

# **The Practicality of Giving**

## **(1 Corinthians 16: 1-4)**

Since September we have been doing an in depth study of 1 Corinthians. In the first 11 chapters Paul is addressing what could be referred to as the “carnalities.” These are those behaviours that are influenced by our base nature which need to be confessed, forgiven and surrendered to Christ. They include such attitudes and behaviours as rivalry, sexual immorality, lawsuits between Christians, inequality in the marital relationship, people using knowledge to puff themselves up and diminish others, disregard for the poorer members of the community and a confusion of gender roles between men and women. All these things were dividing this church in Corinth and so Paul addresses them here. Then we come to the “spiritualities,” the things that needed increased emphasis in Corinth. They are discussed in chapters 12-14. The gifts of the Spirit, distributed to everyone, the fruit of the Spirit, the loving atmosphere in which these gifts are to be manifest, and the great hope of the resurrection.

Having dealt with the carnalities and spiritualities we now turn to chapter 16, where Paul deals with three “practicalities” of the Christian life. There are three very practical matters in this chapter -- how to give, how to live dependently upon God and how to work with others. We are only going to take the first one today and will come to the second and third on July 11.

As we look at the topic of giving it is worth noting that after having spent the longest chapter in the letter discussing the theme of the Resurrection, chapter 15, Paul then turns to the topic of money. The Resurrection of the Body is a subject that deals with the most material thing, the body that will be imperishable, incorruptible, glorious and undefiled. It makes sense that having spoken about the glorious material body we will one day have that he then turns to a discussion of how we use that most material commodity, money, at the beginning of chapter 16.

These first four verses of chapter 16 and what follows after grows out of the 58th verse of 15 where Paul is exhorting us to be “always abounding in the work of the Lord.” Out of that come the themes of Chapter 16, including giving, because giving is one way you can “abound in the work of the Lord.”

“Now concerning the collection for the saints: you should follow the directions I gave

to the churches of Galatia. 2 On the first day of every week, each of you is to put aside and save whatever extra you earn, so that collections need not be taken when I come. 3 And when I arrive, I will send any whom you approve with letters to take your gift to Jerusalem. 4 If it seems advisable that I should go also, they will accompany me.”

There are seven principles about giving in this brief paragraph. Let me point them out to you. First, you will note, giving is a universal practice. Paul says to the Corinthians,

**“you should follow the directions I gave to the churches of Galatia. (1 Cor 16.1)**

It was not just something that the Corinthians had to do. Everywhere Paul went, wherever he founded a church, he taught them to give, because giving is an essential part of being a follower of Jesus Christ. It is not an option; it is something every Christian is called to do. In 2 Corinthians 8 Paul writes “you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich.” He recalls this aspect of Jesus’ character in the most extensive passage dealing with the topic of financial giving in the New Testament. Our giving is a reflection of the generosity of Jesus Christ. We are called to imitate Jesus and imitation is enhanced with practice. One of the ways we practice imitating Jesus is by our willingness to give of our money to the local church and beyond.

The next principle is that we are to give on Sunday.

**On the first day of every week, (1 Cor 16:2a)**

It is no accident that this paragraph follows the great themes of resurrection in Chapter 15, for the essence of the new life in Christ is that it is a new beginning, it is life on a different level entirely. The Christians worshipped on that day because it was the day that Jesus rose from the dead. So the apostle gathers this whole matter of giving and associates it as flowing out of their wonder at the resurrection of Jesus, and their worship of the risen Lord. That, he says, is the atmosphere in which we are to give, on the first day of the week. Then, third, giving is a personal act,

**...each [one] of you... (1 Cor 16:2b)**

He does not leave anybody out. Even children ought to be taught to give. It may be

only a few pennies, a nickel or a dime, but on Sunday there ought to be a gift from every Christian. It is not the amount that is important at all, it is the regularity of it, the fact that there is a continual reminder that you have freely received, therefore, freely give. So each one is to do this. It is, in that sense, really not an option. It is a necessity growing out of our relationship to Christ. Fourth, Paul says,

**to put aside and save whatever extra you earn,{1 Cor 16:2c RSV}**

The sixth principle is set forth in Verses 3-4:

**And when I arrive, I will send any whom you approve with letters to take your gift to Jerusalem.**

Another rendering of that is a little better:

Then after I arrive, I'll write letters authorizing whomever you delegate, and send them off to Jerusalem to deliver your gift.

It is Paul who is going to write the letter. He knows these people in Jerusalem and he will write a letter assuring them that the ones who bring this money are trustworthy, responsible men. He will be glad to do that so that these men can bring the gift, or, **If it seems advisable that I should go also, they will accompany me.**

All he is emphasizing here is that giving should be carried out responsibly, and there is a provision made to see that it gets to its source in the right way. He is very careful, as we see in other letters, that he does not have this responsibility himself. He has made sure others know what is being given and to whom it is being given. Paul wants to ensure that when money is given to the work of Christ that it is accounted for properly.

Now here again are the six principles for giving:

1. A universal practice,
2. A weekly or regular activity,
3. A personal act,
4. A proportionate amount,
5. An unpressured response,

## 6. A responsible delivery.

The submission of our cheque book to the Lordship of Christ is very hard indeed. Jesus knew of the pull on our hearts to be in the service of money. It can have a power over us not unlike the power the Ring had over Gollum and Frodo in the Lord of the Rings. We so often refer to money as “our precious”. This is because we live in a world built on “conspicuous consumption. The advertising world does almost everything possible to appeal to what the Apostle John referred to as the “lust of the eyes, lust of the flesh, and the boastful pride of life.” Advertising is designed to make us dissatisfied with what we have thus creating within us a longing for something else.

In a culture such as this it is arguable that materialism is the single biggest competitor with authentic Christianity for the hearts and souls of millions in the world today, including those in the visible church.

Living in this consumeristic world we are called to live under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. We want to learn discernment and contentment so that we can echo these words from Proverbs: “Give me enough food to live on, neither too much nor too little. 9If I’m too full, I might get independent, saying, “God? Who needs him?’ If I’m poor, I might steal and dishonor the name of my God.”

Coupled with applying what Paul has taught us this morning may I suggest we try to practice the following:

- Don’t buy on impulse. Purchasing anything without thinking beforehand increases our submission to advertisers’ manipulation.
- Beware of rationalization. Inserting the word “need” is a great way to disguise “greed” as in “I need that new outfit”.
- Practice an attitude of gratitude. Thankfulness helps us take an account of what we have. Advertising appeals to what we don’t have.
- Beware of window shopping - it makes you think you need things you never would have thought of if they weren’t before your eyes.
- Never buy for “image” whether that means “designer” clothes or new cars. We pay for pride - both economically and spiritually.

As we learn to be surrendered to Christ more fully one of the practical results of this

will be a growing freedom from the tyranny of things. As this happens may we be able to say “Amen” to the words of this song by Scott Wesley Brown, a Christian musician who writes:

Things upon the mantle. Things on every shelf.  
Things that others gave me. Things I gave myself.  
Things I’ve stored in boxes, that don’t mean much anymore.  
Old magazines and memories, behind the attic door.

Things on hooks and hangers. Things on ropes and strings.  
Things I guard that blind me to the pettiness of things.  
Am I like the Rich Young Ruler, ruled by all I own?  
If Jesus came and asked me, could I leave them all alone?

Oh Lord, I look to heaven beyond the veil of time.  
To gain eternal insight that nothing’s really mine.  
And to only ask for daily bread and all contentment brings.  
To find freedom as your servant in the midst of all these things.

For discarded in the junkyard, rusting in the rain,  
Lie things that took the finest years of lifetimes to obtain.  
And whistling through these tombstones, the hollow breezes sing  
A Song of dreams surrendered to the tyranny of things.