

Abounding Grace

“God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work.”

—II Corinthians 9:8

IT WOULD SEEM THAT THE

previous and perhaps unexpected liberality of the Corinthian brethren had reminded the Apostle Paul of how much God has done for us. In providing the means for supplying the material needs of their more

needy brethren and thus being their benefactors, the saints at Corinth were manifesting an important characteristic of godlikeness. Thus Paul takes the occasion, in the words of our text, to remind them, and us, that God is able to “make all grace” abound toward us.

The apostle does not mean that God will always give his sacrificing people an abundance of temporal good things, because frequently this would result in their spiritual impoverishment. However, he does mean that our Heavenly Father is able and willing to make his favor abound toward us in all ways that will be for our highest spiritual welfare. Paul himself had learned how to abound in temporal blessings, and he had learned also how to suffer need, but through all these experiences he also had

learned that the grace of God had never failed him. (Phil. 4:12) The love of God seems to have gripped the great apostle to such an extent that he seemed unable to find suitable words adequately to express his understanding and appreciation of God's grace which appeared to him to be boundless and inexhaustible.

In the words of our text, three great truths are expressed pertaining to our precious relationship to God: (1) "God is able to make all grace abound," that is, there is the inflow of divine blessings; (2) "Having all sufficiency in all things," in other words, a sufficient possession of these blessings; and (3) "Abound to every good work," which is the outflow of blessings for the benefit of others. In this process we see the manifold and all-encompassing benefit of the grace of God, as it first comes to us, then abides in us for our spiritual growth, and also proceeds forth from us to others.

THE INFLOW OF GRACE

First there is the inflow of divine favor. In connection with this the apostle suggests three thoughts: (a) the power of God—he is able to provide the needed grace; (b) the provision of God—his divine grace and favor; and (c) the all-sufficiency of God's provision—he makes all grace abound.

What thoughts this induces in us concerning the greatness of the power of God! The human mind is so limited that we have but a poor conception of such a glorious being. "From everlasting to everlasting thou art God." Consider him as the Creator, and the vastness of his creation. What a wonderful mind is revealed in the planning of such mighty works as these. Indeed, as the prophet declares, it

is only the fool that says in his heart, "There is no God."—Ps. 90:2; 53:1

David's mind was much impressed with the greatness of God when he wrote these words in the 8th Psalm: "When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; What is man, that thou art mindful of him?" (vss. 3,4) The Prophet Isaiah also speaks eloquently of God's power, saying, "Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, and meted out heaven with the span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance?"—Isa. 40:12

What measureless resources of power and wisdom must reside in God who planned all these wonders! We are only now beginning to learn something of his greatness as revealed in the works of creation, and what glory is reflected in the little we are able to understand. We appreciate God's greatness even more, however, as we come to understand his character as revealed in his wonderful plan of salvation.

Through the plan of salvation we see ourselves as living examples of the power and love of God. We were all servants of sin, but now, through his love and power we have been rescued and have become servants of righteousness. (Rom. 6:17,18) His strong arm is ever being exercised on behalf of his children, and the conviction of the all-conquering ability of God should be very real to each one of us. One of the great sins of natural Israel was doubt, which led to murmuring. This attitude caused them to question God's ability to furnish them, while in the wilderness, with the necessities of life.

“Is God able?” seemed to be their attitude, and thus they prevented the inflow of blessings from the Holy One of Israel.—Exod. 15:24; 16:2; 17:3

BOTH ABLE AND WILLING

The ability of God to provide grace and favor is something upon which we can depend. Do we feel faint? Are we weary? Then let us remember that God, the Almighty One, “giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. ... They that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength.” (Isa. 40:29,31) Are we fearful? God tells us, “Fear thou not; for I am with thee: ... I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee.” (Isa. 41:10) In the operation of his grace it is not our weakness that counts, but his strength. Indeed, God is able and can give the grace that he has so abundantly promised.

God’s abounding grace is his loving provision for his people. Being sinners by nature, we have done nothing to merit such lovingkindness. God has bestowed grace upon us to the extent that we were led step by step to Jesus, “the way, the truth, and the life.” (John 14:6) We learned how we could obtain life through faith in him. Through consecration and spirit begettal, we were delivered from the “power of darkness” into the “kingdom of his [God’s] dear Son.” (Col. 1:13) We learned too, that through Jesus’ great sacrifice we could become reconciled to the Heavenly Father and become his children. (Rom. 5:10; II Cor. 5:18) This was indeed wonderful, but it was not all. God continued to give “grace upon grace.” (John 1:16, *Weymouth New Testament*) He revealed to us his loving purpose concerning the

church; how he intends through her, as part of the Christ class, to bless all mankind. Furthermore, his marvelous grace made known to us that we could have a part in that arrangement if we would but enter the training school of Christ, and learn well the lessons there intended for us.

Surely, God has revealed to us the riches of his grace in that he has opened up to us the privileges of this "high calling." (Phil. 3:14) Constrained by such love, we accepted this calling and entered his service, desiring that his will might be done in us. (II Cor. 5:14,15) Thus it is that he accepted us and enlightened our mind. He gave us his Holy Spirit and has begotten us to a new nature. (I Pet. 1:3,4) We were given an insight into the mysteries of divine love which are found in his wonderful Word. Life under any favorable circumstances is a great boon, but the Heavenly Father has promised us life on the highest plane of all, the divine, there to be "heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ." (Rom. 8:17) We are not worthy of such favors. Hence, it is all by God's grace, ever flowing from him to us.

GOD ABUNDANTLY SUPPLIES

The expression, "to make all grace abound," is one of the high notes of our lesson. God does not dole out his blessings in a meager or stingy fashion. The fountain flows copiously, generously, lavishly, not a mere trickle, but a veritable torrent. As his power is great, so is God's grace full, free and generous: "For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us." "The earth

is full of thy riches. ... These wait all upon thee; that thou mayest give them their meat in due season. ... Thou openest thine hand, they are filled with good.”—Ps. 103:11,12; 104:24,27,28

Of a certainty, there is nothing ungenerous or miserly about God if we give our “all” to him. The prophet wrote: “Prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.” (Mal. 3:10) How our cup of blessing overflows if we conform our lives to the divine will!

POSSESSION OF GOD’S GRACE

Why does God supply us such an abundance of his grace? We suggest that it is because he wants us to have something to pass on to others without impoverishing ourselves. There is no waste in the provision and economy of God’s grace. However, if others are to be enriched from us it must be from the overflow and not from that which God intends for us to use. If our hearts are in the right attitude before God, there is sure to be a copious overflow of his grace to us, and through us to others. Thus we must be sure to make the proper use of divine grace in ourselves, so that we will not be among those who will say, “They made me keeper of the vineyards; but mine own vineyard have I not kept.”—Song of Sol. 1:6

We are like a vessel filled to the brim, and that which overflows is the grace which we have the privilege of sharing with others. If we fail to make proper use of the overflow, however, we may soon find that we are lacking even in the grace needed

for ourselves. "There is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty."—Prov. 11:24

God's grace is all-sufficient for our possession. We note these statements from Scripture. "God shall supply all your need according to his riches." "I can do all things through Christ." "All things are possible to him that believeth." (Phil. 4:19,13; Mark 9:23) Our lack of faith is often a hindrance to the full possession of divine grace. God is willing, but through deficiency of faith we may fail to receive or properly use that which he bestows. He has promised all things for our needs as New Creatures in Christ Jesus. Therefore, let us rely fully upon those promises and realize that our needs are actually supplied. By faith let us translate God's promises into the realities of divine grace inflowing to us, and then overflowing for the blessings of others.

To the church God says, "All things are yours." (I Cor. 3:21,22) That is why it is further said that we can be "filled with all the fullness of God." (Eph. 3:19) From the moment of consecration and spirit begettal as New Creatures in Christ Jesus, the power of God is ever exercised on our behalf. The grace of God endows us with everything necessary to enable us to have his will worked out in our daily lives and which will help to produce in us a character likeness to Jesus. Thus, we are enabled to be faithful to the covenant of sacrifice which we have made with God.—Ps. 50:5

GRAVEN UPON HIS HANDS

At times we may act as if we have forgotten that the Heavenly Father has a keen interest in us which never fails. While we may forget, however, he never

forgets. He says to us, “Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands.” (Isa. 49:16) Our loving Heavenly Father holds each one of us in his hand, and no outside force or being can pluck us out of his power and watch-care. What confidence this should give us!

Since the very moment our consecration was accepted of him, the Heavenly Father’s arms have been around us, and he will never leave us. (Heb. 13:5) From the time when he began the work of sanctification in us, he has been, and will continue to be, in the forefront, as it were, shaping every circumstance of our lives, and arranging his providences on our behalf so that they will work for our highest spiritual welfare.—Rom. 8:28

Entrepreneurs enter into business with the thought of making a success of it. Likewise, our Heavenly Father enters into relationship with us to the end that we may pass through our training and development period successfully. He wants us to be victorious in our walk in the narrow way, but we must do our part. We must cooperate with him and work in harmony with his perfect will for us.—Rom. 12:2; Phil. 2:12,13

We are to be “workers together” with God, acknowledging his wisdom to control and overrule in all our affairs. (II Cor. 6:1) Obeying his instructions, we may confidently expect to share in the success which will attend his plans. However, if we do not cooperate with him, we may put in jeopardy our position as workers with him, the result of which could be that we are counted as unfaithful servants. There can be no doubt that our Heavenly Father will do everything in his power to avert such an

outcome, but it remains with us to make use of every means of grace so bountifully and freely supplied to us.

Of our grace-supplying God it is truly written that he is “from everlasting to everlasting,” and that, like Jesus, he is “the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.” (Ps. 90:2; Heb. 13:8) This assurance of permanency should give us much confidence. Our Heavenly Father is the eternal source of all sufficiency, and his grace enables us to cultivate the patience to endure faithfully, and to count our suffering as a “light affliction.” (II Cor. 4:17) It is this fact of the riches of God’s great storehouse of grace that enables us to meet all the emergencies and overcome all difficulties which otherwise might turn us aside from our walk in the narrow way. Indeed, God is the source of all grace, and especially is he “our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.”—Ps. 46:1

Surely from such an infinite source of grace there must be an endless supply to meet every need, to compensate for every sorrow of the individual Christian, and to cope with every situation in which the members of his church may be placed. Let us remember this when passing through the barren places of our Christian experience. For example, we may have those apparently fruitless occasions when we have seized an opportunity to tell the glad tidings of the kingdom, and yet there has been no response.

Furthermore, we may wonder how we shall meet this question or that question, and what shall we say if we are opposed. Let us remember that God never sends his messengers upon his errands

without overruling and assisting them as to what to say. God's grace takes care of these situations also; perhaps not always to our liking or preference, but in any event to his glory.

CROSSES—BLESSINGS IN DISGUISE

Sometimes in our lives we are brought face to face with questions which must be settled, or difficult problems to be resolved. Decisions based upon human wisdom could perhaps lead to disaster. However, followers of Christ are assured that if they endeavor to meet these problems as God would have them met, and not to please themselves, divine grace will direct the issues so that "all things work together for good" to them, because they "love God," and because they have been "called according to his purpose."—Rom. 8:28

Divine grace will always guide us through trouble, but it will not necessarily prevent us from experiencing problems and trials. It is no sign that God has forsaken us if storms continue to assail and endeavor to overwhelm us, nor is it a sign of greater spirituality to be free of trials. Frequently, it is the proud and wicked who call themselves "happy" in this time of testing and trial of the true church of God, but he has promised, "My grace is sufficient for thee."—Mal. 3:15; II Cor. 12:9

Though we may not always be spared from trouble, nor promptly delivered from our trials, some good will always come out of them if we are rightly "exercised thereby." (Heb. 12:11) The Apostle Paul was shipwrecked, but as a result the island of Melita received the Gospel. Lazarus died, but Mary and Martha had a marvelous foretaste of the

resurrection. “They that go down to the sea in ships, ... These see the works of the LORD, and his wonders in the deep.” (Ps. 107:23,24) It is often in the deep waters of affliction that the mighty works of God are made manifest.

THE OUTFLOW OF GRACE

“That ye ... may abound to every good work,” our opening text says. The abounding or overflowing of God’s grace resides in Christ. He is the channel through which divine favor comes to us, and “of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace.” (John 1:16) We have the overflow of God’s grace. It is this that we should pass on to others, knowing that God has abounded toward us. We get no blessing simply from mere selfish enrichment. The only way to be able to truly appreciate a blessing is to share it with others. “It is more blessed to give than to receive.”—Acts 20:35

As an example of this, we should not keep the Word of God continually shut up within ourselves, when there are searching ones looking for the message of hope which we can give because we have learned the character and plan of the comfort-giving God. If we hide away hoping to enjoy God’s blessings for ourselves alone, we will become unfruitful in the work of the Lord. We cannot prosper spiritually unless we are helping someone else to grow. This is true whether it be with regard to our family, the brethren, and even those in the world who we may be able to assist by means of a comforting word or act. As we have been blessed of the Lord, therefore, we should endeavor to pass blessings on to others.

Are we providing portions of spiritual food for those who desire and require this form of nourishment? Are we, on the other hand, so eager to study the Truth, that we have no time to practice its principles for the benefit and blessing of others? By way of example, our attention is often drawn to the need of isolated brethren, and there are many such. We may say to ourselves that God will provide for them, which, of course, is quite true. It may be, however, that he wishes to provide for their needs through us. If we are neglecting our privileges in this respect, he will turn to others who will be more willing helpers, because we have been unfaithful in the use of the opportunity we were afforded.

We cannot retain our blessings unless we endeavor to pass them on to others, especially to those of the “household of faith.” (Gal. 6:10) If, however, we dispense the bounties of God’s grace given to us for the benefit of others, its value to us will be the more deeply impressed, and we will be doubly blessed.

Many years Abraham waited for his son Isaac. He had the promise of God that he would have a son, and how he did love Isaac when he was granted him. However, this joy must have been doubled when Abraham received Isaac back from God after he had given him up as a sacrifice. (Gen. 22:9-12; Heb. 11:17-19) He then possessed him in a way he could never have done before. Thereby the blessing of God was increased to him by virtue of his greater appreciation. It was then that God confirmed the covenant with his oath to Abraham, “By myself have I sworn.”—Gen. 22:16-18

What is given to the Lord is always returned many-fold. “No man that hath left house ... for my sake, and the gospel’s, But he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time,” the interim dividend, “and in the world to come eternal life.” (Mark 10:29,30) If we would have the increase we must sow accordingly. The principle underlying this is found in the abounding of God’s gift of grace toward us. Peter said, “As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.”—I Pet. 4:10

We can minister to those around us in the same way as the Master did. He went about doing good and preaching the Gospel of the coming kingdom of God. (Acts 10:38; Mark 1:15; Matt. 24:14) At the present time, the people are utterly unable to free themselves from the condemnation of sin. All human schemes for the salvation of the world are proving to be valueless. God’s kingdom on Earth, for which Jesus taught us to pray, is the only solution to all the various human woes, and we must proclaim this promise. (Matt. 6:10) By thus bearing witness to the Lord and the work he came to do, it may inspire hope where little or none now exists.

MEANS FOR ABOUNDING

God provides the means for our abounding. We can give because we have received. We must continue to receive in order to bestow upon others, and to receive we must be in constant communication with the Heavenly Father, the source of our supplies of grace and truth. Ours will be a continual supply of grace if we daily ask for it in the proper condition of humility and reverence. “Truly our fellowship is

with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.”
—I John 1:3

How much should we abound, and what is the measure? As God has abounded to us, so we must abound to others. He gave of his best in the person of his beloved Son. (John 3:16) It cost him a very great deal. It also cost Jesus much to pass on the knowledge of the Heavenly Father’s love to man. Jesus had many bitter experiences, much suffering, and finally it cost him life itself. Should we not follow his example? We should give of our best in the interests of others, abounding to them as God and his Son have abounded to us.

Let us also remember that every act of love shown to the brethren of Jesus is counted as done to the Master himself. As Mary of Bethany did, we should break our alabaster boxes and scatter their sweet-smelling contents as tokens of loving service to one another. Why did Mary break her box? Evidently it was in a full gesture of devotion, and to show her love, that she gave all of its fragrance to her Master. What generous love that was!—Matt. 26:7; John 12:1-3

Love is the greatest commandment and the fulfilling of God’s law. We may ask, how much love are we to give? “Love one another; as I have loved you,” is the answer given by Jesus. (John 13:34) They who hear the gracious words to come up higher and enter the “joy of thy lord,” are those who have already received “all-sufficiency in all things,” and have had it abound toward others in love. (Matt. 25:21) These will receive eternal life in its fullest, grandest sense—glory, honor, immortality, the divine nature.—Rom. 2:7; II Pet. 1:4 ■