

You Know the Grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ

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[0 : 00] Thank you.

I must tell you before I start, I have not read them, but I've read little snippets of them, of that book and of others that he's written. And what he maintains, and there's an element of truth I think in this, that many books on marriage have overlooked some fundamental truths.

And the fundamental truth that he thinks that they have overlooked is that people tend to use what he calls different love languages. Now what he means by that is they use different ways of communicating their love to a partner in marriage.

And Chapman isolates five different languages, five different ways of expressing love. He says one way of communicating love is to use words, that is to communicate to people that they are of value for this reason or another.

That is communicating verbal compliments even as a way of expressing and appreciating someone else, as a way of communicating your love.

[1 : 32] The second love language he says is quality time. He says this is just about saying to someone, you are so important to me that I am going to spend time with you. Now you don't ever say that, but you act that way.

That is, you communicate your love by setting aside time for people. I mean we do this often in our relationship with our children, don't we? The third love language he talks about is that of receiving gifts and giving gifts.

You see, in order to give someone a gift you've got to actually think about it a bit, don't you? At least most of us have to. A gift is therefore a focus on the recipient. It's saying you are important to me, I've spent time thinking about this, this gift is for you.

The focus of attention has been expressed in taking time to secure a gift and give it. Now a fourth love language is acts of service. Here a lover or a spouse gives themselves sacrificially to the other.

They put aside their own rights for the love of the other person. And the fifth and final love language that Chapman identifies is physical touch. Physical touch is a powerful means, isn't it, of communicating love and affection.

[2 : 39] And it can be holding hands, it can be kissing, embracing, sexual intercourse, a whole variety of expressions of physical touch. Now, friends, I wonder which language it is that you, if you're married, most express your love to the other person with.

And I wonder which one you wish your spouse would express love towards you with. You see, I think we do, we tend to major on one or two of these different ways of expressing love.

Perhaps you express your love towards your partner by speaking words of affection or by spending quality time or giving gifts or acts of service or physical touch. Which language do you think your spouse would like you to express love with?

Do you wish that they would sort of major much more, not just on speaking, but, you know, on spending quality time or on giving you lots of gifts or giving you, giving themselves to you in your service or physically touching?

Well, how would you answer that question? Well, my friends, what I'd like to do is to get you to contemplate just for a moment on how God loves.

[3 : 50] How do you know God loves you? He says to us time and time again that he loves us in his word, doesn't he? So he actually physically, in his word, tells us he loves us.

But which sort of language do you think is God's major way of communicating his love for us? Now, I need to tell you, in preparation for this sermon, I changed my mind.

I came with one particular view and I walked away with another from this passage. So what do you think God's major mechanism of expressing love toward us is?

Is it to speak to us words of affirmation? He certainly does that, doesn't he? Is it spending quality time with us? I'm not sure what that would mean with God, but we often talk about it in terms of spending quality time with God, don't we?

Or is it giving gifts? Or is it his service of us? Or is it, well, it's a bit hard to think about physical touch, isn't it? But give it a thought for a moment and think about how is it that God loves us?

[4 : 50] And is there a major way in which he loves us? How do we know that God loves us? How does he predominantly communicate his love toward us? What is his primary expression of love?

Where is it found? How is it exercised? Friends, I think our passage today is a display in many ways, tells us how God loves us. And so as we watch this passage today, as we examine it, I want you to look and to listen for this.

Ask yourself, how is it that God loves us? And how does he communicate his love? What dominates his expression of love for us? What is the focus of his expression?

With that question in mind, I want you to turn to our passage today. So it's 2 Corinthians chapter 8. So please turn with me. And let me first give you an overview of the passage.

And to do that, I want to first give you some background. Now, by way of background, you see these two chapters in 2 Corinthians focus on one particular theme.

[5 : 53] In his earlier letter to the Corinthians, Paul had talked about something which he calls the collection. That occurs in 1 Corinthians 16 verse 1, where he talks about it in those terms.

And in Romans, he calls it something slightly different. He calls it the contribution to the poor among the saints in Jerusalem, which is sort of code for exactly the same thing, the collection. This collection was a sort of outworking of an agreement he had had with Peter and James and the Jerusalem church, which he and Barnabas had had with them.

It was an agreement that they all would remember the poor in Jerusalem, the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem. Specifically, in their ministry to the Gentiles, Paul and Barnabas would make provision, material aid available for poor Jewish Christians.

Paul had been keeping his promise. At his hand, he had designed an extensive campaign amongst Gentile churches to financially aid the Jerusalem Christians.

And in 1 Corinthians 16, he said to the Corinthians, I want you each week on the first day of the week to set aside an amount of money that will go towards this particular focus. This money would then be collected.

[7 : 10] This money would then be sent to Jerusalem. However, while they started well, it appears that between 1 Corinthians and what we now have as 2 Corinthians, they had slipped.

You see, they had started well, but they were not continuing well. They had apparently become quite slack. And now Paul wants to urge them to renew the commitment that they had made at first.

He wants them to play a part in this undertaking of supporting Jewish Christians. And so he urges them to absorb these certain principles about Christian giving.

So let's run for a quick run through this chapter. And I want you to stay with me. We'll draw together some principles at the end. And then I want to talk about what that means for us. So look at your Bibles at 1 Corinthians chapter 8, verses 1 to 7.

We're going to major on verses 1 to 15, but 1 to 7 to start off. Now, Paul talks, can you see it there, about God's grace being granted to the churches of Macedonia.

[8 : 09] Now, I need to tell you, within this chapter, our English translators have not done us a real favour because they've changed words all the time, which is a bit unfortunate. And one of them is in verse 8.

So I want you to just keep an eye on that when we get to it. What's happened here is Paul talks about God's grace being granted to the Macedonians. These churches include churches like Thessalonica and Philippi.

These Christians, you see, were not physically rich Christians. They were not rich in terms of their ease of life. No, verse 2 indicates that they had suffered an extreme ordeal of affliction.

You see, these people were extremely poor. They were in difficult times. But God's grace had been poured out upon them. And from their severe ordeal of affliction, their extreme poverty had flowed out from them, this extreme wealth of generosity and abundant joy.

Look at verse 3. Paul says that they gave according to their means, but they gave even beyond their means. They begged and pleaded for the privilege of giving. Have you ever done that?

[9 : 16] That is, have you ever said, I want to give more? That's what these folk did. You see, they said to Paul, though they were poor, please, can we give more?

And he allowed them. And their severe affliction overflowed in extreme generosity. They gave beyond their means. And these people, you see, had understood the gospel, hadn't they?

You see, they'd heard, they'd received the good news of what God has done in Jesus. And they gave themselves to the Lord Jesus first. And then after they'd given themselves to the Lord Jesus, they gave themselves to others by giving.

God's grace caused their grace. God's gift caused them to give. They gave to God and they gave themselves to his representatives. And they gave themselves to his people.

They gave of themselves. Then look at verses 6 to 11. Paul turns to the not so gracious Corinthians. You see, the poverty of the Philippians is contrasted.

[10 : 19] And Paul's done this deliberately with the wealth of the Corinthians. Look at verse 7. Paul knows that they excel, the things that they excel. And he says, you folk are rich, aren't you? In faith and in deeds and in speech and in knowledge and in eagerness.

And you can see from 1 Corinthians that they thought that way too. They thought they were doing very well. But he urges them, look at the example of these poor people, these Macedonians.

Excel, not just in faith and in knowledge and in eagerness and in speech. No, excel in generosity as well. Look at verse 9. Listen to how Paul urges the Corinthians to generosity.

He focuses in on the Lord himself. And he reminds them that the Lord Jesus had been rich. That is, Jesus had not always been a human being. Before his birth, he had pre-existed as God.

In the language of Philippians, which Paul uses elsewhere, he says, He was in very nature God. He possessed equality with God. He was rich, therefore, beyond all measure.

[11 : 24] But his focus turned not to himself and his eternal riches. No, the focus of the Lord Jesus Christ turned to the Corinthians. And for their sake, he became poor.

That is, he put aside his human nature and became a man. He humbled himself. The eternal God entered into what is a sort of divine parabola.

He who was eternal and God put aside that, became a human being and became one of us.

He descended and became a human being. Why? So that we might become rich. He became obedient to death, even death on a cross in the language of Philippians.

And he did so for one reason. And that reason is that he might make us rich. In other words, he became human. He died to bring others to God, to bring them into the riches of relationship with God, to the riches of reconciliation with God, to the riches of righteousness with God, to the riches of relationship with God.

[12 : 28] Here is the gracious and generous kindness of our Lord Jesus Christ. And this is the verse that says, You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that although he was rich, yet for the sake of the Corinthians he became poor, so that by his poverty they might become rich.

And this great generosity of the Lord Jesus Christ should spur the Corinthians on. They are to receive the Lord Jesus. They are to be, they are to mimic him, to imitate him.

They are to receive his grace and love. And they are then to give that grace and love to others. Now look at verses 12 to 14. In these verses Paul argues for an equality and balance.

Now those of you who listen to the two Bible readings will notice that during these few verses he cites the first reading from Exodus chapter 16 about the gathering of manna.

So this is about the wilderness wanderings in Exodus 16. There God supplied his people with food. And what we noticed when we read through Exodus is some had lots and others had less.

[13 : 34] But all had enough. And what Paul is saying is that should be true amongst all of God's people. The abundance of the Corinthian Christians should overflow to the poor Christians of Jerusalem.

So there should be fair balance. Paul has now used three, did you notice the three different ways of encouraging the Corinthians? What was the first way? It was the example of the Macedonians, wasn't it?

What was the second way? It was the example of the Lord Jesus Christ. What is the third way? It is the example recorded for us in Scripture. All pointing in the same direction.

The Corinthians should be generous. And in verses 16 to 24, he makes arrangements for the collection and he says there will be Titus and some others. And they'll supervise and administer the collection.

They'll arrange in advance for this bountiful gift that the Corinthians are going to provide. And they'll look after it. And then finally in chapter 9 verses 9 to 15, he turns to the matter of sowing and reaping.

[14 : 36] And his message is clear. God's grace in Jesus is to reproduce itself in his redeemed people. God's grace in Jesus is to reproduce itself in graciousness among his people.

The Corinthians are to respond to God's grace with grace. He says, look, you're not under compulsion here. No, instead you are under grace. Just as God is a cheerful giver, so you should be cheerful givers because God loves cheerful givers.

Why? Because he's one himself. Look at verse 8 there. In our versions, it reads like this. And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance.

And here again, they haven't been that helpful with us, the translators, because it actually says, and God is able to make all grace abound to you.

Can you hear that word grace again? So in chapter 8, we heard that God's grace had been granted to the churches of Macedonia. Out of their poverty, they had come generosity. In chapter 8, we heard that the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ has been that he was, though he was rich yet for the sake of the Corinthian Christians, he became poor, so that through their poverty, through his poverty, they might become rich.

[15 : 46] And now he speaks of grace again. And he assures the Corinthians that God's grace can abound to them as well. And this grace is to be shown in their abundantly sharing, just as the Macedonians and as the Lord Jesus has.

And the result of such generosity? Have a look at it in the closing verses of chapter 9, verses 10 to 13. Godly generosity and grace will result in what? A harvest of righteousness, verse 10.

It will result in further enrichment of the Corinthians themselves, verse 11. It will produce thanksgiving to God, verse 12. It will result in God being glorified, verse 13.

And all of this will flow from one source, the indescribable gift given in the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, the things that I've read have told me that this word indescribable could almost be a creation of Paul's because it's not found elsewhere in any Greek manuscripts that we had up until now.

So he appears to have invented this word about being indescribable. Friends, there's an overview of this passage. Now, I need to say we've only skimmed the surface, and I've done that deliberately because I want to draw out some theological principles.

[17 : 03] This passage is rich in its depth. It does deserve greater exploration. But I want to just speak about some of the things that are happening here. First, I wonder if you've heard what Paul has to say about God.

This passage, I think, is clear in its presentation, isn't it? You see, here, as in all Scripture, God is presented as the God of grace and generosity.

He is the God whose primary love language is, if you like, the giving of gifts. He loves, loves, loves giving gifts.

He is the God of grace. He is the God of overwhelming kindness. This is the first and primary principle we hear in this passage. Our God is a God who's generous and gracious, the God of all grace.

But there's more in this passage, isn't there? You see, it has taught us that that grace is displayed in his world. It's as though God has put this banner up in his world and said, Here, this is what proclaims to you that I am the God of grace.

[18 : 09] Now, he's done it in other ways before this. He's displayed it in his creation. He's displayed it in his cheerful giving to his world. He's displayed it in the giving that he gives to poor.

But above all, where is God's grace displayed? It is displayed in one location. It is primarily and predominantly displayed in the giving of his good and great and indescribable gift of his son.

Here in his son, God acts with surprising and overwhelming grace. For he who is rich for our sakes became poor, so that through his poverty we might become incredibly rich.

Friends, that fact is designed by God to seep deep into our existence, even today. You see, we know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, don't we?

Though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor, that through his poverty we might become rich. This is our God, the God who does this unimaginable thing for us.

[19 : 17] This is our God, and this is his indescribable gift. This passage has taught us more though, hasn't it? You see, not only do we know the God of grace, not only is that grace focused in the gift and sacrifice of his son, this passage has taught us that the grace of God is to flow out not only from God, but from us as well.

What we see here in God is to be seen in his people. This passage is clear that the people who have truly experienced God's grace in Jesus will have that grace overflowing to their lives and in their lives and out of their lives.

It will be demonstrated in themselves, giving themselves to God. That's what happened to the Macedonians. That's why they're such a fine example, because they're like the Lord Jesus. As chapter 8 verse 5 says, they gave themselves first to this God, and as he had given them an indescribable gift, they gave the logical gift back.

They gave themselves to this God. The grace of God teaches us and drives us to give ourselves back to the God who bought us through the death of his son. You've been bought with a price.

Therefore, glorify God in your bodies. But this is not all. Where people have truly experienced God's grace in Jesus, what will they do? What do you think it will be like for someone who has understood this grace of God in Jesus?

[20 : 42] Well, they'll give themselves to be like God, to be God-like, won't they? In other words, they'll receive the grace of God, and they'll demonstrate the grace of God in graciousness.

See, if you receive God's grace, what will you do in return? You'll give grace, won't you? You will give grace. God's cheerful giving will drive people to cheerful giving.

God's love will drive them to love as they have been loved. They will love one another as God has loved them. They will give as they have been given to. Their eyes will be open to the disadvantaged and the poor, and they will give graciously and kindly as God himself has given to them, and they'll do it in all circumstances.

Did you notice that in the passages we went through? It is apparent that the Macedonians were afflicted and impoverished, and yet Paul says they gave of themselves even beyond their means.

It's apparent that he considers the Corinthians a rich, and he expects that they will do what the Macedonians have done, but they don't. He expects that they'll give out of their wealth, and Paul is very clear.

[21 : 50] It's the same as the message of Jesus. No person in any circumstance is in such a situation that they cannot be generous, and some of us here may feel incredibly poor, but none of us is in such a situation that we cannot be generous.

You can be the poor widow or the rich young ruler. You can be the poor widow who puts just a tiny little coin in, or the rich young ruler who refuses to give anything.

You can be resource rich, or you can be resource poor. You can have what look like great and impressive gifts, or you can have what look like ordinary and small gifts, but all of us can be generous in some way or means.

Despite circumstances, we can express God's generosity and grace in some way, and where we do, it'll have sure results.

Where God's people generously give as God gives, there will be a harvest of righteousness. There will be the enrichment of God's people. There will be a flood of thanksgiving to God, and God's Son will be reflected and honoured and known, and God himself will be glorified.

[23 : 04] Friends, if we are gracious as God is, those things will happen. We will be enriched as God's people. There will be a harvest of righteousness. There will be a flood of thanksgiving issue to God.

God's Son will be reflected and honoured and known, and God himself will be glorified. Friends, these are just some of the principles that arise from the passage, and so on this Commitment Sunday, I want to leave with you a series of questions that you could ask yourself.

And I want you to ask yourself seriously these questions. First, I want to ask you, if you believe that God is God, is a God who is generous, do you really believe what this passage says, and what the rest of the Bible proclaims?

Do you believe and know that God is generous? And that leads to my second question. Have you seen and experienced this great and gracious and generous God in Jesus Christ?

Have you met Him in His Son? Have you come to know His Son and love His Son? That's question number two. Question number three, so do you believe God is a God of grace?

[24 : 13] Have you met Him in His Son? Question number three flows from the other two. Have you let those previous two things change your life? Has God's generosity in Christ transformed you?

Has the grace of God displayed in the Lord Jesus Christ made you gracious? Has the love of God displayed in the Lord Jesus Christ made you loving? Has the forgiveness of God that He has given you in Christ enabled you and made you forgive others?

Has it driven you to forgive and not be bitter? Has the obedience of the Lord Jesus Christ driven you to obedience and to want to be obedient? That's question number three.

Has what you have seen in Christ changed your life and changed your actions? And the fourth question is this. Are these facts so conclusive for you, so incredible, that they overwhelm your circumstances?

In other words, are the facts of the gospel so all-encompassing that they drive you to be like God, despite the poverty or riches that you have?

[25 : 20] Clearly, as Paul says in this passage, you can only give according to what you have. But are you willing to give from what you have?

You see, I think that if you've truly understood the gospel, then this is what you will do. You'll respond by giving of yourself. And you'll respond by giving generously as God Himself gives generously.

So I want to close today by asking you how you went with my questions. So those four questions, how do you answer each one of them? Is God, in fact, generous? Have you met Him, His great generosity in Jesus?

Have you let it change your life? And is it so overwhelming that you want it to change your life in all circumstances? Is this you? Well, if this is you, then I want to urge you today, as Paul does.

Did you notice what he did as he works through his passage? He says of the Philippians, excel even more. Do it better. Last week, we saw how we could do it financially.

[26 : 25] I don't want to stress that this week. I want to stress it in terms of giving time and energy. You see, the ministry of the gospel here and in the world outside Holy Trinity needs your help.

So I urge you to respond to God's grace by being generous yourself in your service. I know many of you are like this. I've been amazed since coming here at some of the service that you give and the way you give sacrificially.

But if you think there's opportunity to excel even more, to do even better, there's lots of opportunities. So on your way out, grab one of those blue sheets and tell us some of the ways in which you could help.

And if there are some there that you think I could do that are not listed, write them down. Tell us. We want you to be able to serve the Lord Jesus Christ here and outside as well. So please consider how you can be generous in service.

But I want to come back to those four questions one final time. I wonder if there's some of you here who can't answer yes to those series of questions. Perhaps you're not sure that God is in fact the God of all generosity and kindness.

[27 : 30] Or perhaps you've not yet experienced that great generosity in the indescribable gift of his son Jesus Christ. Or maybe you haven't let this transform your life yet. Or maybe you haven't found the circumstances of life such that they've crippled your ability to respond.

Friends, if this is you, then we don't want your service so much as we want you to go back to the cross. Go back to where God's extreme generosity is displayed in Jesus.

Go back to Jesus. Go back to the foot of the cross. Go back to that place where his kindness is displayed most clearly. And soak it in.

And stay there till you've imbibed it. Stay there till you've understood it. Meditate upon it and let God embrace you there. And then follow that grace where it drives you.

Now if you need some help with that, then come and talk to me about it. Or come and see one of the staff members. Or pick up one of our communication cards and just write it down and tell us. And we'll do our best to help you.

[28 : 40] Let's pray though. Father God, we thank you for the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

That though he was rich, yet for our sake he became poor. That through his poverty we might be made rich.

Father, we pray that you would drive within us a love of these truths. And a passion to be like you and like your son. Father, we pray this.

And we pray that by this your son will be glorified. And his name known. And therefore you will be glorified. We pray this in the name of the Lord Jesus. Amen. Amen.