

THE SOURCE OF SCRIPTURE LIBERALITY.

"See that ye abound in this grace also."—2 Cor. viii. 7.

The term grace is employed in the Scriptures with various significations. Its first acceptation expresses the manifestation of God's special favour to man, who had forfeited all claim to his friendly regard, and was altogether unable to do anything to merit the communications of his love. In this acceptation the term expresses the free, unmerited, and undeserved favour of God to man. Now these communications are designed to produce a change, not only in the condition, but also in the character of man. And as the communications from God to man are called grace, so the different features of character in man, produced by these communications, are styled the graces of the Christian. The connection and correspondence between the grace bestowed by God, and its effects on those who receive it, are illustrated in this chapter in reference to one particular mode in which the term is applied. In verse 9, the great manifestation by Jesus Christ is spoken of as the display of grace, "Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich." And in three different places in the chapter, the term is employed to point out a certain exercise on the part of the believer. A little attention will make it evident what this exercise is. In verse 2, the apostle refers to the liberality shown by the churches in Macedonia, which, in verse 4, he calls a gift for ministering to the necessities of the saints. And in reference to this liberality he says in verse 6, that he desired Titus to finish in the church of Corinth the same grace, and in verse 19, the gift for the poor believers in Jerusalem

is again called *this grace*; so that the exercise referred to is the exercise of this liberality, which is thus called a grace.

There is a peculiar propriety and beauty in calling the exercise of liberality on scriptural principles, a Christian grace. In the exercise of grace by God to man, there is the outgoing of his kindness to those who receive his benefits through Christ—there is the voluntary imparting of what he possesses for the comfort and happiness of those who enjoy these benefits. Both these features characterize the exercise of Christian liberality. There is the outgoing of kindly feeling to the objects of its regard, and there is the voluntary imparting of what is possessed by the giver for the relief and comfort of those who enjoy this kindness. There is thus far a resemblance. But this is not the only, nor even the principal reason for the application of the term grace to this feature. Christian liberality is the result of the Holy Spirit's influences, and from his gratuitous operations, taken in connection with the heavenly effects of these influences in producing a resemblance to God in this feature of character, the term grace is peculiarly appropriate.

The apostle, in the verse of which our text is a part, having mentioned several features of character by which the Christians in Corinth were distinguished, exhorts them to abound in liberality also, which is likewise a grace.

In illustration of this subject we shall consider—

1. *The source of Christian liberality.* It is a grace. The features of character in believers, which are called graces in the writings of the apostles, are the effects of