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THIS WEEK'S SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

PRINCIPLES OF CHRISTIAN STEWARDSHIP
Golden Text—Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity; for God loveth a cheerful giver.—2 Cor. 9:7
THE LESSON AS A WHOLE
 Approach to the Lesson
 It is no pleasant experience for a minister to be the victim of vilification and reproach. Yet if this comes, he can rejoice that he is in good company. The Lord Himself was subjected to ill-treatment beyond all others, and the Apostle Paul was sorely tried by many who ought to have rallied to his support. The Corinthian church, upon which he expended great labor and lavished great love, gave him many a headache. It split up into parties, one for Apollos, one for Peter, and one, with a show of superior piety, declaring itself "of Christ," independent of all men. The party that stood for Paul was no great comfort to him, for they had the same carnal spirit as the others. But it seems as if the "Christ" party was most bitter in its attack on Paul. His character, his teaching, and even his apostleship, all were the objects of assault. They despised his appearance, called his letters a big bluff, accused him of cowardice, ridiculed his speech, and made out that he acted in a carnal way. The last four chapters of 2 Corinthians reveal this sad situation.

Although Paul answered the charges frankly and fearlessly, he did so with consummate grace.

More than that, he did not allow all that he suffered to diminish his love or deflect him from ministering to the Corinthian church in the fullest way. While this Second Epistle to the Corinthians contains a strong defense of Paul's apostleship and behavior, it is also rich in teaching. Our special attention is called to the teaching on Christian giving, of which Paul had a lofty conception. If giving in our churches were maintained on the high level of chapters 8 and 9 of this Epistle, our Lord would not be dishonored by unworthy methods of money-raising.

It is widely believed that we have only two of four letters which Paul wrote to the church at Corinth, the first and third of these being lost. In 2 Corinthians 2:3, 4 and 7:8-10, he refers to a previous letter in such terms as could scarcely be applicable to the one we know as 1 Corinthians. These passages would seem to refer to a letter of stinging rebuke, of whose effect he stood in doubt until he met Titus in Macedonia (2 Cor. 2:13). The letter before us was written to prepare the way for the apostle's third visit to Corinth (2 Cor. 13:1).

Verse by Verse
 2 Cor. 9:1.—"For as touching the ministering to the saints . . ." Paul is referring to the collection for the poor saints in Jerusalem, being contributed by a number of the Gentile churches, especially in Macedonia, Achaia, and Galatia.

Verse 2—"For I know the forwardness of your mind . . . a year ago." On a previous visit, perhaps his second (see 13:1) the apostle had apparently presented the project, with immediate response. See instructions for the collection in 1 Corinthians 16:1, 2.

Verse 3—"Yet have I sent the brethren . . . that ye . . . may be ready." Three brethren were sent on this errand, Titus (S6) and two whose names are unknown (vs. 18, 22). Paul wanted no collections when he arrived (1 Cor. 16:2).

Verse 4—"Lest . . . we should be ashamed." Paul had boasted to the Macedonians about the ready response of the Corinthians. If some Macedonians (Aristarchus, for instance) were to accompany the apostle to Corinth and find them unready, Paul would be ashamed—and so would the Corinthians. See how Paul stirs the one group with boasts about the other (2 Cor. 8:1-5).

Verse 5—"Make up beforehand your bounty . . . not as of covetousness." Still he does not want it to be a "race" between the two, each trying to outdo the other. Inspired by each other's bounty, they must nevertheless act separately in the spirit of bounty.

Verse 6—"He which soweth sparingly . . . bountifully." Here is the law of sowing and reaping applied to the quantity as it is applied to kind in Galatians 6:7.

Verse 7—"As he purposeth in his heart . . . not grudgingly . . . for God loveth a cheerful giver." The purpose of the heart, not what another gives, is to decide the offering. The purpose is to be formed and executed with gladness of heart; for God is glad to receive only what we are glad to give.

Verse 8—"All grace . . . always . . . all sufficiency . . . all things." Abounding grace is for abundant living. If we give all, God will see that we always have enough for every demand of the work. God wants us to live in the superlative degree.

Verse 9—"He hath dispersed abroad . . . his righteousness remaineth for ever." The quotation is from Psalm 112:9. Notice the close relation between bounty and righteousness.

Verse 10—"Multiply your seed . . . and increase the fruits of your righteousness." See this verse in the American Standard Version. When God finds a willing sower, He will give him plenty to sow, and increase the harvest from it.

Verse 11—" . . . bountifulness . . . through us thanksgiving to God." Paul is anticipating the thanksgivings of the saints in Jerusalem when they receive at his hands the liberal gifts of the Gentile churches.

Verse 12—"For the administration . . . supplieth the want . . . is abundant also by many thanksgivings unto God." This is an explanation of verse 11. See how the apostle rejoiced at the thought of God being glorified as the end of all this liberality.

Verse 13—"They glorify God for your professed subjection unto the gospel." Nothing could more assure the Jewish believers of the reality of the Gentile faith than this expression of their love.

Verse 14—"And by their prayer for you." The blessing would return to the givers through the thankful prayers of the receivers.

Verse 15—"Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift." No bounty can equal God's bounty in the giving of His only-begotten Son for us.

The Heart of the Lesson
 The Apostle Paul's "money raising" was of a very high order. He mingles the human and divine elements in an amazing fashion. To grasp his method we should consider the two chapters of this Epistle in which he makes his plea.

He begins by telling the Corinthians of the wonderful liberality of the Macedonian saint despite their poverty, calling it "the grace of God" bestowed on them (2 Cor. 8:1-5). He makes this the basis of desire that such grace may characterize the Corinthians, especially since they are so rich in all other spiritual gifts (vs. 6-8). Then he holds up the Lord Jesus as the pattern of all giving (v. 9), and urges the Corinthians to carry out the intention which they expressed so heartily a year earlier—for holy purposes must not be allowed to die unfulfilled (vs. 10-12).

From this, Paul proceeds to show that giving is not a one-sided affair, but all parties are enriched by it. So important is the ministry of giving, that Paul had actually appointed Titus and others to the special task of training the churches in this "grace."

Then comes a very human touch. Paul has boasted to the Macedonians about the generosity of the Corinthians and he appeals to the Corinthians not to let him down. How embarrassing it would be to both him and to them if some of the Macedonians should accompany him to Corinth and find that Paul's boast about them was baseless!

Paul's next argument is on

The Daffodil
 Happy little daffodil,
 Nodding in the sun;
 Some have tasks the hours to fill;
 You, methinks, have none.

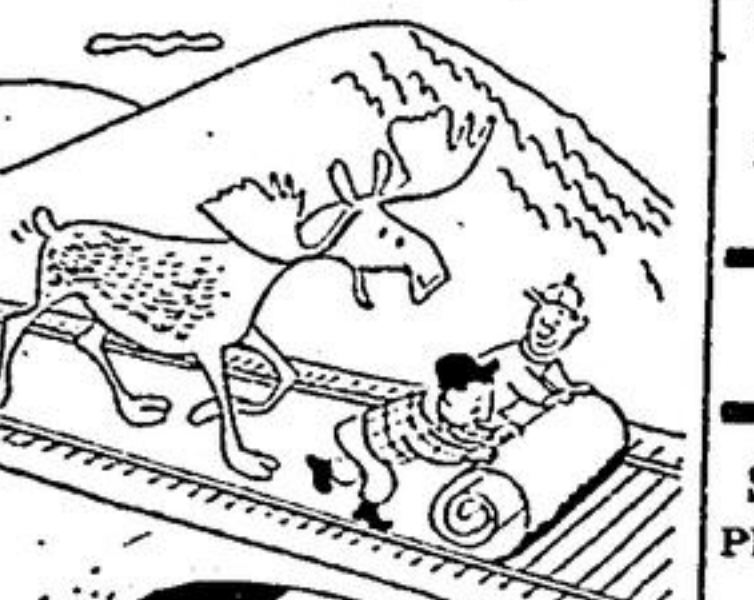
Idle little daffodil,
 Think you're quite a fellow,
 Loafing 'neath my window sill,
 Seems to me you're yellow.

Simple little daffodil,
 Needs are simple too—
 Sun your warming, breeze
 your thrill,
 Fed by morning dew.

Lazy little daffodil,
 Hard by busy street;
 Always cheerful, never ill—
 Life so short, and sweet.
 W. F. R.

the plane of spiritual law. Sowing and reaping are akin, not only in kind but also in quantity, and God, the author of spiritual law, will see that it works in their case, for when God finds a ready "channel" He sees that it is well used.

Roll out the carpet!



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