

**Excel in Everything:
II Corinthians 8:7**

Franklin Church of Christ
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Introduction:

We often talk about the Corinthians' problems. We hammer them for their division, their error, their tolerance for sin. However, for all that was wrong with the Corinthians, Paul was still able to commend them. **II Corinthians 8:7** says, "But as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you—see that you excel in this act of grace also" (ESV). I have to ask myself, could Paul call up any example of excellence in my life? Let's learn where we need to excel.

Discussion:

I. Excel...

- A. First, understand excellence. When I looked up the word translated "excel" in this verse, one of the first definitions I found was "to superabound." Not just abound, but abound "superly."
 - 1. *Excellence is not meeting minimum requirements, but exceeding expectations.* Consider how the word is used in **Luke 15:17**. The servants in the house of the prodigal's father had more than enough bread. The NKJV says, "bread enough and to spare."
 - 2. "*Excellence is not an act, but a habit,*" said Aristotle. Paul agreed in **I Corinthians 15:58**, saying we must always "abound." If we excel only once, we are not excelling.
 - 3. *Excellence is not a goal, but a continual pursuit.* Paul urged the Thessalonians to do "more and more" (**I Thessalonians 4:1, 10**). Excellence is not reaching a certain level, but always pushing for the next. Though we have more than expected, we keep growing.
- B. We must never be satisfied with good enough. We must excel and then excel even more.

II. ...in Faith

- A. Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen (**Hebrews 11:1**), without which we cannot please God (**Hebrews 11:6**). **II Peter 1:5** presents faith as the foundation of spiritual growth. We could not be God's children without it. Yet, we must not be satisfied with our present level. We must excel. We must have faith enough and to spare. Don't ask, "Do I have enough faith to be saved?" Ask instead, "How can I develop deeper faith?"
- B. Consider two means by which to excel in your faith.
 - 1. **Romans 10:17** says, "So faith comes by hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ." If you want to increase your faith, don't read ***Chicken Soup for the Soul***. Get into the Word. When the Hebrew writer wanted to increase his readers' faith in **Hebrews 11**, he reminded them of the Bible's faithful. Get into their stories; read them, study them, live them.
 - 2. In **Matthew 14:25-31**, Jesus schooled Peter in faith. Though Peter stumbled while on the water, do you think his faith was increased? I have no doubt walking on the water with Jesus would increase anyone's faith. If you want to increase your faith, get out of the boat. Don't wait for increased faith to get out of your comfort zone. Do what Jesus said while it is uncomfortable, relying on Him, crying out to Him when you stumble and watch your faith excel.

III. ...in Speech

- A. According to **Matthew 12:33-37**, we will be judged by our words because they show our hearts.
- B. We could spend whole lessons on the tongue. Instead, note three major principles.
 - 1. *Speak sparingly.* **James 1:19** demonstrates we must be quick to hear but slow to speak. Let us not be so enamored with our own voices we rarely listen to others. Many sins of the mouth could be overcome by learning to keep it shut.
 - 2. *Speak in submission to Jesus.* **Colossians 3:17** explains everything we do or say should be done in the name of Jesus. No, we do not have to preface every statement with the words, "In Jesus' name." However, we must be certain everything we say defers to Jesus' will.
 - 3. *Speak to build up, not tear down.* **Ephesians 4:29** explains we must remove all corrupting speech from our lives. Whether that is gossip, malice, lying, filthy talk, dirty jokes, cussing, hypercritical judgment or any other foul language, we must remove it and speak only what builds up and supports. Paul said our speech should give grace to our hearers. Our speech should give to those who hear, not take away from them.

IV. ...in Knowledge

- A. **II Peter 1:5** says we must add knowledge to our moral excellence and faith. We live in a time that places little value on knowledge, even among Christians and churches. We must have moving sermons and studies to increase our faith, deepening our devotion. We must learn the lessons of application affecting how we live each day. However, if we neglect excellence in knowledge, we doom our deeper devotion and purer lives to uselessness.
- B. Do not forget **Hosea 4:6**. "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge" (ESV). **Romans 10:2** demonstrates the problem. "I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge" (ESV). We can be roused by devotional materials. We can feel more spiritual. We can look more Christian. However, if we do not excel in knowledge, there will be a leak in the dam that will eventually break and flood our lives.
- C. Today, Christians, in general, have increased their capacity for compassion. We know better than ever how to feel each other's pain. We have increased our desire to be there for each other. But we don't know how to help each other because we don't know the help God has in His Word. Yes, we must take care not to so focus on knowledge that we are puffed up (**I Corinthians 8:1**). But we must remember excelling in knowledge allows us to instruct one another (**Romans 15:14**) and stimulate one another to love and good deeds (**Hebrews 10:24**). If we do not have knowledge and to spare, we cannot accomplish these goals.

V. ...in Earnestness

- A. Without this characteristic, there could be no excellence whatsoever. Earnestness is the practical key that unlocks the door to excellence. To be earnest means to be diligent, to strive after something, to make haste toward something. Earnestness means giving it your all and going the extra mile to get the job done. According to **II Timothy 2:15**, we must have this earnestness (or diligence) to be approved by God, a worker who has no need to be ashamed.
- B. Paul commented on the Corinthians' earnestness in **II Corinthians 7:11**. He had rebuked them in **I Corinthians 5** because they had tolerated sin in the camp. They had acted. But they did not act in a "Ho-hum, we'll get around to it when we feel like it" way. Notice some of the words Paul used to compliment them: zeal, eagerness, longing.
- C. I know we all want deeper faith, better speech, greater knowledge, stronger love and wider grace. How hard are we working on these things? We need to have earnestness, diligence, zeal, longing, eagerness and to spare. Peter used this same word in **II Peter 1:5** as he encouraged us to add to our faith. No longer can we sit on our hands, waiting for greater opportunity. With zeal and earnestness we must pursue maturity and work for the Lord. We must excel at it.

VI. ...in Love

- A. The ESV says "in our love for you." However, they add the footnote that some manuscripts read "your love for us." Most translations pick this second statement. The New American Standard translation provides a great bridge to help us understand Paul's point: saying the Corinthians excelled "in the love we inspired in you." Whatever struggles we might have with textual issues in this verse, we all recognize Paul wanted us to excel in love.
- B. According to **I Timothy 1:5**, the aim of our charge is love issuing from a pure heart, a good conscience and a sincere faith. Everything we do should push us to accomplish the two great commands: love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind and love your neighbor as yourself (**Matthew 22:37-40**).
- C. Through loving others, we become more like God (**I John 4:7-8; Matthew 5:43-48**). Through loving God, we receive His blessings and promises (**Romans 8:28-30**). We must not love half-way, but with excellence; not in word only, but in deed and in truth (**I John 3:18**). As most of us know, **I Corinthians 13:4-7** provides a description of excellent love. We must work diligently to make these characteristics ours. We must have love enough and to spare.

VII. ...in Grace

- A. This final point was Paul's main thrust. This was the sticking issue for the Corinthians. Interestingly, it is a sticking issue for many Christians today as well. The grace Paul spoke of was not God's saving grace. Rather, it was the gift the Corinthians had promised to give for the Judeans

enduring the famine (**II Corinthians 9:5**). Their monetary gift was grace from them to the Judeans. In fact, it was a means of God's grace upon the Judeans (**II Corinthians 8:1-2**).

B. Do you excel in grace...

1. ...on a person to person basis? Consider **Hebrews 13:16**. Are you generous with God's blessings to you, sharing with others and showing hospitality? Or are you a hoarder, constantly coming up with excuses for closing yourself off from others?
2. ...in relation to the congregation? According to Wikipedia, our county is in the top 1% of US counties for wealth and per capita income. Consider the grace this congregation ought to be able to offer. First, think of the grace we could offer by our support of the gospel. We ought to have a presence in the newspaper, on the radio and on the television. We ought to be able to purchase and distribute Bibles and other materials to draw people to Jesus. We should be able to support many evangelists locally and in foreign countries. We are doing hardly any of that now. Second, think of the grace we could offer as the Corinthians were, helping needy brethren. While we gain weight at potlucks, we have brethren in S. Africa and Zimbabwe who mix gravel with corn mush to help their children feel full. Think of the grace we ought to be offering them.

C. Consider the point Paul made to the Corinthians in **II Corinthians 8:9**. Jesus became poor that we might be rich through His grace. Why are so many of us so afraid of being poor that we do not excel in grace through personal generosity and congregational giving? We must ask, "What would our lives be like if Jesus handed grace to us in the same way we offer it to others through our generosity and our giving?" Before we talk about all our obligations to our family and putting food on the table, let's have a moment of honesty and admit that few of us have ever gone without. Some of us may be struggling because we have improperly managed our material goods, but none of us are because we lack God's blessings. Further, **II Corinthians 8:1-2** provides the great example of the Macedonians who excelled in grace even though they dealt with their own poverty. No matter our situation, Paul encouraged the Corinthians and us to excel in grace. We must offer grace enough and to spare.

Conclusion:

Excellence. **Proverbs 22:29** says, "Do you see a man who excels in his work? He will stand before kings; He will not stand before unknown men" (NKJV). If we excel, we will stand before the King. Let's band together and excel together, serving the Lord and His people in excellence. Let us not settle for mediocrity. Let us not wait to get around to it someday. Let us excel today and everyday in faith, speech, knowledge, earnestness, love and grace. By the strength of Christ Jesus, we can excel (**Philippians 4:13**). This week, strive to excel.