

INTRO -A. One of the chores I was given as a child was mowing grass. Now, I didn't mind doing the job, but I tried to get it done as quickly as possible, and maybe skipped some steps along the way. But my dad would check. 'You missed some lines of grass here.' 'You didn't trim.' You left grass clumps on the lawn. He did not just want me to do the job, but also wanted me to excel in the job I did.

B. I've been telling you that this summer I am preaching on the Epistle lessons, because they give practical instruction to the Christian. And, if you are reading the New Testament according to our schedule, this epistle lesson is the reading assigned for tomorrow.

I. What Paul tells us here is to excel in a certain job. Look at verse 7, '**Excel in the grace of giving.**'

A. It is good to know the background here.

1. If you read Acts 11 you will hear that a famine was coming to Judea, the area around Jerusalem.

A. In return the churches around the world willingly decided to take an offering to help the church in Jerusalem.

B. Among those who were taking an offering was the church in

Corinth.

C. If you notice verse 6, it talks about the offering that was begun in Corinth under the leadership of Titus.

2. Paul encourages the Christians to finish this job, but not just to finish it. **⁷ But just as you excel in everything -- in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us -- SEE THAT YOU ALSO EXCEL IN THIS GRACE OF GIVING.**

3. Don't just do the job, do it in excellence.

B. Paul talks very openly here about a somewhat sensitive topic, money, and offerings.

1. But Paul is very specific about this offering.

A. First Paul encourages the Corinthians to follow the example of the Macedonians.

1. He says **² Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. ³ For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, ⁴ they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints.**

2. According to verse 5 this was an act of faith. **⁵ And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will.**

2. Then, Paul talks about the offering the Corinthians should give.

A. Here, it should be done, right, well, in an excellent way.

B. That means, It should be done 'as God has blessed one.'

Proportionately - in accordance with one's possession, as was also said in Acts 11. Corinth was one of the wealthiest cities in the world.

3. The offering should be given cheerfully.

C. This grace of giving includes offerings.

1. This verse talks of a special offering. We take such offerings when there is a tragedy, or a special need. In a couple of weeks we'll have a special offering to help pay for the expenses of a singing group who will put on a concert so that we can invite the community and share with them the good news of Jesus.
2. This section also talks about regular offerings.

D. But, the grace of giving is more than just monetary offerings. There are many ways that Christians can give.

1. Ultimately love is giving, giving of oneself.
2. We give of our time and efforts volunteering.
3. Christians can give the Savior by sharing the good news.
4. A generous spirit comes from a thankful heart, so Christians can and should be generous, because in Jesus we have much for which to be thankful.
5. God tells us through Paul, '**Excel in this grace of giving.**'

II. When I was young it was a Rocky tradition to have the same lunch every Saturday - raw hamburger sandwiches. My dad would buy the meat fresh, and have it ground twice, and we would spread it on bread. I remember one day I had a friend visiting. I tried my best to get him to try a sandwich. He refused, and I don't think he ever returned.

A. I'll be blunt, there is a reason I told this story. If there is a taboo in today's church, a topic about which it is dangerous to talk, that topic is money.

1. I know people who have left the church when money was discussed, and not returned. Should we refrain from talking about money and offerings?
2. If you notice, I did not choose this reading because it talked about money, this is the assigned reading for today - we have been reading from 2 Corinthians for a number of weeks.
3. The Bible discusses our whole life of serving God, even money. In fact, finances are a common topic in Scripture.

B. We may not like to hear about money, but we are to live our whole life for God.

1. Using our finances for the Lord is also part of our faith.
2. We may not like to sacrifice, to give of our-self. But, that is part of the Christian life, just like finances are.
3. If we try to serve God in some areas, but choose not to serve Him with our money, then we have set up something that is more important to us than God, an idol.

III. We have just bought a new house. Finances will be tight for a while. And, this week, the transmission on my car went out. The cost of fixing the car is more than I paid for the vehicle, and it is a 1991, it has other problems. Yet, we have financial commitments also for the church. How do we excel?

A. Paul says to me, **Excel in this GRACE of giving.**

1. Then he used the word **GRACE** again.
2. **⁹ For you know the GRACE of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.**

A. Jesus knew our need and left heaven and its blessings to take on the poverty of earth for us.

B. By the poverty and suffering and death of Jesus on the cross he won for us the riches of heaven.

C. God provides for our eternity. Surely he can provide for our ability to serve the Lord.

CONCLUSION - After Russia opened up, amazingly, St. John sent teams to Provideniya and Lavrentiya from 1993 to 1997 to do Bible school and tell about Jesus. You probably remember Vasiliy Dobriev coming to America. In 1998 we had a team read to go, but they didn't get in because Russia was making it more and more difficult. Russia was going through severe financial strain, and it was causing hardship, even a famine among the people where we worked. So, we decided to have an offering to help with food. We opened it to all Alaska, and our wild goal was that maybe the 13 churches in Alaska could collect \$20,000.00 and help in some way. The other problem was shipping. Food was expensive, and usually it cost \$1.00 a pound to ship food to rural Alaska, never mind into isolated Russia. But others wanted to join in. Instead of \$20,000.00, the Lord provided over \$104,000. And, with that we were able to purchase over \$115,000 pounds of food and have it shipped to numerous areas where we had worked. But you know what was the greater miracle? The grace of Jesus Christ. **Who though he was rich became poor so that we through His poverty might become rich.**

How can we excel in the grace of giving? God provides HIS GREATER GRACE for us in Jesus Christ.