

2 Corinthians 8:1-7

## A Church Overflowing With Grace

As we enter into the Christmas season, it is a good time for us to evaluate the position of our hearts. This time of year is full of adventures: up and down the roadways, shopping at the mall, fun with family, and for some, this time of year may be filled with great strain and challenges as we take the time to look back at all that we have accomplished in the year and maybe all that we did not accomplish. Indeed of all times of the year this time of the year is packed with emotion. As such, it is a good opportunity to check the condition of our hearts.

God truly is concerned with our hearts. One of the clearest indicators of our hearts is money. Jesus said, where our treasure is there our hearts will be also. Maybe this is why this time of the year, when we spend the most money provides us the greatest opportunity.

Scripture, God's revelation to us, is meant to be the most informative force in our lives. Scripture always speaks to our heart and encourages us to ensure that God has all of our hearts. This is the message that Paul relates to the Corinthians, a message that we hear God speaking to us today.

### READ TEXT

God's desire for us, as his people, as one of His expressions of His glory in this community, is to be a people who are overflowing with grace.

How to tell if you are a part of a church overflowing with grace? 3 Questions:

#### **1. What flows from your hardship? (1-2)**

- Let's notice how Paul emphasizes giving. He does so by grounding these actions in grace.
  - Grace is that wonderful gift of God that is the overflow of his own goodness poured out upon us so that we can reflect his goodness
  - Our existence as the children of God is on account of grace. All of our actions have a fountainhead from which they all flow. Grace is that fountainhead.
    - Have you ever used a water filter? When using some filters, you take water and pour it through a cylinder filled with different particles, and what comes out on the other end is water suitable for drinking. As believers we are grateful for the filter of our lives – the Holy Spirit. Our lives are constantly being renewed according

to His gracious work in our lives. The whole of our lives

flows from grace.

- What is so amazing about grace? Grace leaves no room for bragging because it founds our entire lives on the activity of God. Grace means that the inclination (the desire for whatever) as well as the object itself (whatever you do in light of your desires) is understood in light of God's activity in your life.
  - We want to be able to say what Paul said to the Corinthians in 1 Cor 15:10 – *By the grace of God I am what I am...* and we want to mean in its true light.
- Paul is encouraging the Corinthians to give, and to do so he reminds them of grace. Paul encourages the church to look around to see if their actions are flowing from grace
- The easiest way to assess to see if your actions are flowing from grace is to see what happens when you are squeezed
  - When you squeeze a grape does lemon juice come out? When you squeeze a Christian what should come out?
    - Remember a Christian is formed by grace; so what comes out when a Christian is squeezed? Joyful Generosity
- How can we be sure that grace is the driving force in our life? See how we react in the times of hardship.
  - These churches spread across Macedonia, according to the NT, were no strangers to persecution and hardships. How they react in the midst of great adversity reveals God's gracious activity in their lives
  - Look at verse 2: When adversity meets a life formed by grace, what is intended as harm meets an impenetrable force called joy.
    - For the believer, joy is inextinguishable because joy is not based upon external circumstances.
    - Joy is the pleasurable delight in life that transcends our circumstances
    - Joy is a "delight in life that runs deeper than pain or pleasure." (EDT, 656)
  - And when hardship is met by joy, generosity is the result
    - Here in Macedonia, hardship and poverty overflowed not in a woe-is-me or attitude of despair but with an overflowing wealth of generosity that was beyond all expectations.
  - The grace of God was forming their actions
- They were rich in grace which is what it means to be truly wealthy
- This is what we need to know:
  - Our circumstances do not determine who we are

- Who we are is determined by who He is. And who is He? He is one with whom there was never a time when He was not, and in time for our sake and our salvation became incarnate. He is the one who ever lives to make intercessions for us, the one full of grace and truth, the one who has graciously poured Himself in our hearts and is forming us to display His glory

Which leads us to our second point of consideration as we are seeking to determine if our church is rich:

## 2. What is the longing of your heart? (3-5)

- The heart is not so easily seen. This is why Paul does not resort to coercion or by putting them on a guilt trip to encourage giving.
- Often times we are quick to see things according to the flesh (2 Cor. 5:16), but God sees the heart and is affectionately after your heart.
- The amount does not matter as much as the attitude of the giver.
- Giving, the way the Macedonians are commended, is an overflow of grace by hearts filled with joy.
- As we read 2 Corinthians 8, did you notice what word was not used? What is the Bible talking about in 2 Corinthians 8? What is Paul encouraging the Corinthians to give? Money. But, Paul does not mention the word money. This is on purpose.
  - We should learn that God isn't concerned with money; He is concerned with our hearts. He does not care how much money you have or how much you don't have. What He cares about is having all of you.
  - The issue that God desires for you is to have an overflowing heart, and a heart that overflows with grace gives.
- This is why Jesus taught about money
  - Mark 10:25 – *It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.*
- And Paul said about money in 1 Timothy 6:10
  - *For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.*
- Money and possessions are the first indicator of where someone's heart is
  - Matthew 6:19-21 - *Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break*

*in and steal. For where your treasure is there your heart will be*

*also.*

- The hearts of the Macedonians are overflowing with grace, are revealing that they are seeking a treasure that will never fade away through the way they are seeing their material possessions.
- What brought them to this point? Look at verse 5.
  - Jesus says in Matthew 6:33 in a context of materialism and the concerns of the world to, *seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.*
  - Jesus, as the word *first* in this sentence stands in the emphatic position, is to be the emphasis of our lives.
    - How we give, why we give, how much we give, all go through this question: “Am I seeking Christ first? Is my joy and delight in Him?”
    - If you and I would surrender to Christ *first* then our lives too will be characterized by an overflow of grace.
    - We would then see life not as striving but resting because we know that we already have our deepest satisfaction in Him.
    - The song of our hearts will be:
      - *All that thrills my soul is Jesus, He is more than life to me, and the fairest of ten thousand, in my blessed Lord I see*

It is a whole life of seeking Christ first, all of life. Which leads us to our third and final question:

### **3. Are you consistent or irregular in putting Christ first? (6-7)**

- Apparently the Corinthians started off strong in their zeal but needed encouragement to finish.
- What good to make a pledge and not follow through?
- What good to come to church and not apply yourselves to the truth?
- It is coming that time of the year where many make new resolutions. Some of you are going to set out to lose weight or change a habit, but only a few of you will end up making a life change. The saddest part, even more sad than starting and not finishing, is that some of you won't even make new years resolutions anymore; you have simply given up. Your flow of grace is more than a trickle than an overflow – all because you are not seeking Christ
- To encourage the Corinthians Paul emphasizes grace. Look at this double strand of 3 Characteristics:
  - All faith, speech, knowledge
  - All earnestness, love, grace

- When the first list is by itself we don't know if such actions are genuine or not. But couple the first with the second and we can clearly see an overflow of grace.
- If we are to love, our love is to be genuine. If we are to give, we are to give with a heart overflowing with grace.
- The Macedonian churches had their moment to show God's work amongst them, now it is the Corinthians turn. Prayerfully grace will overflow

Oxford Baptist Church, I believe that we are entering that moment. Oxford Baptist Church is a church that has been in a period of stagnation for a while; a church that has been on the decline. God is bringing us to this moment to see if we are seeking Him first, if Grace will overflow.

It is our choice. I pray that we all make the right choice and our actions in the upcoming days indeed will show that we are a church overflowing with grace.