

## Some Words About...

by Terence Y. Mullins

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### **Pleonazo (abound)**

*The Greek word pleonazo was used by the Septuagint writers to mean a variety of things, but the general meaning was “to abound.”*

#### **New Testament**

In the fifth chapter of Romans Paul gives a clear explanation of the relation of the law to sin and grace. He points out that before the law came, there was sin but it was not recognized as such until the law came (5:15). (A parallel situation would be the fact that there are many bad habits which are not crimes until some law is passed against them — i.e., smoking in restaurants.) Even before the Law came sin was causing death; people just didn't know that it was causing death. Hebrews might join with their neighbors in worshipping Moloch or Baal without realizing that this was offensive to Yahweh — until they were told “You shall have no other gods.” “But the Law came in and offenses abounded, but where the sin increased, the grace overwhelmed it” (5:20). God's grace overcomes sin. That isn't the only thing it does, but where there is sin, God's grace can wipe it out. (Just as water has many other functions than washing away dirt, but where there is dirt, water can wash it away.)

Later in Romans, Paul deals with the suggestion that some people then — and later — put forward that the more we sin, the greater the grace. He quashed that idea. “Are we to continue to sin in order that grace may abound?” (6:1) No way! The point is that God's grace abounds; it does not fluctuate according to the amount of sin.

In 2 Corinthians Paul, in what is almost an aside, says that everything is being done for the sake of the Corinthians “that the abounding grace multiply the thanksgiving of many to the glory of God “(4:15). The world at large does not see God's grace, but when we have experienced God's grace, we respond with thanksgiving. And the world recognizes that thanksgiving response and appreciates something of the motive which occasions it. Like those Israelites who did not see God directly but who apprehended something of the majesty of God when they saw Moses' face shining, the world at large senses something of the goodness of God when it sees our thanksgiving.

Speaking of assistance from the Corinthian church to that in Macedonia, Paul says “in the present situation your abounding is to be toward their need so that their abounding can be to your need” (2 Corinthians 8:14). There doesn't seem to be anything particularly Christian about this advice which Paul gives. It is practical and pragmatic. But that doesn't keep it from being Christian, even distinctively Christian.

The quotation which follows is taken from Exodus 16:18 and refers to the manna which God provided to the Hebrews who were fleeing from Egypt. Paul was reminding the congregation at Corinth that their abundance is from God and should be used in a godly manner — for themselves and for others so that all of God's people will be sustained. It is a good thing to recognize that a loving God cares for us and sends blessings to us. Such recognition generates thanksgiving and praise. But as Christians we know that God loves others and would give them blessings, too, and that God uses us to supply them with blessings.

Corinth was separated from Macedonia by space, time, customs, history, and even to some extent, language. But the Corinthian church was united with the Macedonians in Christ, and whichever way the need might indicate, that way the assistance must flow.

In Philippians 4:17 Paul refers back to verse 15 where he said that no church but theirs said a word to him about giving or receiving. Now he says, “I do not seek a gift, but I desire the fruit that abounds in your

word.” So now he has plenty, having received from Epaphroditus the things which they sent him, and he assures them that God will supply their needs as they supplied his.

In Romans it was God’s grace which was abounding; now in 1 Thessalonians 3:12 Paul desires that Christian love “toward each other and toward all should abound and increase.” Paul sees that our love for each other is not infinite but by its very nature is abundant, and he looks for it to continue to increase even as his and Silas’s and Timothy’s does for them. The Thessalonians had experienced Christian love at work among them in the ministry of Paul and his friends. They knew what he meant when he wrote. Even at a distance of two thousand years, we can catch some of what they knew of love in action. We too can catch the vision of the Lord as the source of Christian love and holiness. We too can want it for our own.

Paul’s letters to the Thessalonians indicate that their congregation was a shining example of Christianity in action. In 2 Thessalonians 1:3 he says, “your faith is growing and love abounds every one for each other and for all.” He continually celebrates the mutuality of Christian love and its astonishing extent. Christians are not reservoirs of God’s love, they are channels for God’s love. Where there is a mutuality of ends, there can be a sharing of means and cooperation abounds.

The writer of 2 Peter lists a series of qualities which he commends to his readers (1:5-7). And he adds, “For these things being present to you and abounding, do not let you who know the Lord Jesus be lazy or unfruitful” (1:8).

### **Today**

We abound in challenges: hunger, disease, war, poverty, oppression, disasters, immorality. And we respond to each of these with different emotions, different attitudes, and different degrees of rational consideration. We also abound in materials for responding to our challenges: technology, natural resources, entertainment, advice, consumer goods, regulations, churches, sciences, and people. We need, of course, to abound to each other and to all in love, as the early Christians did.

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