

## NOTES AND QUESTIONS FOR INDUCTIVE STUDY OF PAUL'S SECOND LETTER TO THE CORINTHIANS - PART NINE

Having described the immense pressures on Christ's ambassadors and the role of the word of God instead of criticism in restoring ambassadors who strayed to faithful service of the government of heaven, Paul returned to his favorite topic, grace, the limitless resource without which we would be totally ineffective. He used the remarkable example of the Macedonians, who also at a later time in Paul's imprisonment were the only ones to give to Paul.(Phil.4:10-17) What was so impressive about grace among the Macedonians was that they were poor, not rich. They were afflicted, under pressure, but they had joy. Remember the link in Greek between 'chara', joy, and 'charis', grace. Joy is the result of knowing about grace, not of favorable earthly circumstances. Joy meant that they not only gave generously apparently beyond their means but that they even begged to be allowed to give to the needy Christians in Jerusalem. The secret of such extravagant joy and therefore grace lay not in what they had given in money but in their relationship with God. First they gave themselves wholeheartedly to Him.(8:1-5)

Paul had asked Titus to help the Corinthians to complete what they had promised and started.( I Cor.16:1-4) He was not trying to push them to do something but simply to be sincere by doing what they had previously decided and said they would do. Their repentance as a result of the word of God in chapter 7 had changed their hearts and behaviour, and it was therefore to be expected that this would overflow into concern for the struggles of others by living out their promises. The supreme model of grace is Jesus, who put aside the richness of being God in heaven to be born into a poor Galilean family as a servant,(Phil.2:5-8) knowing how rich He could make us through His crucifixion and resurrection.(8:6-9)

Again Paul urged them to turn words into action. They had set a high example for others a year before with their generous promises. He encouraged them with the thought that giving stimulates giving. The time might well come when they were needier than the Jerusalem Christians who would then respond by helping them. It had always been in the nature of the early church that 'there was not a needy person among them',(Acts 2:44,45) and 'they had all things in common'.(Acts 4:34) This is the very reverse of communism because it comes from the heart not the law. Paul reminded them of the Israelites in the wilderness gathering manna for their families. Regardless of the size of the family and their appetites what was collected each day was exactly right. No-one went short and nothing was left over.(Exod.16:18) This is the reality of depending upon God for all our needs. Sometimes the Lord drops His provision out of heaven but most often it is one group of Christians caring for another.(8:10-15)

Titus had represented Paul on his highly successful previous visit, and was now being sent back yet again to continue what he had begun. Two unnamed friends traveled with him to help. Each one was carefully chosen for the contribution he could make which was more about his personal qualities than his special qualifications. Paul was concerned that the whole team would consistently illustrate the message of grace which he had taught. They were to be effective ambassadors of Christ. Titus for example was coming to Corinth again because he cared. 'Earnestness', remember is 'hasty

diligence', the compulsion to do a thorough job starting right now. God produces this quality in us as we respond to the word of God.(7:11) It was really God who was sending him, not just Paul.

Titus' first helper already had a great reputation for living the gospel he preached. His appointment by the churches was simply their recognition of what God was already doing through him. Office in the church does not make us effective. Only God does. Because all of the team clearly recognized that anything worthwhile they did was only the Lord's work through them, the one motive was God's glory not their own. They could therefore be confident that all could see how faithfully the gifts to Jerusalem had been passed on. No-one could seriously suggest mismanagement or personal gain out of their service. The third member of Titus' team also had a proven record of faithfulness, and another advantage. He knew the Corinthians well and shared Paul's confidence in what God could do in them because of His grace.(I Cor.1:1-9)

Though Titus was Paul's 'true child in a common faith',(Tit.1:4) presumably because Paul had first led him to Christ and then taught him as a young Christian, Paul regarded him as his 'partner and co-worker', not his subordinate. There is no hierarchy in the body of Christ, other than the recognition of Christ as the one head. All three were coming with one purpose, to bring God's message for God's glory. Again,(6:13; 7:2) Paul urged the Corinthians to open their hearts in response.(8:16-24)

In chapter nine Paul continued his theme of grace.

9:1-5 Q.1 How in this section had Paul reversed the approach he had used in the previous chapter to encourage the Corinthian Christians to give as they had promised? Was this honest? What had Paul been boasting about? In what sense is it acceptable as Christians to boast? 'Bountiful' literally means 'blessing'. What is meant by a 'blessing gift'? What would it feel like in practice to receive such a gift?

9:6,7 Q.2 What practical illustration did Paul use here to make his point? It is clearly true of planting a crop, but how does it work when it comes to giving to others? What is the real secret of being a 'cheerful giver' as compared to a miserable one?

9:8,9 Q.3 What according to verse 8 will be the immediate effect of having an open heart to the grace of God? Describe how this message has worked in your own experience. Why on the other hand will we sometimes be reluctant to give to others in need? Look up Ps.112:9 from which verse 9 is taken. What is the starting point for the kind of generous giving the Psalm describes?

9:10-15 Q.4 For a farmer to sow his seed generously what must he first have experienced? How does this same principle apply in a spiritual sense? How in turn does our generosity in giving have an effect on those who receive it? Paul has described a cycle effect? Where according to verse 15 does this cycle begin?