

Gospel-Driven Generosity

2 Corinthians 8:6–9

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Introduction

Well turn with me in your Bibles once again to 2 Corinthians chapter 8. And we find ourselves once again in this two-chapter section on the matter of Christian giving. Our text this morning is 2 Corinthians 8, verses 6 to 9. But I'll read starting from verse 1: "Now, brethren, we wish to make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia,²that in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality.³For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability, they gave of their own accord,⁴begging us with much urging for the favor of participation in the support of the saints,⁵and this, not as we had expected, but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God.⁶So we urged Titus that as he had previously made a beginning, so he would also complete in you this gracious work as well.⁷But just as you abound in everything, in faith and utterance and knowledge and in all earnestness and in the love we inspired in you, see that you abound in this gracious work also.⁸I am not speaking this as a command, but as proving through the earnestness of others the sincerity of your love also.⁹For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich."

The subject of giving is an interesting one. It's a discussion that the professing church-at-large does not often do well. On the one hand, the name of Christ has been so egregiously and consistently blasphemed by swindlers, who disguise themselves as Christian pastors, and get on TV programs and manipulate people into thinking that giving *them* money is a sign of their faith in God. Entire so-called "ministries" consist of bilking poor, naïve people out of the little money that they have. So much is this the case that the world equates these health-and-wealth phonies with evangelical Christianity. When they think of Christian pastors, they think of the Kenneth Copelands and the Creflo Dollars and the Robert Tiltons, in their thousand-dollar suits and hundred-thousand-dollar cars and multi-million-dollar homes, constantly asking for more money in the name of Jesus.

On the other hand—and perhaps in an overreaction to that kind of perversion—there are churches who seem to never address the topic of giving or how to steward the money the Lord entrusts to you. Again, maybe in a swing-of-the-pendulum as a result of the embarrassment of the health/wealth/prosperity heresy, churches are fearful of sounding like those ministries and are

eager to paint a more faithful picture of Christianity for the world. Or, many times, it can just be that it's uncomfortable to speak to people about giving money. It feels too sensitive, too personal, too invasive a matter for a pastor or Christian leader to address. And so rather than expounding Scripture's teaching on giving, pastors skip over it, and the people of God are left ignorant of the Bible's vital instruction on Christian stewardship.

Neither of these two extremes is healthy for the body of Christ. Unlike the health-and-wealth hucksters on TBN, pleas for money should not be the constant refrain and hallmark of our ministry. And neither should financial matters be regarded as so sensitive and off-limits that the biblical view of money and Christian stewardship is never mentioned at all. We ought not to be preoccupied with giving, but we must not be ignorant of it either.

And that is the Apostle Paul's attitude as well. He could never be mistaken for one who was always clinging the pot asking for money. In fact, he made it a mark of his ministry to never ask for his own monetary support. In 1 Corinthians 9, he says he counts it as his reward to preach the Gospel without charge. In 2 Thessalonians 3:8 he says, "With labor and hardship we kept working night and day so that we would not be a burden to any of you." But at the same time, he didn't shy away from instructing the church concerning financial matters. And the two chapters of Scripture that we find ourselves in here is proof of that.

In these two chapters, Paul writes to the Corinthians to stir them up to participate in a collection for the poor saints in Jerusalem. This was an offering that the Corinthians had known about. They had begun making preparations a year ago to participate in support of the Jerusalem church, but progress had been stalled by the conflict instigated by the false apostles. But now that Titus has reported that those issues are out of the way, Paul writes to urge the Corinthians to pick up where they left off, and bring to completion the offering that they had begun a year prior. And in the details of this 2,000 year-old offering, Paul actually gives us the most detailed theology of Christian generosity and giving that we find in all of Scripture. In these chapters, we are able to glean universal principles of Christian giving that are applicable to the church throughout all ages.

And Paul begins this theology of Christian giving first by holding up the churches of Macedonia as an example of generosity to be imitated. And in our last two sermons on the first six verses, we gleaned several principles for Christian giving by observing the example of the Macedonians. We saw in verse 1 that the grace of God is the motivating source of all genuine generosity. Paul doesn't so much extol the virtue of the Macedonians as he praises the grace of God at work in the Macedonians. And then in verse 2 we saw that challenging circumstances—like severe afflictions and deep poverty—do not have to be barriers to Christian generosity, because of the supernatural joy in Christ that the grace of God works in the heart.

And then in verses 3 to 5 we saw the detailed character of Christian giving: that (1) Christians are to give *proportionally*, according to what they have; that (2) we are to give *sacrificially*, thinking strategically about how we can deny ourselves in order to give beyond our ability; that (3) we are to give *voluntarily*; that true Christian giving is entirely willing apart from any coercion or manipulation. We saw (4) that we are to give *gratefully*, acknowledging the *privilege* it is to participate in supporting the needs of the saints, such that we might even beg not to get, but beg to give. That led us to observe (5) the *mutuality* of Christian giving—that generosity flows out of the context of genuine Christian fellowship, and then *increases* that fellowship and communion with one another. And finally, (6) we noted that Christian giving is *whole-hearted*—that, before it has anything to do with money, generosity has to do with the devotion of our own *selves*, first to the Lord and then to the service of His church.

This morning, we continue in our study of this theology of Christian giving, and we continue to aim to isolate **principles for our Christian giving** that inform how we think about money, about generosity, and about faithful stewardship of the financial resources that God has blessed us with. And in these three verses, we come upon those principles by observing **three characteristics of genuine Christian generosity**.

I. Generosity is a Grace to Be Pursued (v. 7)

And after that transitional verse, verse 6, where Paul informs the Corinthians that he has once again dispatched Titus to assist them in the completion of this collection, we find our **first characteristic of generosity** in verse 7: namely, that generosity is **a grace to be pursued**. Verse 7: “But just as you abound in everything, in faith and utterance and knowledge and in all earnestness and in the love we inspired in you, see that you abound in this [grace] also.” This teaches us that generosity is a spiritual grace that Christians must pursue for the sake of a balanced and well-rounded spiritual life.

Now, Paul begins this verse with a clear commendation of the Corinthians’ spiritual giftedness and maturity, and sees that as a foundation from which to exhort them to excel still more in the grace of generosity. He says, “Just as you abound in *everything*, ... see that you abound in *this* grace also.” And what is the “*everything*” in which the Corinthians abound? Well, he gives a list of three spiritual gifts and three spiritual graces.

First, he says they abound “in faith and utterance and knowledge.” And those final two words—utterance, the Greek word *logos*, and knowledge, the Greek word *gnosis*—they occur together in Paul’s previous letter to the Corinthians, in 1 Corinthians 1:4–7, a text which has a lot of lexical parallels to 2 Corinthians 8. There, he says, “I thank my God always concerning you for *the grace of God*”—which ought to remind us of verse 1—"which was given you in Christ Jesus, that in everything you were *enriched*”—which is the same word for “wealth” in verse 2—“in

Him, in all speech”—there’s *logos*, our word for utterance—“and all knowledge”—and there’s *gnosis*, our word for knowledge. And then in verse 7 he identifies these as spiritual gifts. He says, “...so that you are not lacking in any *gift*, awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Utterance, then, would refer to spiritual gifts that have to do with speaking—likely the gift of prophecy. Knowledge likely refers to “the word of knowledge” in 1 Corinthians 12:8. When you add “faith” to this mix, though it could just be an acknowledgement that the Corinthians had a strong trust in the Lord Jesus Christ and His Gospel, it more likely refers to the spiritual gift of faith noted in 1 Corinthians 12:9. They all show up together in 1 Corinthians 13:2, where Paul says, “If I have the gift of prophecy”—which would be utterance—“and know all mysteries and all *knowledge*; and if I have all *faith* so as to move mountains,” but don’t have love I’m nothing. So the point is: the Corinthians had been enriched by Christ with an abundance of spiritual gifts.

And not only in gifts, but also in graces. Spiritual gifts refer to those endowments of the Holy Spirit by which we serve and edify the body of Christ. But spiritual graces refer to the virtues of character that the Holy Spirit works into us, such as the list of virtues that Galatians 5 identifies as the fruit of the Spirit. Paul lists two of such graces here, when he says the Corinthians abounded “in all earnestness and in the love we inspired in you.” Earnestness speaks of whole-hearted enthusiasm, as one commentator put it: “the energy or vigor of their spiritual life” (Hodge, 575). Paul had mentioned this spiritual grace at work in them twice in the previous chapter, where he praises God that they had been roused from their indifference to sin in the church, and had been spurred on by earnestness to deal with sin biblically. He commends them for caring about spiritual things. And then he commends them for their love for Christ and for others, which Paul’s ministry of the Gospel had inspired in them.

And the point is: While you abound in everything—in all these spiritual gifts by which you seek to edify the body of Christ, and in all these spiritual graces by which you glorify Christ and His work of sanctification in you—do not think that you have arrived! Don’t let all of that blessing and all of that grace at work in your life make you complacent! No, “See that you abound in this grace as well!” Let the fact that you have been so graciously and generously *enriched* by God with all these spiritual gifts and graces make you zealous to **pursue** this grace of generosity all the more!

And implicit in this exhortation to **pursue** Christian generosity is the fact that failure to abound in this grace casts doubt upon the genuineness of the other. In other words, Paul is saying it would be wholly incongruous for a congregation of Christians so eminent in spiritual gifts and so lavishly enriched with spiritual graces to be lacking in the grace of generosity. The absence of the one would call into question the genuineness and validity of the others. And so if they were to take an accurate measure of their own spiritual maturity, they could not merely rest on the

laurels of their faith, utterance, knowledge, earnestness, and love! They had also to take stock of whether the grace of generosity had begun to work in their hearts.

And dear friends, the same is true for you as well. This grace of **generosity must be pursued**. It is a blessing of divine grace that this congregation—both GraceLife as a fellowship group and Grace Community Church as a whole—is rich with spiritual gifts whereby the body of Christ is edified. While the gifts of wonder-working faith, and prophecy, and words of knowledge have ceased with the close of the New Testament canon, this is a congregation rich with gifts of teaching, of shepherding, of mercy, of administration, and the full panoply of gifts which Christ gives to His church. And with respect to spiritual graces, I think you would be hard-pressed to find another congregation as spiritually mature and earnest for holiness than Grace Church. But though that is true of you: friends, do not think that your sanctification is complete! No, but just as you abound in everything—abundant in gifts and abundant in graces—see that you abound in this grace of generosity also!

Because the human heart is deceitful. And when you discover that your brothers and sisters have a financial burden, or when you hear of a faithful missionary who needs support to get out to the field, or when you learn of an opportunity to monetarily support a work that furthers the advance of the Gospel, you're tempted to let those opportunities pass by. And as you examine your heart to determine why that was your inclination, your conscience gets after you. And the temptation is to say, "But I'm a mature Christian! Look at all the other ways I'm serving the Lord! I have a mature understanding of sound theology! I've made significant progress in my fight against several pet sins in my life! My stinginess—my tight-fistedness, my coldness of heart to my brethren in need—isn't indicative of anything wrong spiritually! It's just not how the Lord is calling me to serve *right now!* But look at all these other ways!" And when your deceitful heart speaks to you in that way just like mine speaks to me, you need to battle that temptation with the inspired words of 2 Corinthians 8:7: "But just as you abound in everything, see that you abound in this grace also!"

Generosity is **a grace to be pursued**, friends. And so you are to do what you can to put yourself in the way of this work of God's grace—to avail yourselves of the means by which such grace is worked in the heart—and to pray that God would so work in His church.

II. Generosity Is the Proof of Genuine Love (v. 8)

A **second characteristic of Christian generosity** comes in verse 8. Not only is generosity a grace to be pursued, but also, number two: Generosity is **the proof of genuine love**. Verse 8 says, "I am not speaking this as a command, but as proving through the earnestness of others the sincerity of your love also."

After just having exhorted them to pursue the grace of generosity, Paul clarifies his intent. He's sensitive to the fact that he may be received in a way that he doesn't intend, and with the tact befitting an undershepherd of the flock of God, he aims to dispel any misunderstanding. He says, "I am not speaking this as a command." "Don't misunderstand me. In exhorting you to progress in this grace of generosity, I am not issuing an apostolic commandment for you to take part in sacrificially giving to the saints in Jerusalem." No, as he'll say in verse 10, he is giving his opinion in this matter.

And Paul does this elsewhere in his letters. In 1 Corinthians 7, as he's giving the Corinthians instructions about divorce and remarriage, he says in verse 25, "Now concerning virgins"—that is, unmarried women—"I have no command of the Lord, but I give an opinion as one who by the mercy of the Lord is trustworthy." You see, Paul was not one to lord his authority over the sheep entrusted to his care. As an apostle, he had the authority to issue commandments in Christ's name. The only one who can say, "I'm not speaking this as a command," is someone who has the authority give commands! But he says, "I have no command from Christ on this matter. I have not received any revelation or instruction from the Lord that mandates you as His people to take this or that course of action. Instead, I give my opinion. Your conscience is not bound to it as if *I* was your Lord, but to be honest with you I think I'm a trustworthy source." In 1 Corinthians 7:40, he gives his opinion on whether widows should remarry or remain single, and he says, "And I think that I also have the Spirit of God." In other words, I'm not commanding you, but you'd do well to consider my opinion.

Well a similar dynamic is at play here, though for a different reason. Paul is concerned to clarify that he is not issuing them a command to participate in this collection for the Jerusalem church precisely because of the *voluntary* nature of Christian generosity. He said in verse 3 that the Macedonians "gave of their own accord." In chapter 9 verse 7 he'll say, "Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." And the one who gives money simply because he is commanded to is, by definition, under compulsion. Voluntariness is essential to Christian generosity, and so the compulsion of commandments is inimical to a genuinely generous spirit. And so Philip Edgcumbe Hughes says, "That genuine love which demonstrates itself in liberality cannot, in fact, be the product of compulsion from without. And so Paul continues to coax them with affectionate diplomacy" (297).

And notice: this freedom, this spontaneity, this absence of compulsion is definitional of generosity because generosity is **the proof of genuine love**. Look again at verse 8: "I am not speaking this as a command, but as proving through the earnestness of others the sincerity of your love also." Paul opposes the levying of commands to the demonstration of sincere love. Just as generosity must be free and uncoerced, so must love be free and uncoerced. Paul says this very thing—and sounds quite similar to his instructions here—when he writes Philemon to

appeal for the release of Onesimus. In verse 8 of that letter, he says to Philemon, “Therefore, though I have enough confidence in Christ to *order* you to do what is proper, yet for *love’s* sake I rather appeal to you.” “As an apostle I have the prerogative to order you—to command you—to do the right thing. But I’m not doing that. Instead, I’m appealing to you for the sake of love, so that your *love*, and not merely your *dutifulness*, would be demonstrated.” He goes on to say in verse 14: “But without your consent I did not want to do anything, so that your goodness would not be, in effect, by compulsion but of your own free will.” You see? “I don’t want to compel you to do what is right, because that would undermine the freedom and spontaneity of your goodness, and so it would undermine love. But my desire is not only that you would *behave* righteously, but that you would *be* holy—that your doing the right thing wouldn’t be externally coerced, but would be a free demonstration of your own loving heart.” One commentator said, “He wants to win obedience, not force compliance that is only a superficial conformity to expectations” (Garland, 375n43).

Generosity is **the proof of genuine love**. And so Paul doesn’t issue a command. He gives an occasion for the Corinthians to prove—to put to the test and demonstrate the genuineness of—their love of the brethren. And he does that, the text says, “through the earnestness of others.” He holds out the Macedonians as an example of generous giving, and he uses that example to stir up the Corinthians to action. In chapter 9 verse 2, he comments on how the Macedonians were stirred up to their extraordinary generosity precisely by the report of the Corinthians’ desire to serve. He says, “For I know your readiness, of which I boast about you to the Macedonians, namely, that Achaia has been prepared since last year, and your zeal has stirred up most of them.”

And so here, in chapter 8 verse 8, he’s saying, “Listen, I remember your proclamations of love for the saints in Jerusalem, because I remember how as far back as last year you not only began to do this, but you wanted to do it as well,” verse 10. “It was in your heart. I believe that. And because I believe it, I know that you want an opportunity to prove that. Well, here is that opportunity! Just as hearing of your desire to serve the brethren in Jerusalem stirred up the Macedonians to action, so now let your hearing of the Macedonians’ action fan the flame of your desire so that it is brought to completion in your giving.” It’s a sort of holy rivalry—the spirit of Romans 12:10, which says, “Outdo one another in showing honor.” You see, much of the Christian life is a race to the bottom—one brother outdoing another in getting underneath and serving one another. And here is the opportunity for the Corinthians to prove their love.

How are you doing in that race to the bottom? Where do you place in the competition of outdoing one another in showing honor? How are you stewarding the opportunities the Lord gives you to prove the sincerity of your love? to demonstrate that you’re not all talk and no action? that your words of sympathy and affection are actually genuine, because they well up and overflow into action? GraceLife, generosity is **the proof of genuine love**. And, as the Apostle

John says, 1 John 3:17 and 18: “Whoever has the world’s goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth.”

III. Generosity is Driven by Gospel Grace (v. 9)

And then in the **third place**, we come in verse 9 to the **third characteristic of generosity** that shapes our giving. Not only that generosity is a grace to be pursued, not only that it is the proof of genuine love. But number three: **generosity is driven by Gospel grace**. Verse 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 through His poverty might become rich.”

And here Paul comes to the climax of his argument. Having appealed to the example of the Macedonians, having commended the Corinthians concerning the grace of God already at work in them and calling them to a generosity consistent with those gifts and graces, and having stirred them up by the Macedonians’ earnestness to prove their own love also, Paul now appeals to the supreme and purest motivation for Christian generosity, and for all moral and ethical instruction in the Christian life! Namely, the abounding *grace* of our Lord Jesus Christ, as preeminently displayed in the Gospel of His incarnation, life, and substitutionary death for sin. Although in His pre-existent, eternal glory and deity He was in possession of spiritual riches whose wealth words are unable to describe, He nevertheless voluntarily and sacrificially renounced those riches, and embraced the poverty of life and death as a human being, precisely so that we who were destitute of God’s favor and blessing could be enriched with the very righteousness of God Himself! If the people of God *know* this grace—if we have personally drunk from the sweet fountains and have personally feasted at the banquet table of **Gospel grace**, remembrance and contemplation of that grace will quicken and foster the very same **grace of generosity** in us.

Let’s look at this Mount Everest of a verse. It begins with the word, “For,” and the connection with what Paul has just said is plain. “Dear Corinthians, in stirring you up to give to the saints in Jerusalem, I am not laying any commandments upon your shoulders. No, I’m simply aiding you in proving the genuineness of your loving *affection* by giving you the opportunity to overflow in loving *action*. And you have no need of commandments to demonstrate your love, *for—because*—you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ!” You see? “I’m not giving you commandments! You know grace!” All the motivation necessary to complete this gracious work of generosity is sourced and founded in Christ’s prior gracious work of generosity!

One commentator defines this **Gospel grace** as “the utterly undeserved, royally free, effective, unwearying, inexhaustible goodwill of God, active in and through Jesus Christ, God’s effective, overflowing mercy” (Cranfield, 106, as in Garland, 376). And Paul says, “Corinthians, you know this grace!” You know it! You know it externally, intellectually, as we proclaimed the Gospel to

you, and you became acquainted with the realities of the miraculous birth, sinless life, substitutionary death, and undeniable resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, the eternal Son of God. And more than that, you know it internally, experientially, as God opened the eyes of your heart not only to understand facts but to trust in the person of Christ! And so you experienced the miracle of regeneration, the freshness of new life in Christ, the glorious light of spiritual sight, the purification of your conscience, the forgiveness of your sins, the indwelling, sanctifying ministry of the Holy Spirit, and the sweetness of daily communion with God in Christ. Dear people, you *know* the grace of Christ!

And then Paul isolates that particular angle of the grace of Christ that he focuses on here. He speaks of “the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, *that*”—that is, *namely*, “though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich.” Let’s look more closely into these words, so that we might more fully apprehend the grace of Christ that motivates us to genuine generosity.

A. Christ’s Riches

First, “though He was rich.” And literally, “though *being* rich.” Paul uses a present participle, which expresses ongoing, continuous action. When he speaks of Christ’s poverty he’ll use an ingressive aorist and say, “He *became* poor.” His poverty had a beginning, as we’ll see, in His incarnation. But Christ had never *become* rich. From all eternity, He was *being* rich, or *existing* as rich. Paul says something similar in Philippians 2:6, where he calls on the grace of the incarnation of Christ to stir the churches to humility. And he speaks of Christ, “who, although *existing* in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped.” And in John 1:1: “In the beginning *was* the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word *was* God.” From all eternity, before there was a beginning, the Word *was existing* as God, in the richness of full equality with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit.

This Christ is the eternal Son of God, the One who from all eternity was fully subsisting in the divine nature. He is the image of the invisible God, Colossians 1:15—the very radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, Hebrews 1:3. And so He is rich as the possessor of all the divine attributes and all the divine prerogatives. All of the fullness of Godhood dwells in Him no less than in the Father or the Holy Spirit!

He is the Creator of all things; Colossians 1:16: “For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him.” He is the Sustainer of all creation; Colossians 1:17: “He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.” Hebrews 1:3: “He upholds all things by the word of His power.” As its Creator, He is therefore the owner of all creation. Deuteronomy 10:14 says, “Behold, to Yahweh your God belong heaven and the

highest heavens, the earth and all that is in it.” In Job 41:11, the Triune God says, “Who has given to Me that I should repay him? Whatever is under the whole heaven is Mine.”

He is the eternally glorious One; He speaks in John 17:5 of “the glory which [He] had with [the Father] before the world was.” 1 Corinthians 2:8 calls Him “the *Lord* of glory.” And Isaiah 6 gives us a glimpse of what it meant for the Son to exist in heavenly glory, as it is He, the Son, who is the exalted Lord seated on the throne of the heaven (cf. John 12:37–41). It is the train of the Son’s robe that fills the heavenly temple. And it is to the glory of *His* name—no less than the Father’s, no less than the Spirit’s, for they are One Name: Yahweh—that the bright, burning seraphim along with the rest of the angels of heaven sing, “Holy, Holy, Holy, is Yahweh of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory!”

And even beyond that—beyond the richness of His divine being, the fullness of God dwelling in Him and the glory of God emanating from Him; beyond the richness of His divine possession, the Creator and thus owner of Heaven and Earth—beyond even that is the richness of His divine relations. Anyone in possession of all those riches that we just outlined would be infinitely wealthy, even if he possessed such riches in isolation. But the Son possesses those riches in the glory of perfect communion with and delight in His Father and the Holy Spirit!

In Luke 10:22, Jesus says that no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son. And though there are oceans of mystery wrapped up in that statement, one certain implication is that there is a unique knowledge and communion that exists between the Persons of the Trinity. Each member of the Trinity “has a unique, exclusive, all-comprehensive, all-penetrating knowledge” of the others. Our knowledge of God increases little bit by little bit, as we strive and strain to wrap our finite minds around the infinite fullness of God. And even when by grace we’re able to grasp just a little more knowledge of God, we are at once confronted with the ineffable delight of knowing One so perfect, and with the blessed despair that we could ever know Him fully. But the Son knows the Father in such comprehensive intimacy, that, compared to that knowledge, no one else knows the Father at all! Listen to what John Murray says, “The knowledge of the Son of God is a knowledge for which there are no obscurities, no inscrutable mysteries. It is a knowledge that penetrates the very being of God, that comprehends the totality of the divine glory and that searches the deepest mysteries of the divine will. What tides of ineffable delight, without beginning or end, without ebb or flow, must eternally ravish the heart and mind of the eternal Son!” (3:228–29). O friends, has there ever been anyone rich like Christ was rich?

B. Christ’s Poverty

And yet. Though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor. And after meditating as we have for just a moment on the Son’s eternal riches, these words land on us with almost utter

bewilderment. How should—how *could*—someone so rich as Christ ever experience anything that might be called poverty? Well herein we behold the peculiar glory of the incarnation—the matchless beauty of **Gospel grace**. As Philippians 2 says, “Christ Jesus, existing in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave, being made in the likeness of men.”

Even though Christ existed eternally, even though He was existing in the very nature and essence and glory of God, even though He was existing in equality with God the Father, ruling creation in majesty and receiving the worship of the saints and angels in Heaven, He did not regard the dignity of His station as something to be grasped. But He emptied Himself. He nullified Himself.

Now, this does not mean that in becoming man, the eternal Son of God ceased to be what He was as God, in the richness of His own divine being! That would be impossible! No, He remained the Creator and Sustainer of the universe. He continued to fully subsist in the divine nature. He remained possessor of all the divine attributes and prerogatives; Colossians 2:9 says of His incarnate state that “in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form.” So Christ did not become poor by subtracting some aspects of essential deity from Himself. Scripture does not teach that the Son exchanged His deity for His humanity. No, He didn’t become poor by ceasing to be what He was (God); He became poor by becoming what He was not (man). He became poor by addition, not subtraction—by becoming what He wasn’t, even while never ceasing to be what He was, by taking on a human nature, even while never shedding His divine nature.

So what then was His poverty? Just this, that though He had every right to continue in unlimited manifest power and authority, to radiate the very essence and glory of deity, to receive nothing but the most exalted worship of the host of heaven—immune from poverty, pain, and humiliation—He did not selfishly count those riches to be slavishly held on to, but sacrificed them to become man and accomplish salvation for sinners. One commentator said, “He surrendered all the insignia of divine majesty and assumed all the frailty and vicissitudes of the human condition” (Harris, 579). And I like that: He surrendered all the *insignia* of divine majesty. He *concealed* the divine majesty of the Lord of glory behind the veil of the poverty of a slave.

He is rich as the uncreated Creator, but poor insofar as He is created according to His human nature—coming to exist as a human embryo in His mother’s womb, and being born of a woman. He is, as Augustine said, man’s Maker made Man.

He is rich as the rightful owner of everything in heaven and earth, and yet poor as He is born in a stable and laid in a feeding trough for a bed.

He is rich as the One whose glory fills the earth, who is rightfully worshiped by the saints and angels of heaven, and yet He is poor as the one who was made for a little while lower than the angels (Heb 2:9).

He is rich as the sustainer of all things, upholding the galaxies by the word of His power, and yet poor—at the same time being sustained by the nutrients of his mother’s body.

He is rich as the immutable One, so perfect that He could never change for the better and so righteous that He could never change for the worse, and yet poor as the one who “kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men” (Luke 2:52).

He is rich as the God who owns the cattle on a thousand hills (Ps 50:10), and yet poor as the man who had no place to lay His head (Luke 9:58). The foxes He created had holes! The birds whose life He sustained by His word had nests! But the Son of Man who had spoken the world into existence had no place on that earth that He could call His own.

He is the bread of life, who out of His infinite fullness satisfies the hunger of every soul who feasts upon Him (John 6:35), and yet experiences hunger.

He is the fountain of living waters (Jer 2:13) who invited the thirsty to come to Him and drink (John 7:37–38) and never be thirsty again (John 4:13–14), and yet He experiences the parched mouth of human thirst.

He is rich as the omnipotent One—the source of all strength—who calms the winds and waves with a word (Luke 8:25), and yet poor as one who grew weary from a day’s journey (John 4:6) and required sleep (Luke 8:23).

He is *the Truth* (John 14:6), slandered and accused of bearing false witness. The King of the angels, accused of being possessed by demons. The embodiment of faithfulness, betrayed by His friends.

The One who clothes the grass of the field and lilies of the valley (Matt 6:29–30) was stripped bare. The One who healed the sick with a touch has His back torn open by the scourges of sinful men. His brow that should hold the crown of heaven is pierced by thorns.

The One who upheld the universe collapsed under the weight of His own crossbar, and needed the help of a man—whom He had made, whose life He was sustaining at that moment—to carry His cross to Golgotha!

In the majesty of Heaven, to look on Him would have been to look on the epitome of all beauty. But Isaiah, who told us in chapter 6 of the angelic worship He received in heaven, tells us in chapter 53 that He had “no stately form or majesty that we should look upon Him, nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him. He was despised and forsaken of men...and like one from whom men hide their face He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.”

The worshiped became the despised. The blessed One became the man of sorrows. The Master became the slave. The rich became poor.

But His poverty did not reach its depths at the torture, or even at the crucifixion. The self-impoverishment of the Son of God climaxes in the divine curse, as the unmixed fury of the Father breaks over the head of His beloved Son, in whom He is well-pleased, as Christ bears the sins of His people as our substitute, and cries out in words that exhaust the depths of mystery, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”

The Author of life, dead. The fountain of all divine blessings, become a curse under divine wrath.

Dear friends, no one was ever richer than the Son of God. And no one was ever poorer than the Son of God.

C. Christ’s Purpose

And why did He do this? For what purpose? Look again at the text. “Though He was rich, yet *for your sake* He became poor, *so that* you through His poverty might become rich.” He did this for you! It was your sin He bore! It was your spiritual poverty that required the surrender of His riches! The price your sin required was nothing less than the death and the curse of the Son of God in your place! That wrath He suffered at His Father’s hand, that was your wrath! The abandonment He experienced, that was your abandonment! That cry of dereliction was your cry of dereliction! And yet you may go free into the cloudless peace of divine blessing! You, through His poverty, might become rich!

And rich, not in the passing treasures of this earth, which moth and rust destroy and which thieves break in and steal! Rich in every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, Ephesians 1:3! The riches of the loving election of the Father before the foundation of the world! Union with Christ our Savior and Friend! The forgiveness of sins! The imputation of righteousness! Adoption into the family of God! The permanent indwelling and sanctifying ministry of the Holy Spirit! A cleansed conscience! Communion with the Triune God that grants indomitable joy and peace that passes understanding! Made a partaker of the divine nature! Increasing conformity to the very image of Christ! And one day to be free from all sin and suffering in the presence of

Christ on the New Earth! All these riches are yours for the taking! But they are all wrapped up in the Savior! They are all stored in the person of Christ!

And if you would take possession of these spiritual riches, you must come and take possession of Christ by faith alone this morning. If you do not yet know Christ, if you remain outside of Him, if you remain wallowing in the poverty of your own sinfulness, confess your sins where you sit, turn away from your sins, turn away from yourself, and put all your trust for acceptance with God in this sovereign Savior! And you, through His poverty, will become rich!

Conclusion

“For your sake,” He has done this, Christian. I want to read something, written by the Puritan John Flavel, that captures something of the self-imposed poverty of the Lord Jesus Christ for your sake. It’s called, “The Father’s Bargain with the Son.”

Father: My son, here is a company of poor miserable souls, that have utterly undone themselves, and now lie open to my justice! Justice demands satisfaction for them, or will satisfy itself in the eternal ruin of them: What shall be done for these souls?

Son: O my Father, such is my love to, and pity for them, that rather than they shall perish eternally, I will be responsible for them as their Surety; bring in all thy bills, that I may see what they owe thee; Lord, bring them all in, that there may be no after-reckonings with them; at my hand shalt thou require it. I will rather choose to suffer thy wrath than they should suffer it: upon me, my Father, upon me be all their debt.

Father: But, my Son, if thou undertake for them, thou must reckon to pay the last mite, expect no abatements; if I spare them, I will not spare thee.

Son: Content, Father, let it be so; charge it all upon me, I am able to discharge it: and though it prove a kind of undoing to me, though it impoverish all my riches, empty all my treasures ... yet I am content to undertake it.

And GraceLife, I ask you: If you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich,” how is it that you should ever struggle with the grace of generosity? How could you ever close your heart to the needs of your brothers and sisters in Christ? How could you be anything but lavishly generous? You are a beneficiary of a Gospel that was accomplished by means of self-imposed poverty! The richest of the rich voluntarily made the poorest of the poor! For your sake! So that you would be enriched with every spiritual blessing in Christ! Friend, if that is the **grace** that saved you, that very same grace is at work within you. And therefore, that grace must be

brought to bear on every aspect of our lives! It must inform every decision we make! It must shape every action we perform! We must bend out the grace that we have received from God to others. **Gospel grace** must **drive** us to generosity.