**THE EXPOSITION OF HOLY SCRIPTURE BY ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

**2 CORINTHIANS-018**. **ALL GRACE ABOUNDING by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all-sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work."*

*2 Corinthians 9:8*

In addition to all his other qualities the Apostle was an extremely good man of business; and he had a field for the exercise of that quality in the collection for the poor saints of Judea, which takes up so much of this letter, and occupied for so long a period so much of his thoughts and efforts. It was for the sake of showing by actual demonstration that would touch the hearts of the Jewish brethren, the absolute unity of the two halves of the Church, the Gentile and the Jewish, that the Apostle took so much trouble in this matter. The words which I have read for my text come in the midst of a very earnest appeal to the Corinthian Christians for their pecuniary help. He is dwelling upon the same thought which is expressed in the well-known words: What I gave I kept; what I kept I lost.

But whilst the words of my text primarily applied to money matters, you see that they are studiously general, universal. The Apostle, after his fashion, is lifting up a little secular affair into a high spiritual region; and he lays down in my text a broad general law, which goes to the very depths of the Christian life.

Now, notice, we have here in three clauses three stages which we may venture to distinguish as the fountain, the basin, the stream. God is able to make all grace abound toward you;--there is the fountain. That ye always, having all-sufficiency in all things;--there is the basin that receives the gush from the fountain. May abound in every good work;--there is the steam that comes from the basin. The fountain pours into the basin, that the flow from the basin may feed the stream.

Now this thought of Paul's goes to the heart of things. So let us look at it.

**I. The Fountain.**

The Christian life in all its aspects and experiences is an outflow from the the Fountain of Life, the giving God. Observe how emphatically the Apostle, in the context, accumulates words that express universality: all grace ... all-sufficiency for all things ... every good work. But even these expressions do not satisfy Paul, and he has to repeat the word abound, in order to give some faint idea of his conception of the full tide which gushes from the fountain. It is all grace, and it is abounding grace.

Now what does he mean by grace? That word is a kind of shorthand for the whole sum of the unmerited blessings which come to men through Jesus Christ. Primarily, it describes what we, for want of a better expression, have to call a disposition in the divine nature; and it means, then, if so looked at, the unconditioned, undeserved, spontaneous, eternal, stooping, pardoning love of God. That is grace, in the primary New Testament use of the phrase.

But there are no idle dispositions in God. They are always energising, and so the word glides from meaning the disposition, to meaning the manifestation and activities of it, and the grace of our Lord is that love in exercise. And then, since the divine energies are never fruitless, the word passes over, further, to mean all the blessed and beautiful things in a soul which are the consequences of the Promethean truth of God's loving hand, the outcome in life of the inward bestowment which has its cause, its sole cause, in God's ceaseless, unexhausted love, unmerited and free.

That, very superficially and inadequately set forth, is at least a glimpse into the fulness and greatness of meaning that lies in that profound New Testament word, grace. But the Apostle here puts emphasis on the variety of forms which the one divine gift assumes. It is all grace which God is able to make abound toward you. So then, you see this one transcendent gift from the divine heart, when it comes into our human experience, is like a meteor when it passes into the atmosphere of earth, and catches fire and blazes, showering out a multitude of radiant points of light. The grace is many-sided--many-sided to us, but one in its source and in its character. For at bottom, that which God in His grace gives to us as His grace is what? Himself; or if you like to put it in another form, which comes to the same thing--new life through Jesus Christ. That is the encyclopaediacal gift, which contains within itself all grace. And just as the physical life in each of us, one in all its manifestations, produces many results, and shines in the eye, and blushes in the cheek, and gives strength to the arm, and flexibility and deftness to the fingers and swiftness to the foot: so also is that one grace which, being manifold in its manifestations, is one in its essence. There are many graces, there is one Grace.

But this grace is not only many-sided, but abounding. It is not congruous with God's wealth, nor with His love, that He should give scantily, or, as it were, should open but a finger of the hand that is full of His gifts, and let out a little at a time. There are no sluices on that great stream so as to regulate its flow, and to give sometimes a painful trickle and sometimes a full gush, but this fountain is always pouring itself out, and it abounds.

But then we are pulled up short by another word in this first clause: God is able to make. Paul does not say, God will make. He puts the whole weight of responsibility for that ability becoming operative upon us. There are conditions; and although we may have access to that full fountain, it will not pour on us all grace and abundant grace, unless we observe these, and so turn God's ability to give into actual giving. And how do we do that? By desire, by expectance, by petition, by faithful stewardship. If we have these things, if we have tutored ourselves, and experience has helped in the tuition, to make large our expectancy, God will smile down upon us and do exceeding abundantly above all that we think as well as above all that we ask. Brethren, if our supplies are scant, when the full fountain is gushing at our sides, we are not straitened in God, we are straitened in ourselves. Christian possibilities are Christian obligations, and what we might have and do not have, is our condemnation.

I turn, in the next place, to what I have, perhaps too fancifully, called

**II. The Basin.**

God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that ye, having always all-sufficiency in all things, may, ... etc.

The result of all this many-sided and exuberant outpouring of grace from the fountain is that the basin may be full. Considering the infinite source and the small receptacle, we might have expected something more than sufficiency to have resulted.

Divine grace is sufficient. Is it not more than sufficient? Yes, no doubt. But what Paul wishes us to feel is this--to put it into very plain English--that the good gifts of the divine grace will always be proportioned to our work, and to our sufferings too. We shall feel that we have enough, if we are as we ought to be. Sufficiency is more than a man gets anywhere else. Enough is as good as a feast. And if we have strength, which we may have, to do the day's tasks, and strength to carry the day's crosses, and strength to accept the day's sorrows, and strength to master the day's temptations, that is as much as we need wish to have, even out of the fulness of God. And we shall get it, dear brethren, if we will only fulfil the conditions. If we exercise expectance, and desire and petition and faithful stewardship, we shall get what we need. Thy shoes shall be iron and brass, if the road is a steep and rocky one that would wear out leather. As thy days so shall thy strength be. God does not hurl His soldiers in a blundering attack on some impregnable mountain, where they are slain in heaps at the base; but when He lays a commandment on my shoulders, He infuses strength into me, and according to the good homely old saying that has brought comfort to many a sad and weighted heart, makes the back to bear the burden. The heavy task or the crushing sorrow is often the key that opens the door of God's treasure-house. You have had very little experience either of life or of Christian life, if you have not learnt by this time that the harder your work, and the darker your sorrows, the mightier have been God's supports, and the more starry the lights that have shone upon your path. That ye, always having all-sufficiency in all things.

One more word: this sufficiency should be more uniform, is uniform in the divine intention, and in so far as the flow of the fountain is concerned. Always having had I may be sure that I always shall have. Of course I know that, in so far as our physical nature conditions our spiritual experience, there will be ups and downs, moments of emancipation and moments of slavery. There will be times when the flower opens, and times when it shuts itself up. But I am sure that the great mass of Christian people might have a far more level temperature in their Christian experience than they have; that we could, if we would, have far more experimental knowledge of this always of my text. God means that the basin should be always full right up to the top of the marble edge, and that the more is drawn off from it, the more should flow into it. But it is very often like the reservoirs in the hills for some great city in a drought, where great stretches of the bottom are exposed, and again, when the drought breaks, are full to the top of the retaining wall. That should not be. Our Christian life should run on the high levels. Why does it not? Possibilities are duties.

And now, lastly, we have here what, adhering to my metaphor, I call

**III. The stream.**

That ye, always having all-sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work.

That is what God gives us His grace for; and that is a very important consideration. The end of God's dealings with us, poor, weak, sinful creatures, is character and conduct. Of course you can state the end in a great many other ways; but there have been terrible evils arising from the way in which Evangelical preachers have too often talked, as if the end of God's dealings with us was the vague thing which they call salvation, and by which many of their hearers take them to mean neither more nor less than dodging Hell. But the New Testament, with all its mysticism, even when it soars highest, and speaks most about the perfection of humanity, and the end of God's dealings being that we may be filled with the fulness of God, never loses its wholesome, sane hold of the common moralities of daily life, and proclaims that we receive all, in order that we may be able to maintain good works for necessary uses. And if we lay that to heart, and remember that a correct creed, and a living faith, and precious, select, inward emotions and experiences are all intended to evolve into lives, filled and radiant with common moralities and good works--not meaning thereby the things which go by that name in popular phraseology, but whatsoever things are lovely ... and of good report--then we shall understand a little better what we are here for and what Jesus Christ died for, and what His Spirit is given and lives in us for. So good works is the end, in one very important aspect, of all that avalanche of grace which has been from eternity rushing down upon us from the heights of God.

There is one more thing to note, and that is that, in our character and conduct, we should copy the giving grace. Look how eloquently and significantly, in the first and last clauses of my text, the same words recur. God is able to make all grace abound, that ye may abound in all good work. Copy God in the many-sidedness and in the copiousness of the good that flows out from your life and conduct, because of your possession of that divine grace. And remember, to him that hath shall be given. We pray for more grace; we need to pray for that, no doubt. Do we use the grace that God has given us? If we do not, the remainder of that great word which I have just quoted will be fulfilled in you. God forbid that any of us should receive the grace of God in vain, and therefore come under the stern and inevitable sentence, From him that hath not shall be taken away, even that which he hath!