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ST. PAUL ON THE GRACE OF GIVING

– II COR. 8:1-15 – DECEMBER 5. –

Golden Text: – "Remember the words of the Lord Jesus... It is more blessed to give than to receive." – Acts 20:35.

THE Bible is singularly free from monetary solicitations from first to last. The prophets were poor. The Savior himself had not where to lay his head and his followers were noted as being "of the common people who heard him gladly," and "chiefly the poor of this world." And yet we know of no solicitations for money, either for personal use or for building churches. The Scripture we consider today may be said to be the only appeal for money recorded in the Bible, and it was for the poor at Jerusalem, sorely pressed by the famine in the time of the Roman Emperor Claudius. (Acts 11:28.) If the pages of the Bible abounded with accounts of our Lord's and the Apostles' begging and "sponging," their lives and their words would have far less influence with us.

The fact that their faith and their preaching did not bring them wealth, but cost them much in self-sacrifice, is a convincing proof to us of their sincerity, their honesty – that they believed what they proclaimed. Not to mention the great Redeemer's self-denials, but merely looking at his followers, we perceive that in espousing an unpopular cause they became objects of hatred and derision and were boycotted socially and everyway. Instead of profiting by the Gospel, it was of Divine Providence that the acceptance of it cost them "the loss of all things." What noble characters they were, in that they needed not to be bought with money, but gladly paid the price of the Truth. They esteemed their earthly possessions and hopes as loss and dross, that they might share in the sufferings of Christ and thereby attain joint-heirship with him in his Millennial Kingdom by the First Resurrection. – Phil. 3:8; Rev. 20:4.

"MORE BLESSED TO GIVE"

Our text furnishes the key-note to this Study. St. Paul had proven the Truth of Jesus' words, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." He was happy, "joyful in tribulation," giving constantly for the good of others from his store of grace and Truth. He was more blessed in the giving than any of his hearers in the receiving of the message. In the words of this Study, he sought to extend to the Church at Corinth the blessing and joy of *giving*. They already knew of the necessities of the principal congregation of Christians – at Jerusalem. They already knew that St. Paul intended going thither and that others of the Gentiles purposed sending at his hands a present – an acknowledgment, as it were, that the spiritual blessings of the Gospel message had come to them through representatives of the Jewish people.

St. Paul knew that *giving* would cheer and warm their hearts and bring them a great blessing – therefore, not selfishly, but as their true friend, he would stir them up to the exercise of generosity that he might increase their spiritual vitality and joy. He asked nothing for himself, however. It was by way of inspiring them to emulation that he related how the churches of Macedonia had contributed, even while in affliction. The abundance of their joy led them to great liberality, notwithstanding their own deep poverty. Evidently there, as elsewhere, "not many rich" were among the "called." To the measure of their power and beyond it and without urging they gave. Indeed they had entreated the Apostle to act as their representative in this service to the Jerusalem saints. Their course in the matter was more noble than the Apostle had dared hope. They had said in effect, "We are Christ's in this matter, and yours after him; for this we realize to be the will of God."

PRESENT YOUR BODIES SACRIFICIALLY

It was this giving from the heart which the Apostle wished to inculcate. If the Corinthians learned the blessedness of giving a little money to help the poor, if they found that much blessing resulted therefrom, they, like the Macedonians, would be impelled to give themselves more completely than ever to the Lord. And this latter was the Apostle's aim in respect to all Christians, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." – Rom. 12:1.

He complimented them on their faith, utterance, knowledge, [R4526 : page 362] earnestness and love, and urged for their own good that they should not neglect the grace of *giving*. It would constitute a proof of the sincerity of their love for the Lord and for the brethren. Emphasizing the necessity for a development of a spirit of benevolence, he reminded them of the Lord Jesus, who for our sakes left riches of glory and honor, when he humbled himself to become the "man Christ Jesus" – that he might redeem our race from its death sentence. If our exemplar became poor that we might attain the riches of eternal life and fellowship Divine, his Spirit in us would surely lead us "to lay down our lives for the brethren." (I John 3:16.) And whoever would lay down his *life* for a brother would surely be yet more willing to lay down time or influence of money for his assistance.

But, the Apostle urged, that was not suggesting that they should burden themselves by too generous giving – nor that others should be left without a burden entirely at their expense. Amongst men, and especially amongst those who constitute the family of God, there should prevail a spirit of sympathy and equalization. He reminded them also that God looked not at the amount, but at the heart condition prompting the gift. And surely all will agree that in the dark pathway of sorrow and the shadow of death, in

which we daily walk, there are abundant opportunities to be generous, even for those who have no money to give. A kind word of sympathy or advice, yea, even a kind look, has sometimes been worth more to a discouraged brother than a handful of gold:

"It is not the deed we do,
Though the deed be ever so fair,
But the love that the dear Lord looketh for,
Hidden with holy care
In the heart of the deed so fair.

"The love is the priceless thing,
The treasure our treasure must hold;
Or ever the Lord will take the gift,
Or tell the worth of the gold
By the love that cannot be told."

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