

2 Corinthians 8:1-9 ESV

Is YOUR Life-in-Christ like a Buffet?

Sunday, June 28 at 8:00 & 10:45 + Monday, June 29 at 7 PM

5th Sunday after Pentecost / 4th Sunday after Trinity – 2015

Introduction: Dear friends in Christ: Today's text focuses on Paul and Timothy encouraging the Corinthians to complete a special collection *for the poor believers living in Jerusalem*. Near the end of 1 Corinthians, Paul wrote: “**Now concerning the collection for the saints... On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come**” (1Co 16:1-2 ESV). However, *in Corinth*, the special collection was not going well, thus encouragement in today's text.

1. Paul Shows the Corinthians a Powerful Example:

- a. Their reason for giving – *the grace of God*: ¹ **We want you to know, brothers, 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.** // So among the churches in the area of Macedonia – *Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea* (modern-day Greece):
 - i. **Their persecution was severe!**¹
 - ii. **Their joy in Christ was abundant!**
 - iii. **Their poverty was extreme!**
 - iv. **Their giving was generous!**

¹ References to persecution in Thessalonica: 1Th 1:6; 2:14; 2Th 1:4

We might tend to view the Macedonian believers as the exception, but Dr. Kretzmann wrote: “For Christians to help each other... is not an evidence of unusual [generosity]... but it is the work of God’s grace” (NT 2:201). By God’s grace *He saved us sinners; by God’s grace we are moved to powerful acts of love for others!*

- b. Their strong desire for giving – they pleaded with us: 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 favor 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. //
- i. *First* they gave themselves to the Lord. So they offered the Lord “their talents, their energies, their abilities, and... their worldly possessions...; they placed themselves and all they had, without any restriction, at [His] disposal...” (Kretzmann, NT 2:202)
 - ii. *Second* they did the will of the Lord, *which flowed from giving themselves to the Lord!*
 - iii. Dr. Kretzmann wrote that it is “all too often in our days, that Christians must be begged and entreated and urged and admonished and... coaxed to give of their abundance. But here the case was just the opposite” (Ibid.). *May we be like them!*

2. Paul Encourages the Corinthians to Excel in Everything:

- a. Christian living is not like eating at a buffet: ⁷ **But as you excel in everything-- in faith** [*living for Christ*], **in speech** [*speaking for Christ*], **in knowledge** [*growing in Christ*], **in all earnestness** [*being enthusiastic for Christ*], **and in our love for you** [**the love we inspired in you (NAS)**] -- **see that you excel in this act of grace also** [*thus in giving generously to help the poor*]. // A buffet may have 25 food options, so people choose the ones they like and pass over the others. That is fine for a buffet, *but that should NOT be true of our lives in Christ!* Paul commended the Corinthians for excelling in many wonderful ways, *but he didn't stop there*; he also called them to “**excel in this act of grace.**” So wherever we have passed over God’s will **or** responded with a “but,” God is calling us to change, to excel in doing His will!
- b. Let us prove our love with our actions: ⁸ **I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine.** // It is easy for us to say to the Lord: “I trust you, I love you.” But *trust and love* will show themselves in *action*; those who trust and love desire to *know and do* the Lord’s will (Luke 6:46; John 14:15). If that is your life – *excellent!* If that is not your life, *God is calling you to repent!*
- c. Proper motivation: 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. // The Son of God willingly went *from heavenly riches to earthly rags*, so that we – **through Him** – might be delivered *from our earthly rags to God’s heavenly riches!*

Conclusion: Imagine this conversation between *God the Father* and *God the Son* in regard to the work of our salvation:

- F: “Son, I want You to leave your magnificent home and go to earth.” S: “**But** Father, I like it here.”
- F: “Son, if You do not go, all people on earth will be lost.” S: “**But** Father, most people on earth don’t want to be found.”
- F: “Son, I want You to receive their sins and pay their penalty.” S: “**But** Father, that is not fair to Me; they sinned, so they should pay their own penalty?”

Let us give *eternal praise to God* that such a conversation *never* took place! Instead, †the Father planned, †the Son obeyed, and †now the gift of heaven is being freely offered to everyone through Jesus!

As we are thankful that Jesus did *not* say “but,” so it is *best* when we do *not* say “but” in response to God’s will for our lives. Therefore, ➡forgiven in Christ and ➡empowered by the Holy Spirit, let us “**strive... to emulate the great example and to follow in the footsteps of [our] great Lord** [Jesus Christ in regard to everything] (Kreztmann, NT 2:203).

And all God’s people said: **Amen!**