

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 7/21/13
2 Corinthians 8:9 “Pondering the Grace Exchange”^{**1}

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Main Idea: On the basis of the grace of Christ, two exchanges occurred according to 2 Corinthians 8:9.

I. The first exchange involved Christ.

A. He was rich.

1. He possessed all the fullness of God (Col 1:19).
2. He shared the Father’s glory (John 17:5).
3. He created the universe (John 1:1-2; Col 1:16).
4. He is the heir of all things (Heb 1:2).

B. He became poor.

1. He became a man (John 1:14).
2. He laid aside His glory (Phil 2:6-8).
3. He experienced the rejection of men (John 1:10-11).
4. He paid the ultimate price at the Cross (Matt 20:28).
5. He died without a single possession (Matt 27:35).

II. The second exchange involves us.

A. On our own, we are poor.

1. We are spiritually bankrupt (Matt 5:3).
2. We owe a debt we can never pay (Matt 18:23-25).

B. Because of Christ, we may become rich.

1. We receive God’s fullness (Col 2:9-10).
2. We share God’s glory (John 17:22).
3. We become heirs of God (Rom 8:17).
4. We are given eternal life (1 John 5:13).
5. We receive every spiritual blessing (Eph 1:3).

C. The basis of it all is grace.

1. At the Cross, God transferred our poverty to Christ.
2. At the Cross, God transferred Christ’s wealth to us.

Response: To experience the grace exchange you must...

1. Stop clinging to your rags.
2. Receive the riches of Christ.

There are some things that are just too good to enjoy just once. For some of you, you might think of your wife’s chocolate cake. You’d never say, “Oh honey, *that* again? We just had that cake two weeks ago!” Never. For others, it’s that movie you’ve seen a dozen times. Or the book you’ve read multiple times. Or that special vacation spot. It’s just too good to enjoy only once.

Some Bible texts are that way, just too good to enjoy one time. This morning, we’re going to return to such a text, a familiar text to many, and rightfully so. I love this text, and the theme it contains. It’s 2 Corinthians 8:9.

Back in 1881 Mark Twain wrote the now classic book that begins as follows:

“In the ancient city of London, on a certain autumn day in the second quarter of the sixteenth century, a boy was born to a poor family of the name of Canty, who did not want him. On the same day another English child was born to a rich family of the name of Tudor, who did want him. All England wanted him too. England had so longed for him, and hoped for him, and prayed God for him, that, now that he was really come, the people went nearly mad for joy. Mere acquaintances hugged and kissed each other and cried. Everybody took a holiday, and high and low, rich and poor, feasted and danced and

**Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ For another development of this text and the subject of grace, see a message preached at WBC on 12/24/2000 as part of a series on Grace.

sang, and got very mellow; and they kept this up for days and nights together. By day, London was a sight to see, with gay banners waving from every balcony and housetop, and splendid pageants marching along. By night, it was again a sight to see, with its great bonfires at every corner, and its troops of revelers making merry around them. There was no talk in all England but of the new baby, Edward Tudor, Prince of Wales, who lay lapped in silks and satins, unconscious of all this fuss, and not knowing that great lords and ladies were tending him and watching over him- and not caring, either. But there was no talk about the other baby, Tom Canty, lapped in his poor rags, except among the family of paupers whom he had just come to trouble with his presence.”

So begins the story of *The Prince and the Pauper*, the tale about an exchange that occurred when a prince traded places with a pauper. Can you imagine what it would be like to wake up one day in abject poverty and then lay your head on the pillow that same night in the comfort of the palace? Talk about a great exchange!

But there’s something even more astounding. It’s called the *grace exchange*. You say, “What’s that?” The *grace exchange* is something that happened two thousand years ago. It’s the transaction described in 2 Corinthians 8:9.

It’s amazing to ponder grace. This morning we’re going to contemplate one of the most breath-taking descriptions of grace found anywhere in the Bible. In the Greek text there are but twenty-one words, but this sentence is packed with significance. Here is the *grace exchange*:

“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.”

This is profound, beloved. The *grace exchange* goes beyond all human comprehension. It’s life changing. It’s *destiny* changing.

Just what is the *grace exchange*? It involves two parties, although the initiative of the exchange is totally one-sided. Who initiated the *grace exchange*, and who benefits from it? We’ll find out as we unwrap the package before us.

In the grace exchange, two transactions (or “exchanges”) occurred according to 2 Corinthians 8:9. Here’s the first...

I. The first exchange involved Christ.

The text begins, “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Let’s explore the context.

The letter we call 2 Corinthians was penned by the apostle Paul around the year A.D. 55. In it, Paul shares more autobiographical material than in any of his other writings.

This is a very personal letter, and in chapters 8-9 Paul brings up a very personal subject, *money*. The specific matter pertained to a collection of money for poverty-stricken Christians living in Jerusalem. On an earlier occasion, Paul had told the Corinthians about the financial needs of their Christian brothers and sisters, and the Corinthian church responded with gladness. They began to collect money in their benevolence fund.

But for some reason, their good intentions had come to a standstill. The believers in Jerusalem were still in need, but the Corinthians were holding tightly onto their money.

So Paul tackled the problem head-on in chapters 8 & 9. First, he appealed to the example of the Macedonian church in verses 1-5. The Macedonians themselves were poor, but did not let that keep them from giving what they had generously.

Then in verses 6-7 Paul reminded the Corinthians of the promise they had made the year before, the promise to *give* to this benevolent offering. He doesn't command them to give, but reminds them that giving is a test for the sincerity of one's love (8).

It's interesting that another key theme in 2 Corinthians 8-9 is *grace* (8:1, 6, 7, 9; 9:8, 14). That ought not surprise us for *grace* and *giving* go hand in hand. Notice verse 1, "And now, brothers, we want you to know about the *grace that God has given* the Macedonian churches. Why were the Macedonian Christians, though themselves in extreme poverty (2), so eager to give? The answer is *grace*. Grace is God's unmerited help. God enabled the Macedonian believers to give "beyond their ability," as Paul puts it in verse 3.

Paul wanted the same to occur with the Corinthians. So he exhorted them in verse 6 "to bring to completion this *act of grace* on your part." Christians aren't supposed to be "takers" in life, but "givers." We're not to focus on ourselves, but on God and others. And when we give to others, we're acting like God. We're showing *grace*.

But if the example of the Macedonians wasn't enough to motivate the Corinthians to show compassion, this would be—the *grace of our Lord Jesus Christ*. In verse 9—which is our text—Paul puts the spotlight on the most amazing demonstration of grace ever given.

Beloved, the greatest incentive for giving isn't a tax break. It's not getting your name on a plaque. It's *grace*. It's what our Savior did.

"*For you know*," Paul begins. You know. This is common knowledge for the Christian, yet we need to be reminded of it. This is fundamental, bedrock truth.

"*For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ*." The Corinthians knew about grace. They were saved people. You can't be a Christian and not know about grace. The religions of the world say, "If you do right, you'll reach God." But Christianity says, "Not so. You are a helpless sinner, and you need God to reach you."

Which is what He did. How? By sending His Son into the world. "For you know the *grace of our Lord Jesus Christ*." Notice that Paul used the Savior's complete title.

What follows in verse 9 is not a *definition* of grace, but rather an *illustration* of it, the greatest illustration of love in action the world has ever seen. The illustration before us involves two exchanges, the first which involved Christ.

What was true of the grace-exchange that Christ experienced? We're told two things about the Lord. First, what He *was*...

A. He was rich. How rich was He? So rich that in comparison Bill Gates is a pauper—and I'm not exaggerating. I want to give you a snapshot of the portfolio of the Son of God. It's not exhaustive, for His resources are infinite. How rich was He before He came into the world? Consider four assets to His credit.

1. *He possessed all the fullness of God (Col 1:19)*. That's the phrase Paul used in Colossians 1:19, "For God was pleased to have *all his fullness* dwell in him." Not some, but *all*. The Son of God possessed all the fullness of God.

2. *He shared the Father's glory (John 17:5)*. It's impossible for our finite minds to grasp this. To say that Christ shared His Father's glory is to say, in part, that He was one in essence with the Father.

“No man can see God and live,” the Scriptures teach. Yet Christ not only saw God the Father, but enjoyed intimate fellowship with Him throughout eternity past.

Oh, how sweet that fellowship was, beloved! And cherished, too. Do you know what the Savior looked forward to most about returning to heaven following His work on earth? Listen to His prayer in John 17:5, “And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.”

How rich was Christ? So rich that He shared the very glory of the Father. Hebrews 1:3 says, “The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of His being.”

The night before the crucifixion, Philip asked Jesus, “Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us (John 14:8).” Remember the Lord’s response? “Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.” A third asset...

3. *He created the universe (John 1:1-2; Col 1:16).* How’s that for a bullet statement on your resume? He is the Creator of everything!

John 1:1-2 states, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning.” And then verse 3, “Through him *all things were made*; without him nothing was made that has been made.”

Talk about wealth! Everything that exists belongs to Him. “Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever! Amen (Rom 11:35-36).”

This universe belongs to Christ. He made it, and it exists for His honor. Colossians 1:16 explains, “For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him.” A fourth asset...

4. *He is the heir of all things (Heb 1:2).* That’s how the writer of Hebrews referred to Christ in Hebrews 1:1-2, “In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in many ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed *heir of all things*, and through whom he made the universe.”

How rich was the Lord Jesus Christ? So rich that the Father has declared Him to be the *heir* of everything. In the last book of the Bible, John sees a vision of Christ in which the Son of God takes a scroll in hand, indicating He actually holds the title deed of the universe (verse 7).

And furthermore, we know that today Jesus has a name that is above all names (Heb 1:4; Phil 2:9). He is the source of all blessing (John 1:16). That’s rich!

“For you know the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ that though *He was rich*.” Let that sink in, dear friend. Unless we ponder how *rich* He was, we’ll fail to grasp the magnitude of the exchange.

He was rich. Indeed, there was none richer anywhere in the universe. Which is what makes the next three words in the text mind-boggling...

B. He became poor. Who became poor? The One who possessed all the fullness of God, who shared the Father’s glory, who created the universe, and is the heir of all things. *He* became poor.

“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes *he became poor*.”

What did Paul mean when he said that Christ *became poor*? Some feel he has in mind economic deprivation. Talk about lowering His standard of living! From the throne of heaven to the home of a peasant carpenter.

When the Son of God came to the world, He did not choose a famous city like Rome or Athens, but the obscure village of Bethlehem. And He didn't enter as a Roman citizen, but as a second class Jew. And it wasn't the King's palace He selected, but a cattle stall.

In fact, the home He chose—Joseph and Mary's—was so poor that this young couple couldn't afford the typical lamb for purification. They settled for a pair of doves (Luke 2:24), the offering of the poor.

Though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor. Is that what Paul had in mind, the poor *social status* the Savior chose? I don't think so, at least not primarily.

True, Jesus entered the world at the lower end of the economic scale. He was poor. But He wasn't destitute. In fact, Jesus was no poorer than most first-century Jews, and better off than some. Jesus and His followers actually had sufficient money to provide help for those worse off than themselves (John 12:3-6; 13:27-29).²

No, this is something greater than economic poverty. Jesus became poor in a way that no one else ever has. This is a reference to the entire drama of redemption. Christ *became poor* by taking five, self-humbling actions.

1. *He became a man (John 1:14).* “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

When Christ came from the Father, He took as His wardrobe the rags of human flesh. The theological term is *incarnation*. God actually became a man.

2. *He laid aside His glory (Phil 2:6-8).* Listen to Philippians 2:6-7, “Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.”

Don't misunderstand this. When God became a man, He didn't give up His deity. He never stopped being God. But when He humbled Himself and took the form of a man, He voluntarily chose to lay aside His glory. For thirty-three years, He willfully forfeited the privileges that are inherently His as God.

You would think that if God would pay a visit to the world, the world would respond with a grand reception. You would expect the world to roll out the red carpet, wouldn't you? Is that what happened? Just the opposite. When Christ *became poor*, He not only became a man and laid aside His glory, but thirdly...

3. *He experienced the rejection of men (John 1:10-11).* One of His followers, John, saw it happen firsthand, and wrote, “He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.”

Ponder that. *His own* did not receive Him. He came as a Jew—but the Jews did not receive Him. But neither did the Gentiles—Pilate authorized His execution, and the Roman soldiers carried it out. The One whom angels worshiped and attended in heaven subjected Himself to the pain of human rejection. There's more...

² Colin Kruse, p. 154.

4. *He paid the ultimate price at the Cross (Matt 20:28).* Why did He become a man, lay aside His glory, and subject Himself to man's rejection? Jesus Himself answered that question in Matthew 20:28, "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to *give his life as a ransom for many.*"

That's what it means to say *He became poor*. In becoming poor, Christ chose to pay the ultimate price. He gave His *own life* on Calvary's Cross. "And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross (Philippians 2:8)!"

That's why we sing, "Jesus paid it *all*. *All to Him I owe.*" But there's still more. We haven't yet exhausted the magnitude of the statement, *He became poor*. Ponder how He died. Christ became poor by taking a fifth, self-humbling action.

5. *He died without a single possession (Matt 27:35).* Literally. Matthew 27:35 tells us what the soldiers did while He hung on the Cross, "When they had crucified him, they divided up his clothes by casting lots." When Christ left the earth, He didn't even have His clothing.

He left behind no bank account. The record states that Joseph of Arimathea donated his own tomb for burial (Matt 27:60). Truly, the Savior died without a single possession. *Though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor.* Beloved, that is *grace*.

On June 30, 1966, American troops were attacked by a Viet Cong regiment. Among them was Sergeant Donald Long, from Oak Hill, Ohio. When the enemy threatened to overrun a disabled carrier nearby, Sergeant Long disregarded his own safety to help the severely wounded crew to safety.

Suddenly, a grenade was hurled onto the carrier deck. Long shouted a warning to the crew and pushed to safety one man who had not heard the warning over the roar of the battle.

Realizing that these actions would not fully protect the exposed crewmen from the deadly explosion, Sergeant Long threw himself over the grenade to absorb the blast. In so doing, he saved the lives of eight of his comrades. But he did so at the expense of his own life. He gave his life in exchange for theirs.³

It's amazing to ponder such love. But what Christ did is beyond comprehension. Sergeant Long died for his comrades. Christ died for His *enemies*.

What Thou, my Lord, hast suffered was all for sinners' gain.

Mine, mine was the transgression, but Thine the deadly pain.

Lo, here I fall, my Savior; 'Tis I deserve Thy place;

*Look on me with Thy favor, assist me with Thy grace.*⁴

Which brings us to the second transaction in the *grace exchange* of 2 Corinthians 8:9. The first exchange involved Christ.

II. The second exchange involves us.

³ Account taken from the medal citation for Donald Long, as reported in the *Portsmouth Times*

⁴ *O Sacred Head, Now Wounded*, by Paul Gerhardt, based on Medieval Latin poem ascribed to Berhard of Clairvaux.

Listen to our text again, “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.”

We learn two things about ourselves in this verse. Here’s the first...

A. On our own, we are poor. What does that mean? Just as Christ’s “poverty” in the first part of the verse pertained to something other than economics, so here for us. To say that we are poor indicates two things about our condition.⁵

1. *We are spiritually bankrupt (Matt 5:3).* Jesus began His Sermon on the Mount with these words, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven (Matt 5:3).” The “blessed” person, that is, the person who has God’s approval, is the one who is *poor in spirit*.

The truth is, we enter this world as sinners. We have broken God’s Law, and are incapable of repairing the damage. Indeed, we are spiritually bankrupt. What’s more...

2. *We owe a debt we can never pay (Matt 18:23-25).* Remember the parable of the unmerciful servant? In Matthew 18:23-25 Jesus said, “The kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand talents [that is, millions of dollars] was brought to him. Since he was *not able to pay*, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt.”

That servant, of course, represents us. We are *debtors*. We’re not only poor, but we owe God a debt that we can never pay.

You’ll recall that in the first exchange, Christ was rich, yet chose to become poor. The second exchange is just the opposite. On our own we are poor, but...

B. Because of Christ, we may become rich. “For your sakes He became poor, so that you through His poverty *might become rich*.” That’s right. Paul says that we who were once spiritually bankrupt and who owed a debt we could never pay are now *rich*!

How rich? The riches Christ gave us in the *grace exchange* are inexhaustible, but to whet your appetite, allow me to mention five treasures. How rich are we? On the basis of the *grace exchange*...

1. *We receive God’s fullness (Col 2:9-10).* Paul explains in Colossians 2:9-10, “For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and *you have been given fullness in Christ*, who is the head over every power and authority.”

What do we possess? *Fullness*. What kind of fullness? The *fullness of Deity*. Don’t confuse this with New Age teaching. We are not “gods,” but creatures. But because of the *grace exchange*, we receive God’s *fullness*. More about that in a moment.

2. *We share God’s glory (John 17:22).* Here is what Jesus said to His Father in John 17:22, “I have given them [the disciples] *the glory that you gave me*, that they may be one as we are one.” What did Jesus say He gave His followers? The *glory* that the Father had given Him. A third treasure...

3. *We become heirs of God (Rom 8:17).* “Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.”

Have you noticed something? Do you see a similarity between our riches and the riches of Christ? What’s true of Christ? He possessed all the fullness of God. He shared

⁵ Though not stated explicitly in our text, Paul assumes them to be true based on other texts (see Rom 3:10ff.).

the Father's glory. He's the heir of all things. And what's now true of us? We've been given the fullness of God. We share in God's glory. And we have become heirs of God. These are not ours inherently like they are Christ's. We've received these treasures. They are gifts extended to us because of the *grace exchange*. But there's more...

4. *We are given eternal life (1 John 5:13)*. That's what 1 John 5:11-13 says, "And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have *eternal life*." And fifthly...

5. *We receive every spiritual blessing (Eph 1:3)*. "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with *every spiritual blessing* in Christ."

Fellow Christian, when the text says, "So that through His poverty we might become *rich*," it means *rich*! "But how?" you ask. "How can a spiritually-bankrupt debtor be rich?" Let there be no misunderstanding...

C. The basis of it all is grace. Remember, this verse is an illustration of *grace*. "For you know the *grace of our Lord Jesus Christ*." Because of grace, two exchanges took place. First, the One who was rich became poor. And secondly, we who were once poor become rich.

But how do we tap into these resources? Don't miss these three key words in the second exchange: *through His poverty*. It's *through His poverty*, that is, through His redeeming work, that we become rich.

You see, though unseen by the naked eye, a transaction occurred at the Cross. This transaction was the work of God, and involved two transfers.

1. *At the Cross, God transferred our poverty to Christ*. And secondly...

2. *At the Cross, God transferred Christ's wealth to us*. The Scriptures explain as follows:

Hebrews 2:9—"But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the *grace of God* he might taste death for everyone." It's called the *substitutionary atonement*. Christ died as a substitute for us. He tasted death for us.

1 John 3:5—"But you know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin." A holy God cannot overlook sin, but to satisfy His justice must punish it. And that's what He did. At the Cross, God transferred our poverty to Christ, and Christ's wealth to us.

Martin Luther explains, "Although out of pure grace God does not impute our sins to us, He nonetheless did not want to do this until complete and ample satisfaction of His law and His righteousness had been made. Since this was impossible for us, God ordained for us, in our place, One who took upon Himself all the punishment we deserve. He fulfilled the law for us. He averted the judgment of God from us and appeased God's wrath. Grace, therefore, costs us nothing, but it cost Another much to get it for us. Grace was purchased with an incalculable, infinite treasure, the Son of God Himself."⁶

No verse makes this any clearer than 2 Corinthians 5:21—"God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

⁶ Martin Luther, *Daily Walk*, May 5, 1992.

This is sacred ground. Marvel at it, go deep. God treated Jesus the way we deserve to be treated, so that He can treat us the way Jesus deserves to be treated!

The hymnwriter helps us contemplate this mystery:

*Thou who wast rich beyond all splendor,
All for love's sake becamest poor;
Thrones for a manger didst surrender,
Sapphire-paved courts for stable floor.
Thou who wast rich beyond all splendour,
All for love's sake becamest poor.*

*Thou who art God beyond all praising,
All for love's sake becamest Man;
Stooping so low, but sinners raising
Heavenwards by Thine eternal plan.
Thou who art God beyond all praising,
All for love's sake becamest Man.*

You say, "It doesn't make sense to me. Why would the Son of God take my place? It doesn't seem fair." And you're right. It wasn't fair. It was *grace*. At the Cross, this *grace exchange* occurred. Your poverty was given to Christ, and Christ's wealth was given to you. The question is, *will you accept it?* Will you accept *Him*?

Has there ever been a greater demonstration of love than this? No—a thousand no's! *And can it be that I should gain an interest in the Savior's blood? Died He for me who caused His pain, for me who Him to death pursued. Amazing love! How can it be that Thou, My God, shouldst die for Me?*

Beloved, the work of Christ is done. It is sufficient to save you. You say, "What must I do?" The Word of God is clear...

Response: To experience the grace exchange you must...do two things.

1. *Stop clinging to your rags.* Look at what's in your hands. What do you treasure? Is it your image or pleasure or the vain façade of your own goodness? If so, you must let go.

"But I've got too much to give up!" you say. Really? What do you have compared to the treasure of Christ? Nothing. But know this. To experience the *grace exchange*, you must stop clinging to the rags of your self-righteousness. Then you are ready to do this. Indeed, you must do this. You must...

2. *Receive the riches of Christ.* Perhaps you entered this room as a pauper, but you can leave as a prince. And it's all because of the *grace exchange*.

"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."