

AN INSPIRING EXAMPLE OF GENUINE BENEFICENCE 2COR.8:1-13

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The subject of the first five verses (vv.1-5) of our text is the genuine beneficence (the active goodness, the genuine sacrificial giving) of the churches of Macedonia toward the fellowship of ministering to the poor saints at Jerusalem. Cf. 1Cor.16:1-3; Rom.15:25-27; 2Cor.9:1,2.
2. Paul cites their example as a means of helping motivate Corinth to respond to their need to help supply their want, 2Cor.8:1-8.
3. Then in v.9 he cites the example of Jesus for the same reason.
4. 1Cor.16:1,2 reveals the who, how and when the funds were to be raised by the churches to perform this work.
5. Our purpose in the study of this inspiring example of genuine beneficence in 2Cor.8:1-5 is to take note of and consider certain general truths concerning it and suggested by it.

II. DISCUSSION

A. FIRST, THAT ALL GENUINE BENEFICENC (GENUINE SACRIFICIAL GIVING) IN AND OF MAN IS FROM GOD.

1. This, no doubt is the point suggested by
 - a. V.1: “Moreover, brethren, we do you to wit of (we make known to you) the grace (favor) of God bestowed on (which has been given in) the churches of Macedonia.”
 - b. V.5: “And this they did...but first (they) gave their own selves to the Lord...”
 - (1) What they did with themselves and then with their belongings, they did because they allowed God’s will to work upon their will.
 - (2) Therefore, consecration of self to God was at once the cause and force of their sacrificial giving as cited in this example of genuine beneficence.
2. All that is loving and generous in any and all of God people is from one Source, and that is God. Cf. 1Jno.2:5; 1Jno.4:7,8,12,21; 5:1,2; Cf. 2Cor.8:8; 9:12-14, esp.v.14.
3. God is the primal Font from whence all such things flow.
4. Whenever and wherever you witness such things in God’s people you see an emanation (a flowing out) from and a reflection of the Eternal One. Cf. 1Jno.3:17,18.

B. SECOND, THAT IN SOME OF GOD’S PEOPLE GENUINE BENEFICENCE (THE ACTIVE GOODNESS,GENUINE SACRIFICIAL GIVING) IS MORE DEVELOPED THAN IN OTHERS.

1. The churches of Macedonia serve and are cited as an example of this truth. For according to Paul in vv.1-5, they displayed it in a remarkable degree.
2. It is evident from what Paul says about the churches of Macedonia that their beneficence was self-sacrificing out of joy and love for God, for truth and for their needy brethren; that they went beyond their ability in their giving in response to Paul’s call to the brethren to help the needy saints at Jerusalem, vv.1-3; Cf. 2Cor.9:1,2.
3. They gave willingly and joyfully under very unfavorable circumstances. Note the following:
 - a. They were in much affliction, v.2: “How that in a great trial of affliction”
 - (1) This might have suggested a feeling of a need for special care of themselves, rather than for others.
 - (2) Suffering often produces selfishness.
 - (3) Our own pain and trials often prevents us from realizing the pain and trials of others.
 - b. They were in “deep poverty,” v.2.
 - (1) “Deep”—BATHOS – “reaching deep down;” “deep-searching;” [“extreme,” Thayer,92.]
 - (2) In view of this, how could they give? They could have said, “How can we give?” But they did give! Cf. Ac.2:44,45; 4:32,34-37.
 - (3) Charity must begin at home. And doesn’t “deep poverty” dictate that it must end there?
 - (4) How inconsiderate, and indeed absurd, to ask them to give to others!
 - (5) Was it not their duty to be provident? To hold some in reserve, in store against possibly worst times? Lay back some for a rainy day?
 - (6) The Macedonians stand out as an example of genuine beneficence, the grace of God bestowed upon them in action.
 - (7) It has been said that no people talk more about duty perhaps than those who intend to violate it.
 - (8) It’s been my experience to find that not many people who are always found working diligently in the service of the Lord are

ever found complaining about the work. It's the non-workers who do the complaining!

4. Though much afflicted and in deep poverty or very poor, they sacrificed and gave *largely*, vv.2,3.
 - a. Their danger was not that they might give too little, but that they might give too much; that they might burden or distress themselves to set others at ease, a thing which Paul said he did not wish anyone to do, vv.12,13.
 - b. they had power or ability or means to give, but they went beyond their power in their sacrificial giving.
 - (1) For Paul said in v.32: "For to their power (according to their ability or their means), I bear record (witness), yea, and beyond their power"
 - (2) Both great trial of affliction and deep poverty combined could not cramp their large heartedness.
 - c. Many, in effect, see how little they can get by with giving to salve their conscience; the Macedonians asked how much, or how much more, can we give?
 - d. A modern curse of local churches is small, stingy, tight-fisted giving. There are too many small-dollar givers among present-day Christians who ought to be large-dollar givers when it comes to supporting the word of the local church.
 - e. But not so, when it comes to providing for what they consider the "necessities" of life.
 - (1) With this kind of givers, a dollar bill looks as large as a bath towel when it's for the collection plate.
 - (2) But when it's for family needs, it's microscopic in size!
5. They gave voluntarily and or spontaneously, v.3b.
 - a. "They were willing of themselves"; "of their own accord"
 - b. They were not pressed into doing what they did by outward appeals; they were not compelled or placed under some kind of compulsion from without to do it.
 - c. The only pressure was from joy and love from within.
 - d. They did not give grudgingly or of necessity, but were cheerful givers, which God loves, 2Cor.9:7.
 - e. they did not require the importunities of many "collection sermons" to jar them loose from their contribution.
 - f. Seemingly, they required only to be made aware of the need. Cf. 2Cor.9:1,2.

6. They gave in earnest, in seriousness: praying or pleading for the opportunity to share in the ministering to the saints, which shows how earnest they were, v.4.
 - a. Instead of giving because of some kind of pressure or persuasion by others, to do so, they themselves pleaded for their gift, or their “grace” to be received.
 - (1) “Gift” here is from the original word “grace,” and is so translated in vv.6,7,19, adheres to the true meaning of the word.
 - (2) Theyer,666, “Gift” or “grace” : “What is due to grace;...a. a token, a proof of grace, 2Cor.1:15 (KJV,2Cor.1:15, benefit); a gift of grace;...used of alms, 1Cor.16:3; 2Cor.8:6sq,19”
 - (a) 1Cor.16:3, ‘liberality or bounty unto Jerusalem’ is translated from the original word “grace”.
 - (3) ASV:
 - (a) 2Cor.8:4: “with much entreaty in regard to this grace”
 - (b) 2Cor.8:6: “so he would also complete in you this grace...
 - (c) 2Cor.9:7: “see that ye abound in this grace also”
 - (d) 2Cor.8:19: “travel with us in the matter of this grace”
 - (4) ESV:
 - (a) V.6: “complete among you this act of grace”
 - (b) V.7: “see that you excel in the act of grace also”
 - (c) v.19: “travel with us as we carry out this act of grace”
 - (5) Therefore, the Macedonians’ “gift” was their “grace” (“their act of grace”) [as above in v.1: the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia]; it was the grace of God working and manifested in and through them to their needy brethren in Jerusalem.
 - b. Perhaps they could have plead their deep poverty as a reason for withholding their contribution to the needy saints, but they didn’t.
 - c. Instead, they earnestly seized the opportunity to render what help they could.
 - (1) They begged for the privilege of giving to this worthy cause.
 - (2) Giving to them was a privilege – a gain, not a loss.
 - (3) Giving to them was not a thing to be avoided, with excuses, but a thing to be sought.
 - (4) They must have remembered vividly the word of the Lord who had said: “It is more blessed to give than to receive,” Ac.20:35.
7. They gave with much joy.
 - a. V.2 speaks of “the abundance of their joy” which “abounded unto the riches of their liberality.”

- b. Be reminded of what 2Cor.9:7 says about giving “grudgingly” or “of sorrow”, “or of necessity”.
 - c. The grudging, sorrowful giver defrauds no one so much as himself.
 - d. Let us not be as the little boy was whose mother gave him a one dollar bill and a half dollar to put in the collection plate for his contribution.
 - (1) He put in the half and kept the dollar bill.
 - (2) When his mother ask him why, he replied: “You said the Lord loves a cheerful giver, and I could do that with half dollar but not with the dollar bill!”
8. They gave themselves to the Lord as well as their monetary contribution, v.5.
- a. First, they gave themselves to the Lord, v.5a.
 - (1) They had solemnly dedicated themselves and their belongings to the Most High.
 - (2) It was easy for them to surrender a part when they had already surrendered the whole.
 - (3) Do we today give haltingly or sparingly or grudgingly because we do not believe the scripture which says: “Ye are not your own. For ye are bought with a price..” (1Cor.6:19b,20a)?, or the scripture that says: “he which soweth bountifully (generously) shall reap also bountifully (plentifully),” 2Cor.9:6?
 - (4) Our gifts cannot be acceptable to God if we withhold ourselves or parts of ourselves.
 - (5) If our gift is not acceptable to God neither are we! Cf. Gen.4 in the case of Cain and Able.
 - b. Then they gave unto the apostle, v.5b.
 - (1) “Not as we hoped” But, obviously, also, “better than” we hoped.
 - (2) As to a servant of their Lord. For service.
 - (3) When they surrendered themselves to the Lord, they did not surrender themselves to idleness, but to activity, to active service.
 - (4) Many present to God a mass of indolence.
 - (5) The Macedonian conduct exceeded the apostle’s expectation, but the Divine. For what they did was “by the will of God”.
 - c. The result of having first given themselves to the Lord is a true example of the fact that genuine beneficence in man is from God, as we established in our first point in this study.
 - (1) It’s obvious that what they did first with themselves and then with their belongings they did because they allowed the will of God to work upon their will!
 - (2) Therefore, consecration of self to God is at once the cause and force of all our beneficence to men.

- (3) And, of course, unless they are motivated by love for both God and man, they are of no benefit to the giver. Cf. 1Cor.13:1-3.

C. A THIRD GENERAL TRUTH SUGGESTED BY THIS INSPIRING EXAMPLE OF GENUINE BENEFICENCE IS THAT IT IS PROPER AND ACCEPTABLE TO GOD TO CITE, EVEN URGE OR HOLD UP, SUCH AN EXAMPLE FOR THE PURPOSE OF MOTIVATION AND AS A PATTERN FOR OTHER TO FOLLOW.

1. Paul obviously does that with this example of the churches of Macedonia.
 - a. How can we fail to see that he uses their example to stimulate and motivate the Corinthians to act?
 - b. First he cites the example of the churches of Macedonia in their act of genuine beneficence, vv.1-5.
 - c. Then he urges the brethren at Corinth to abound in the grace of giving, or the grace of liberality in giving, of the grace of genuine beneficence, as the Macedonians had done, and as they themselves had also abounded in everything; such as, in faith, utterance, knowledge, diligence, and in your love to us; and that they do this to prove the sincerity of their love, vv.6-8.
2. Then, to further encourage and motivate them, he cited Jesus Christ himself as the highest example of genuine beneficence, v.9: What he had; what he did; why he did it.

D. A FOURTH GENERAL TRUTH SUGGESTED BY THIS INSPIRING EXAMPLE OF GENUINE BENEFICENCE CONCERNS THE RULE OF ACCEPTANCE : SUCH BENEFICENCE IS ACCEPTED OF GOD IF AND ONLY IF THERE BE FIRST A “WILLING MIND,” OR IF “THE READINESS TO WILL” IS THERE, VV.12,13.

1. The doctrine is this: That of the disposition of the heart, not the doing of the hand alone. The motive is the soul of the deed. Cf. 1Cor.13:1-3; Psa.51:17; 34:18; Mt.5:3,4.
2. Both the Macedonians and the Corinthians met this criteria – that of a “willing mind” and “a readiness to will”. Cf. 2Cor.8:3,4,11; 2Cor.9:1,2.
3. Note vv.12,13
 - a. V.12: “accepted according to that a man hath” give “out of that which you have”
 - (1) This verse is simply stating in a different way what is taught in 1Cor.16:2: give “as God hath prospered” you.

- b. V.13: “For I mean not that other men be eased, and ye burdened”
 - (1) Again, he simply reiterates it in still a different way.
 - (2) While, on the one hand, I have taught you and urged you to give liberally as you have been prospered.
 - (3) On the other hand, I do not wish that you, or teach that you, distress or overly burdened or impoverish or distress yourselves to set others at ease, or have their wants supplied!
 - (4) Certainly God is just in his requirement; so am I: “I do not wish...” (to be expected since he is guided by the Holy Spirit)

III. CONCLUSION

1. Here is an example for us.
 - a. Though we abound in other things (v.7), yet if we have not this practical love for service we are no better than “sounding brass,” 1Cor.13:1.
2. We can attain to this level of service only as the Macedonian Christians attained it, by “the grace of God,” v.1. Cf. 2Pet.3:18; 1:2.
3. Surely, we don’t want more money in our pockets, our bank accounts, or our investments, than we have grace in our hearts.
4. We are to abound in this grace. God can work this grace in us if we will let him. Let us commit ourselves into his hands, guided by his word that he may work it in us! Cf. 2Cor.9:8.
5. I realize this text pertains to the work of benevolence for the needy saints at Jerusalem.
 - a. But even today not only the work of benevolence assigned to the local church goes on, but also the work of evangelism, and the work of edification, each and all three of which require money to support them.
 - b. The need for these works and the support of them is ever present!
6. 1Cor.16; 2Cor.8; 2Cor.9 are passages which reveal how the church raises its money. They reveal the who, the how, and the when!
7. Other passages reveal that its money raised according to 1Cor.16:2 is to be used for the totality of the work assigned.