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1 Corinthians 16:1-4 “Giving: The New Testament Way”

Intro. For about 5 weeks we have been studying the 15th chapter of 1 Corinthians. We have learned about the great truths concerning the resurrection of the dead. And with very few words of transition, Paul moves right on to the subject of giving and meeting needs. Actually, it is good to discuss giving after a discussion of eternal life, for if this body is going to leave this world and be transformed; we shouldn't be so concerned about investing our money in temporary things. Instead, we will be more interested in investing in the Lord's work, for such will yield eternal dividends.

As we look at v.1, we get the impression that the Corinthians had asked Paul about the matter of the collection for the saints in Jerusalem. This collection formed a major enterprise of Paul's third missionary journey. He really wanted to collect a generous offering from the Gentile churches. And so Paul gives some basic principles here about giving which I believe are still valid today. I say that because in the second half of v.1 he says, “as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you do also.” The principles of giving set forth in v.2 were general in nature, applied for all of the churches then, and I believe that they apply to us today. And these instructions are given in the form of a command. We should obey these principles. So I want you to learn the following principles concerning giving in the Christian life.

Now first of all, I want you to understand:

I. THE PURPOSE OF GIVING

16 out of the 38 parables of Jesus dealt with the issue of stewardship and giving. Why did He say so much about giving? Why is it important for Christians to become givers? Too many Christians have a negative attitude about this subject because they look at it the wrong way. At the season of the year we hear a lot about giving, and we are going to hear from a Mr. Scrooge from time to time. So what's the problem with such people? I believe they see giving mainly in terms of personal loss. In other words, “The preacher and the church are out to get my money!” And such people don't want to hear about giving because they give so little. But the purpose of giving is not to make you poorer. Rather, there are several wonderful purposes that are accomplished when we give. For example, we should give:

A. To Meet Needs - I believe that our giving should meet legitimate needs. In fact, we show love by meeting needs. Our text gives one example. In v.1 we see that this particular offering was for the “saints.” We know from v.3 that it was for the saints in Jerusalem. We know from other letters that they were poor and in great need (Rom. 15:26).

There were several reasons why these saints were poor, all of which were really beyond their control. First, persecution had led to poverty. In Rev. 2:9 we see an example of the link between persecution and poverty. Persecuted Christians would find it difficult to find a job. Also, famine had hit everyone in that region in recent years (late 40s). And the church in Jerusalem was doing all it could to support many poor widows.

So this is one example of the fact that we are to give to the poor & needy. In Galatians 2:10 Paul reported that the Jerusalem leaders “desired only that we should remember the poor, the very thing which I also was eager to do.” And as we consider giving to those in need, we should give special focus to *Christians* in need. Notice that this offering was for “the saints.” In passages such as Acts 2:44-45; Gal. 6:10; James 1:27, 2:16; 1 Jn. 3:17-18, the main focus of our help is upon fellow believers. Our giving to fellow believers should lead the world to confess, “Oh, how those Christians love one another!” Such giving is a great testimony to unbelievers.

In recent days many believers were hit hard by the hurricanes on the gulf coast. Over 1,000 churches were damaged or destroyed. Southern Baptists have given millions in the relief efforts, much of which will go to help our fellow believers. Our church contributed over \$5,000. Though we could always do more, such giving expresses obedience to the teachings of the Word of God.

Furthermore, there are the ongoing needs of the Church. A black preacher once said, “There are 3 books necessary in carrying on the work of the church: the Good Book, the Hymn book, and the pocketbook. It would be impossible for the church to function as we know it without tithes and offerings. A church usually needs a full-time pastor in order to have an effective ministry. We have already seen in 9:6-27 that God has ordained that God’s people should provide for the physical needs of His preachers. A church usually has other staff that needs to be paid in order to have effective ministries. Also Tit. 3:13 and Phil. 4:15-19 are examples of the fact that churches should support traveling preachers and missionaries. Right now we are collecting our Lottie Moon offering, which supports over 5,000 international missionaries. The only way we are going to reach our goal of \$16,500 is if many believers give generously to that offering. And then there are other expenses associated with the operation of a church, and you may have received a detailed list in the 2006 budget. Are you giving to support the needs and expenses of the church? Or are you one of those that give little, and expects the church to get by on very little?

One Sunday, a black preacher was speaking on what it would take for the church to grow. He said “If this church is to advance, it must take up its bed and walk.” The congregation said “Let it walk, Preacher, let it walk.” Encouraged by their response, he went further. “If this church is going to become better, it will have to throw aside its hindrances and run!” The congregation replied, “Let it run, preacher, let it run!” Now really into his message, he spoke stronger. “If this church really wants to become great, it will have to take up its wings and fly!” Caught up in the excitement, the congregation shouts, “Let it fly, Preacher, let it fly!” Then Preacher gets louder. “If this church is going to fly, it will cost money!” The congregation replied. “Let it walk, Preacher, let it walk.”¹

Oh, I hope we don’t have that attitude! I hope that we all love the church. If Jesus was willing to die for the Church, we should be willing to give sacrificially to help the church fulfill our mission in this world. So I want to challenge you to consider the fact that one of your life’s purposes is to meet needs, both in our home church and around the world. Are you fulfilling your purpose?

But there is another purpose for giving:

B. To Strengthen Relationships between People – At Christmas time we sometimes give gifts to people who really don’t need much. Well why do we do it? It is because giving is one way to show our love. A gift says, “I love you.” Giving strengthens relationships. Well Paul had

¹ *Preaching Now*, April 5, 2005.

that goal in mind when he organized this gift from Gentile believers to Jewish believers. Paul knew there was a basic division between Jew and Gentile. In his heart, Paul always had the consuming passion to see the body of Christ become one. And the money from the Gentiles would go a long way to solidify unity between Gentile believers & the Jews. In fact, several times in his letters, Paul refers to this offering as a *koinonia*, or fellowship (Rom. 15:26; 2 Cor. 9:13). And so as we have already seen, Paul was interested in Christians showing love to one another by giving to meet each other's needs. Jesus said in Luke 16:9, "make friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon..." He knew this principle of giving as well.

A third purpose for giving is this:

C. To Help Us Grow in Christ Likeness - Giving not only helps others, but giving also results in the personal benefit of spiritual growth. Giving makes us more like God. Jn. 3:16 says, "For God so loved the world that He gave..." Furthermore, giving destroys the demon of greed. There is great personal benefit in giving.

Sadhu Sundar Singh and a companion were traveling through a pass high in the Himalayan Mountains. At one point they came across a body lying in the snow, but he was still alive. Mr. Singh wished to stop and help the unfortunate man, but his companion refused, saying, "We shall lose *our* lives if we burden ourselves with him." But Mr. Singh would not think of leaving the man to die in the ice and snow. As his companion made his farewell, Mr. Singh lifted the poor traveler onto his back. With great exertion on his part, he bore the man onward, but gradually the heat from Singh's body began to warm up the beleaguered frozen fellow, and he revived. Soon both were walking together side by side. Catching up with his former companion, they found him dead – frozen by the cold. In the case of Mr. Singh, he was willing to lose his life on behalf of another, and in the process, he found it; but in the case of his companion who sought only his own well-being, he only lost it [from preaching.com]. Jesus said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." If you give, you will truly find that you are the one that is the most blessed, even more than the recipient of your giving.

So I hope you are motivated to be a giver. Now, you need some instruction regarding giving. So let's see my final main point today. You need to understand not only the purpose of giving, but also:

II. THE PRINCIPLES OF GIVING

Paul provides 4 powerful principles for Christian giving here in this text. The first pertains to:

A. Every Believer Should Give - Now who should participate in the grace of giving? Paul says in v.2, "On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside..." He clearly states that giving is something *every* Christian should participate in, not just the wealthy. It doesn't matter whether we are young, old, rich, or poor. As we shall see, the amount of giving will differ, but everyone is to participate. Even the poor should learn to give. In 2 Cor. 8:2 Paul said that the Macedonian Christians were liberal in their giving in spite of "their deep poverty." (cf. also Mk. 12:41-44). The young should give as well. We all remember the story of the boy who gave up his lunch to the Lord Jesus, who multiplied the fish & bread to feed over 5,000!

B. We Should Give Regularly – Paul said in v.2, “On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside....” Of course, some of our giving is to be spontaneous when needs arise. But I believe that the Bible teaches that most of our giving is to be regular and systematic. So notice Paul’s plan of systematic, regular giving:

1. On Sunday - Paul draws attention to the first day of the week, Sunday. Why? Because Sunday was already replacing the Sabbath as the main day for Christians to get together and worship (cf. Acts 20:6-7a; Rev. 1:10). That’s because Jesus was resurrected on a Sunday. So since giving was to take place on Sunday, Paul saw it as one aspect of our worship. That is one reason why we usually receive offerings only during our Sunday worship services.

Furthermore, since Paul directed that such offerings were to be given on Sunday, this means that our giving should be:

2. Weekly or Periodically – That made perfect sense in New Testament times, for laborers were paid daily. But in our day, some are paid only monthly, or twice monthly. So I do not believe that God requires every Christian to give weekly. But I do believe we should give regularly, and periodically. I believe that the best plan is to give the Sunday after you are paid. And when you are paid, I believe that your offering to the Lord should be set aside first. Don’t give to the Lord only what you have leftover at the end of the month. But regardless of how often you give, the main point is to have a regular, systematic program of giving.

Why did Paul want giving to be regular and systematic? There were 2 reasons. First, he didn’t want giving to be provoked by an emotional appeal. He wanted it to be in the flow of faithful, weekly giving that alters a person’s whole life. Too many Christians live by their feelings. If we feel like coming to church, we come. If we feel like praying, we pray. If we feel like giving, we give. You can’t grow in the Christian life by feelings. You grow by learning the truth of God’s Word, believing God’s word, and then acting upon God’s Word in your daily life!

Furthermore, such systematic, self-disciplined, consistent giving would have the benefit of reducing the need for special offerings and special giving campaigns. Paul said in the last of v.2 that he wanted them to give weekly “that there be no collections when I come.” Paul didn’t want to have to wait until he arrived to have one big campaign to raise funds for the poor saints. He didn’t want to have to import some malnourished child from Jerusalem to stir them into giving by appealing to their emotions. Almost any scrooge will give under such circumstances. But when it’s all over, the scrooges are still scrooges!

I believe that churches should have an agreement with its members. If the members will be faithful in our regular giving, we will budget as many of our needs & expenses as possible, and not have endless special offerings.

C. We Should Deposit our Gifts in the Appropriate Treasury - What are we to do with our weekly offerings? According to v.2, the Corinthians were to “lay something aside, storing up ...” each week for the offering for the poor saints. There are two interpretations of those words. First of all, Paul may be referring to:

1. A Personal Fund for Giving - The verb translated “storing up” (*thesaurizo*) is based on the word that refers to a treasury or bank of some sort. The Corinthians were not to try to send this money each week to Jerusalem, but they were to save it up to send later by the hand of some trusted leaders, and possibly also by the hand of Paul himself (vv.3-4). So they were to collect & save this money weekly. The words “lay ... aside” literally means “lay along side himself.” It normally would mean that they were to save up this benevolent offering in a personal bank of some sort, and then at the proper time everyone was to bring their collections to the

church to send to Jerusalem.² This method is good even today for an annual offering like the Lottie Moon offering. In order to give a substantial offering, it would be helpful for you to save it up throughout the year. Does anyone here do that?

But there is another interpretation of these words. Paul probably has in mind to lay aside our gifts in the:

2. Church Treasury - According to MacArthur and several others, “lay something aside, storing up,” does not necessarily mean a private fund. It could simply mean that each individual, in a very personal and private way, is to determine what is to be set aside for giving. And since giving was connected to Sunday, it is likely that the church was to receive the offerings when the people gathered for worship. The church would then deposit it into some treasury, saving it up for the right time.

Indeed, I believe that most of our giving is to be church centered. There are several reasons to give systematically to and through the church treasury. Mal. 3:10 and other OT scriptures teach that the tithe was to go to the tabernacle or the temple. The church is a New Testament counterpart. And so in Acts 4:37, we read of the Jerusalem Christians putting their offerings into one fund, which was at that time administered by the apostles. I believe that most of your giving should be to the unified budget of the local church, and through the local church. And then the church has the responsibility of using these funds wisely, and for the purposes that I have shared with you.³

Now the final principle for giving is this:

D. We Should Give Proportionately – This answers an important question: “How much should I give on a regular basis?” There is no ironclad rule laid down in the New Testament. But Paul gives an excellent guideline for us all to follow. V.2 says that a person should give “...as he may prosper.” We are to give to the degree that God prospers us financially. This is proportionate giving, which is taught throughout the Bible. For example, tithing (giving 10%) is one form of proportionate giving. In the early days the Jews were farmers. The amount of their tithe depended upon the Lord’s blessings upon their crops. Even so, the amount you give will usually depend upon how much income you have (income, not income minus expenses). In Dt. 16:10, we read that at the feast of weeks the Israelites were to give a freewill offering “as the LORD your God blesses you.”

So both the Old and New Testaments teach proportionate giving, which is about the same as percentage giving. Now the issue is, “What percent?” I read recently that American Christians give on average about 3% of their income to *all* charitable causes put together (Blomberg, 328). I believe that falls short of the teaching of our text. I believe that how much you give should depend on how blessed you are financially. Do you remember the story of the rich tax collector Zacchaeus? He gave 50% of his income, mainly because he was a wealthy man. J. Vernon McGee tells the story of one of his church leaders who owned several Coca-Cola plants. He was a man of means. Often he would ask him why he didn’t preach on tithing. That was during the depression in the 1930s. So Dr. McGee said to him, “For some strange reason, Coca-Cola is

² American Commentary, Robertson, Barrett support this interpretation. Lenski also accepts this interpretation, supposing that the Corinthian church was not yet developed enough to have an official treasury.

³ Even pagan religions had a practice of the people giving to a treasury at the temple. In fact, the biggest and safest banks in the ancient world were in the temples because the people were fearful of the gods they worshipped, so no one would rob the temple bank. Corinthians converted from paganism would expect to give money into a church treasury (cf. Acts 19:37).

selling, and you are doing very well. There are a few people who are doing well, and they are to give as they have been prospered—and they are not to stop with a tenth. Probably they ought to give a half.” Do you know that this man never again suggested that he preach on tithing! The reason was that he was tithing, but he didn’t want to give as God had prospered him. Peter Marshall once said, "Give according to your income, lest God make your income according to your giving."

I doubt than any among us are so prosperous that we should give 50%. Therefore, many of us just give a tithe, plus some extra. I personally cannot justify giving less than what was required in the OT law. It is true that we are not under law but under grace, but Rom. 8:4 says that we fulfill the righteous requirements of the law by walking in the Spirit. And when we think about all the good that is accomplished by giving, & how God has blessed us, how can we give less than 10%? Yet George Barna found that only 8 percent of adults surveyed in 2001 had chosen to tithe.

But I realize that even giving a tithe may seem like a lot to you, especially if your income is low or if your living expenses are high. But I pray that the day will come that you will step out on faith and begin to give at least a tithe. I say “step out on faith” because that is often required in order to become a tither. Humanly speaking you can’t see how you can afford to tithe. But Jesus said in Lk. 6:38, “Give, and it shall be given unto you.” 2 Cor. 9:6b says, “he who sows bountifully shall also reap bountifully.” By faith in such promises, you can draw water from your well and share it with others, and somehow you will find that the well never runs dry! You can’t out give God.

In I Kings 17:8-16 we read the story of the widow of Zarephath. God told Elijah the prophet to go and dwell there during the famine. When he came to the gate of the city, he met a widow gathering sticks. And he called to her and said, "Please bring me a little water in a cup, that I may drink." And as she was going to get it, he called to her and said, "Please bring me a morsel of bread in your hand." So she said, "As the LORD your God lives, I do not have bread, only a handful of flour in a bin, and a little oil in a jar; and see, I am gathering a couple of sticks that I may go in and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it, and die." And Elijah said to her, "Do not fear; go and do as you have said, but make me a small cake from it first, and bring it to me; and afterward make some for yourself and your son. For thus says the LORD God of Israel: ‘The bin of flour shall not be used up, nor shall the jar of oil run dry, until the day the LORD sends rain on the earth.’" So she went away and did according to the word of Elijah; and she and he and her household ate for many days. The bin of flour was not used up, nor did the jar of oil run dry, according to the word of the LORD which He spoke by Elijah. Friend, dedicate to God the first portion of what He has blessed you with, and you will find that you can’t outgive God.

Conclusion: To the lost: God wants you far more than your money. He is rich already. He wants to give you eternal life and an inheritance with Christ. But you must give your life to Him in simply trust before you can receive this life.

Sources: C.K. Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968); Craig Blomberg, *The NIV Application Commentary: 1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994); E. P. Gould, *Commentary on the Epistles to the Corinthians in An American Commentary on the New Testament*, Alvah Hovey, ed. (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1887); Oliver B. Greene, *The First Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians* (Greenville: The Gospel Hour, Inc., 1965); R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1937); John F. MacArthur, Jr., *God's Plan for Giving* (Panorama City, CA: Word of Grace Communications, 1982); J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*,

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