evident lesson is that the Lord is pleased to see his people cultivate breadth of heart as well as breadth of mind; – generosity in proportion to their knowledge of him and his generosity.

The Scriptures nowhere declare that cases of absolute privation amongst the Lord's people are proofs that at some time in their past lives when possessed of means they failed to use a portion of it in charity, in the Lord's service; but the inspired words above quoted come very close to giving this lesson. At all events, it is profitable that

we lay this testimony to heart and that each child of God henceforth shall be earnestly careful that out of the blessings of the Lord coming to us all from day to day some measure be carefully, prayerfully and lovingly laid aside as seed to be sown in the Lord's service according to the best wisdom and judgment which he will give us. How many have that carefulness for themselves either in using every penny as fast as it comes, or in being so interested in laying by for the outworking of future plans, that they feel they can spare nothing for charity. How many such can afterward see that they made a great mistake, when their accumulations suddenly vanished, either by reason of sickness or accident or bank failure or what not; and how then they have good reason to regret that they sowed no "seed" after the manner described by the Apostle in the sixth verse of our lesson.

Our Lord showed us how he measures our gifts; that he esteems them not according to the amount given, but chiefly according to the spirit which prompts the gift, when he drew attention to the poor widow who cast in two mites into the Lord's treasury. Our Lord declared that from the standpoint of his estimation the poor widow had cast in a larger sum than any of the wealthy who had given merely out of their abundance, and not to such an extent that they felt it. How many of the Lord's people would be more "fat" spiritually to-day, if they would give attention to the exercise of this talent, this opportunity for service, we cannot say; the Lord only knows. But this lesson makes it incumbent upon us to point out a privilege in this direction which is within the reach of the very poorest.

Very seldom is it necessary to caution people against over-much giving; yet in some instances such caution is proper, and in some instances in Scripture giving has been restrained. No one should give to the extent of causing privation to those dependent upon him. Nor should any one give to such an extent as to bring upon him financial bankruptcy and cause losses to others. The apostolic rule for giving we have quoted above. The laying by should be in general, "according as the Lord hath prospered him." The degree of our prosperity should

be the measure of our charities. "The spirit of a sound mind" is inculcated by the Scriptures, upon this as upon every subject.

"The Lord loveth a cheerful giver." And gifts in any other spirit than a cheerful one might just as well not be given: they will bring no blessing. The Lord does not appreciate such giving: it has no "sweet odor" in his estimation. The gift, to be appreciated of the Lord, must be a thank-offering, prompted by a realization of a debt of everlasting gratitude, to him from whom cometh every good and every perfect gift. And to such, the Apostle assures us, "God is able to make all things abound." All who give anything in the divine service, time, talent, strength, money or influence [R2212 : page 263] – any or all of these – will find themselves proportionately abounding in the different graces; because such are in the right attitude of heart to grow in grace.

But, the Apostle seems to imply further that such will have "sufficiency in all things" as well as be able to "abound in every good work." In thinking of sufficiency in any direction the condition of the mind must be taken into account. Sufficiency may not mean luxury and every comfort, but "all sufficiency" is gained always where there is "godliness with contentment." In proof that he is inculcating no new theory respecting the divine care over those who are seeking to scatter to others a portion of the blessings that come to them, temporal or spiritual, the Apostle quotes from the Psalms. – 112:9.

When in the last verse the Apostle speaks of "being enriched in everything," we are not to understand him to mean that the Lord's people will all be enriched financially. The Apostle himself was an example of how the Lord's people do not become wealthy. He is speaking rather of the enrichment of the heart, as he says in another place, speaking of himself and co-laborers in the gospel work: We are "as poor, but making many rich;" – rich in hope, rich in faith, rich in love and all the various concomitant graces which these imply.

Our Golden Text reminds us of the grandest example of self-denial in the interest of others on record – the gift by our Lord Jesus of himself for the world. He was rich in the possession of the spiritual nature and its honors and glory, yet for our sakes he became poor, taking the human nature that he might redeem us; and to this end he surrendered even life itself at Calvary, that through his sacrifice we might become rich: – become possessed of divine favor, and the riches of divine grace in Christ; even jointheirship with him who is now our exalted Lord at the right hand of divine Majesty. But to attain this jointheirship with him, we must study to be like him, to have his spirit; and like him desirous of sharing whatever he may give us of either temporal or spiritual favors with others, particularly the "household of faith;" – either to feed or clothe it, spiritually or temporally, as circumstances may dictate. "The liberal soul shall be made fat." [R2215 : page 263]

### **SCATTER SEEDS OF KINDNESS.**

"Loving words will cost but little,  
Journeying up the hill of life;  
But they make the weak and weary  
Stronger, braver for the strife.  
Do you count them only trifles?  
What to earth are sun and rain?  
Never was a kind word wasted;  
Never one was said in vain.

"When the cares of life are many,  
And its burdens heavy grow  
For the ones who walk beside you,  
If you love them, tell them so.  
What you count of little value  
Has an almost magic power,  
And beneath that cheering sunshine  
Hearts will blossom like a flower.

"So as up life's hill we journey,



Let us scatter all the way  
Kindly words, to be as sunshine  
In the dark and cloudy day.  
Grudge no loving word, my brother,  
As along through life you go,  
To the ones who journey with you;  
If you love them, tell them so."

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