

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

In chapter nine Paul continued his beloved theme of grace, illustrated by the matter of the promised gift to the needy Christians in Jerusalem which the Corinthians had undertaken to make a year before but had not yet delivered. Repentance from their many mistakes, as a response to the word of God through Paul, had produced a wonderful demonstration of grace in changed behaviour. Paul believed that it would equally be expressed in a promise honoured. He had no hesitation in reminding them of what they had said they would do. Nor was he reluctant to introduce an element of competition for a good cause. He used the abundant generosity of the Macedonians to inspire the Corinthian Christians to match their giving, explaining that the Macedonian secret was in their heart relationship to God. He had also used the fine example of the honest, dedicated leadership of Titus and his two co-workers to further underline the point. Now Paul proposed to turn the competition around the other way by using the promised Corinthian gift to challenge the Macedonians! He hoped his boasting about how bountifully the Corinthians had said they would give would not turn out to be an embarrassment if nothing happened. He was well aware of Satan's tactic of tempting us to have second thoughts about giving by reminding us what else we might have spent the money on.(9:1-5)

The practical operation of the grace of God is like the decision facing a farmer. If he looks at what he obtained from his last harvest and decides that he does not want to waste the modest amount he has stored by planting much this season, he will be in for a big disappointment at the end of the next harvest. If, on the other hand, he sows as much seed this season as he believes the ground can accommodate, he can expect a bumper crop. Letting go of the little we think we have of the grace of God for the needs of others is a struggle. If however we stop to realize that our resources of God's grace are limitless because of His love for us, then we can relax and give cheerfully. God has guaranteed an abundance for every need we have, so why panic? We cannot out give God! Verse 9 is quoted from Ps.112:9. This Psalm describes how the man who 'fears the Lord' and 'who greatly delights in His commandments.'(Ps.112:1) will behave. His family will be blessed. His own needs will be met. He will be able to cope with hard times and bad news. He will stand head and shoulders above those who persecute him. Those who are against God will be deeply frustrated by such an extraordinary person.(9:6-9)

In summary, we are not farmers giving from our own hard earned stocks of grain, but sowing out of God's limitless granaries of grace. We can be like Joseph in the book of Genesis who could be ridiculously generous to his undeserving family because he had the huge resources of the king at his disposal.(Gen.44:1) As Joseph's brothers, once they discovered who he was, could only thank him for his generosity, so we can be the means of people thanking God for His outrageous grace to them through us. Grace in giving to the needs of others does not just solve their problems but it changes the attitude of the needy towards God. We can do a lot of talking about the love of God in

sending His Son but until those struggling with daily life see the love of God in action through us it will be words only.(James 2:14-18) When the poor see the gospel being lived out in giving they will sit up and take notice, and say 'thank you' to God. They in turn will desire and pray for the best for us also, which may lead on in time to them being used to meet our needs. Didn't God come up with a great idea when He decided to make grace the heart of His relationship with us?(9:10-15)

In chapter 10 Paul moved on to the difficult problem of how we should deal with those who resist the grace of God. His illustration is that of warfare.

10:1,2 Q.1 In what way did the Corinthians think of Paul as two very different people according to whether he was talking to them face to face or writing to them? Why does this seeming contradiction arise in pastoral ministry?

10:3-6 Q.2 What two kinds of warfare are there?(Eph.6:12) How are they different? What kind of fortress are we attacking in spiritual warfare? What kind of weapon is going to give us success? What is the objective of this war? Whom or what are we to take prisoner? What common mistakes do we make in fighting this war?

10:7-11 Q.3 If we find ourselves in the middle of a war what is the most important question to ask ourselves? Who is in command in our spiritual army? What are His orders? Comparing verses 5 and 8, what are we to destroy and what are we to build up? What common mistake do we make in this regard? How does understanding this help us to appreciate why Paul seemed to be two different people?

10:12-18 Q.4 Why is it not appropriate to recommend ourselves for a medal after a battle? What on the other hand can we boast about in spiritual warfare? In what sense is this battle intended to extend God's territory? Why is this very different from building our own church empire? How then should we be ambitious as Christian leaders? What tests can we apply to decide which is which?