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DIVINE DECADENCE

What are you determined to gain in life?

What actions does that require?

Are there things you are unwilling to sacrifice in exchange for your chosen objective?

How do those fit into your life's priorities?

2 Corinthians 9:7 – Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

I) **We Each Choose...**

Often, it feels as though we have few or no options in life. Our systems constrain us in many ways. The power of the system comes from the illusion of limitations. There are real limits, but they are fewer and more expansive than we perceive them to be. We each choose how far to push the boundaries of life and toward what end. We may be passive or assertive, conforming or groundbreaking, content or hungry. We might pursue peace or power, acceptance or notoriety, spiritual or material gain. These are choices to make for ourselves. No one will make them for us. What we choose will determine how the world will treat us. It will also determine how God treats us. It's up to us.

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♦**Necessary result**: Too often, we live life linearly. We know where we are, we move in the general direction of where we think we want to arrive, and we go until we get...somewhere. Usually this is not where we wanted when we started, but we settle for it anyway. There is another way. When we begin with the end clear, we can craft a plan that is sure to lead us to it. Living this way, each action is the necessary result of the choice we already made. “Each of you must give (2 Corinthians 9:7),” because becoming who we are determined to be requires it.

♦**Our way of thinking**: This pattern of life takes thought. It takes considering the various options available to us for who we will be and how that person behaves. We then order our lives according to those behaviors so that in the end we have become that person. Our way of thinking determines our being and doing. It requires that “you have made up your mind (v7),” and will navigate life’s circumstances to finish well. Our minds are more powerful than we imagine. Once they are made, our ability to conform to their ideas exceeds our perceived limits.

II) In Freedom and Power...

We frequently confuse two ideas: can’t and won’t. We think and say that we cannot do many things. We cannot make the time, do not have the resources, do not have the talent. Usually, the truth is we won’t. The cost is greater than we are willing to pay. The rejection of the cost is so strong and immediate we interpret it as a limitation. Living intentionally takes understanding that we live in freedom and power. The freedom to choose and the power to act. These liberate us from hesitation and demands.

♦**Arrive early**: We arrive early for things we are eager to do. We take the front of the line to get the best seat for the show, stake out the best blind for the hunt, get the best deal on the purchase we want. When our end is to be generous, we give eagerly, “not reluctantly (v7),” because it is our desire. Reluctance is a sign of uncertainty, fear, or apathy. We want to hold back in case another need or better offer comes up. It expresses that the act in question is not essential to our chosen goal for life. It may oppose it. We have not dedicated ourselves to that goal for fear of our reputation. We must decide our life’s priorities.

♦**Because we want to**: Some ends we pursue are not socially acceptable. Wanting honor in society, we sacrifice the effectiveness of our pursuit to avoid reputational damage. It’s a way of trying to achieve multiple, often contradictory, ends. A recipe for madness and disappointment. We act against our chosen interest “under compulsion (v7),” because we cannot bear the cost of disapproval. This can backfire. People honor our intention, not our action. Obligatory giving can make us seem more miserly than not giving. Be who you choose to be.

III) Our Ends...

Abundant living starts at the end. We will gain and retain more of what we want from life if we are clear what that is. Knowing our ends focuses our minds on how to reach them. That knowledge guides our actions, builds experience, and drives us to constantly improve. Those who know they want worldly gain do what it takes. The more they prioritize it over competing ends, the more decisive their actions and effective the results. Those who want spiritual blessings are the same. They engage in the practices, make the sacrifices, and do whatever it takes.

♦**Various denominations**: Many of us are frustrated because we have confused ideas about God’s blessings. We combine the various denominations of life’s rewards. This blinds us to what we receive and highlights what we lack. The idea that “God loves (v7),” us is useful when we maintain the biblical understanding of love. He promotes the conditions that bring out our most Christlike being. His blessings are denominated in spiritual gifts, not material gain. Joy in kindness and generosity rather than pleasure from possession. Faith in need over security in savings.

♦**Currency exchange**: We are familiar with exchanging currency when traveling abroad. We are sure to change back when returning home. Foreign currency isn’t useful here. Every act of material generosity is a form of eternal currency exchange. “A cheerful giver (v7),” builds their generosity and capacity for love, spiritual wealth that will serve well now and forever. The things it affords—divine decadence—cannot be purchased with material currency. Give cheerfully knowing you are gaining in the bargain.