

MESSAGE TRANSCRIPTS

Series: 1 Corinthians

Collection for the Saints

1 Corinthians 16:1-4

Wendell Anderson, Director of Spiritual Maturity

Weekend 10.29-30.11

This week we are picking up again in our text in I Corinthians, our study of I Corinthians. I am going to start us this week with the first part of chapter 16 and then Pastor Tim is going to finish chapter 16 next week when we are back together again. In prior weeks, we have worked our way through chapter 14 and then we are skipping over chapter 15 right now which deals with the resurrection and we will come back to that as we prepare for Easter in the springtime. But if you turn to I Corinthians 16, page 962, in the Bibles that are provided for you, you can see that the section heading is titled, “The Collection for the Saints”. So here is the first issue that Paul addresses as he is concluding this letter in the last chapter of this letter to the church in Corinth. He is addressing some financial instructions. I know that some of you are thinking there goes Wendell again talking about money...always talking about money. You know, but it is just not so. I mean I talk about other topics too but money is one my favorite ones to teach about. You know, the fact of the matter is that as we have been studying verse by verse through I Corinthians, these are the next verses. This is one of the topics that gets addressed in this particular passage. But I like talking about the topic...it is a very popular topic in scripture as again some of you are familiar...some 2,100 verses throughout scripture that talk about money and possessions and our attitudes and actions with money. Right here, of course, in I Corinthians 16, it is addressed but Paul addressed it earlier in this letter in chapter 9 and he also addresses it in book 2, II Corinthians in both chapters 8 and 9. And we will look at some of those references this morning as well.

And, of course, as some of you are aware, I have taught financial seminars for Crown Financial Ministries for twenty years or so now in churches throughout the Midwest. So this is a topic that I am familiar with and I have taught a lot about. But let me assure you the reason that we are talking about this and teaching on this is because these are where the verses are at. There is not a financial crisis at Crossroads. You know, over the past three years when a lot of us have been experiencing the economic uncertainty that has been going on throughout our community, the region, the country and the globe, you know, the leadership and the elders here at Crossroads have been very careful to develop a spending plan that was very conservative and we followed that plan and we are basically right on track with that plan—right on line with our budget. And so we really do thank you for your continued faithfulness and generosity that you have demonstrated. And, in fact, that is just the general fund. That does not even look at the overwhelming response that we received to the building fund campaign for the orphanages this past Easter. And, in fact, you know, we just had the ribbon-cutting and Pastor Tim and some of the team just got back yesterday afternoon from those celebrations of opening up the Crossroads of Hope I and II which is very exciting. You can see some pictures of that on the Go Missions blog.

Well, let’s look at our text right here. Again, here is I Corinthians 16, “The Collection for the Saints.” Paul has been going through lots of different theological and doctrinal issues and then he kind of turns the corner as he is concluding this book and he deals with some very practical matters. As he has written previously about the resurrection and raised our hope, now he says, now that you have got this hope of the resurrection—this excitement, this enthusiasm of knowing about our eternal destiny, he says, now let’s

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look as some practical matters. In fact, just look back there in chapter 15, verse 55, a few verses earlier, it says, “O death, where is your victory? O death where is your sting?” He encourages by knowing that death has been conquered. And then, in verse 58, the last verse of chapter 15, before 16, he says, “Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.” So be encouraged by this knowledge of our eternal destiny and then address these practical matters day to day. Back in his letter to the Colossians, in Colossians 3:2, he says, “Set your mind on things above, not on things of the earth.” So as we are heavenly-minded, then we deal with things that need to be dealt with and taken care of each and every day.

So let me read through these first four verses and then we will look at them one by one. “Now concerning the collection for the saints: as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do. On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come. And when I arrive, I will send those whom you accredit by letter to carry your gift to Jerusalem. If it seems advisable that I should go also, they will accompany me.”

So look at the opening words of this chapter right here...”Now concerning...” “Now concerning...” That phrase, “now concerning”, is used five times in the book of I Corinthians. The first time that it was used, it was in chapter 7, verse 1 where he says, “Now concerning the matters about which you have wrote...” “What we realize is that the Corinthian church, the young church, had written to Paul and asked him a number of questions and they wanted clarification about how they should address very practical issues that they were dealing with. In chapter 8, verse 1, he says, “Now concerning food offered to idols...” In chapter 12, verse 1, “Now concerning spiritual gifts...” And here in chapter 16, “Now concerning the collection of the saints...” So this instruction was in response. The church had questions and Paul was going to answer those questions for them. Well, as verse 1 continues, we find the purpose for the giving here. Verse 1 continues, “Now concerning the collection for the saints...” Now notice, it says “the collection”. There was certainly a reference to a specific collection that was going on and his readers really already knew about it. They probably had specifically asked about this collection in their letter to him. Notice, he uses the word, “collection”. You know, that is not a word that we use here very often, if you will. You know, we use “tithes and offerings”. Collection is not quite as...you know, if I say, well, we are going to collect now. You know, that is what the electric company does, right? They collect from me or the mortgage company, and so forth. We like the word, “offering” because it seems as though I have the option to participate or not. But Paul uses the word, “collection” here and in using that, it implies that there was an expectation of participation among the people. It also implies that there was a process in place for him to collect this money...for the church to collect this and to handle this and get it ready to be sent to Jerusalem. Well, he says, this collection is for the saints, specifically, for the saints in Jerusalem.

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Now as this verse continues, he talks about...also has been done in the churches of Galatia and in the book of Romans, he says, that this collection was being done in the churches of Macedonia and Asia as well. So he was collecting...making this collection for the saints in Jerusalem—across lots of different churches, Gentile churches that had been founded to send back to the church in Jerusalem. Now we know that Jerusalem was a very poor area at this point in time. It was a poor city. There had been a famine in the years preceding this which probably was affecting and making...exacerbating or making the financial difficulties within Jerusalem even more difficult. And then as the periodic festivals and gatherings happened in the city of Jerusalem when people would migrate or pilgrimage to that city, it would put demands on the city and make the lack there even more pronounced.

And then the church or the Christians within Jerusalem even had it worse if you will. Many of them had been kicked out from their homes. They had lost their jobs. They had their possessions taken from them. So here is a poor area and a poor church—the mother church in Jerusalem with this area. And Paul wanted the churches throughout the region where the Gentiles were at to actually provide assistance back to that. Not only just to meet the needs that the poorness demonstrated but also to demonstrate unity within the church. He wanted to meet the needs of the church universal that was there.

Well, as we move on to verse 2, we see several principles of giving. Verse 2 reads, “On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so there will be no collecting when I come.” Now these principles of giving are certainly timeless and the first one that he gives us is the frequency of giving. Notice what he writes, “On the first day of every week...” There was an expectation that there was going to be participation in giving on a weekly basis. Now we also read, if you will, a couple of side notes that we can see from this. One is that the church was meeting on Sunday, on the first day of the week. Historically, the church or if you will, the Jewish people had gathered on the Sabbath day, on the last day of the week, the day of rest. But here the church was meeting on the first day of the week—on Sunday.

The second thing we can see from this text is that there was a participation in giving from the very earliest days of the church meeting. So this did not just occur recently or something like that but from the very first days of worship services. The worship services had giving as a regular part of worship. Well, our giving should be regular as well. Now I certainly do not believe that Paul is telling us here that we should portion out a part of our giving each and every week if we do not receive something each and every week. OK? For people that receive every week, as they may prosper, as the verse continues, then they would give each week. If they receive every other week or every month, then that is how their giving would be. Not a legalistic, well, you need to give something every week even if you did not receive anything that week. He is expecting regular, routine giving.

But it is also implying here that giving should not be based on emotional appeals or feelings. That it

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should not be only when we have extra income, when we have bonuses that come in. It should not be when we feel the Spirit move us, as well. But that our giving should be done and should reflect a willing, grateful, obedient commitment of all our possessions to the Lord, to his people and to the mission that he has us involved in. Now the Spirit certainly can involve us or lead us for special giving at special times. But the Holy Spirit's primary way of leading us is through the Holy Scriptures and here, it says that we should give each and every week. Our regular giving reminds us that this is a vital element, a vital part of our worship of the Lord.

Well, the next principle is the participants. It says, "On the first day of each week...every week, each of you...each of you..." It is obviously all-inclusive. No one was exempted or excused from participating in the worship through giving. Rich or poor, young or old, farmers or shopkeepers, people that were working or were retired, working or not working, each and every one of the people were expected to participate in the offering. Now we might think in our own mind as we think through this, well, certainly there should be some exclusion to this. The poor at least ought to be excluded. But we see no exclusions there. In fact, if we reflect back on some of Jesus' teaching where he was teaching the story where he was standing in the temple courts watching the people come in to present their offerings in the temple treasury, here this widow came in and gave two small coins which amounted to only a cent or so and deposited that into the offering. And notice, he did not stop her from doing that and he did not reprimand the temple officials from accepting that offering from the poor widow either but he used that example of the poor giving as a model for generosity. So, we as well, each and every one of us, is expected to give no matter how much we have, great or little, we are to participate in offerings. Paul expected everyone to participate.

Well, the next principle is the place...the place. Now verse 2 continues, it says, "On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up..." Now as we read through that phrase, "store it up", on the surface, we might think that it means, well, I will store it up at my home or my bank account and I will keep it there and I will do something with it whenever the time arises. And that may seem to be what the case is on the surface. But as we look at what the root word of "store it up", or what store means, it comes from a Greek word which you can see in your program notes, means to lay up treasure or to keep it in store. It is the word that we get the word, thesaurus from, the thesaurus, which means a collection or a store house of words. That word, "stored up" indicates a storehouse or a treasury. And in New Testament times, the places of worship had treasuries attached to them. So Paul was encouraging the Corinthians to weekly bring their gifts to the church to be stored up. If he was referring somehow to people storing it up and keeping it at home, then it would not make sense how that verse continues where it says, "that there will be no collecting when I come." He was expecting it already to have been collected. So then the first thing that could be done when Paul arrives was that they could then move on with that offering and take it to Jerusalem.

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So we see that giving was primarily for the church and, in this case, the church in Jerusalem but it also primarily went to and through the church as well. Now this does not mean that this is the only place or the only type of giving that can occur. There are other scriptures which do teach us that giving can happen outside of exclusively through the church. But in fact, just look at one place in II Corinthians 9 and we are going to look at a couple of places in II Corinthians 9 and 8 in our remaining time. But it talks about where we might give to other individuals or support other ministries or missions. And in II Corinthians 9:11, it says, “You will be enriched in every way for all your generosity which through us will produce thanksgiving to God.” Now in the NIV that verse reads, “So that you can be generous on every occasion”...on every occasion. God blesses us and prospers us so that we can have an abundance to give from on every occasion, first through the church, to the church and then over and above that through to other missions and ministries and individuals as well.

Well, over the years, as I have taught seminars and coached people in this area, people would ask me, “Well, so how do you do this, Wendell?” But, of course, as many of you know, I was an adult convert to Christ so I did not walk into the church writing checks for ten percent because that was not where I was at like most of us as well unless we were brought up in the faith and taught that from a very young age. But as I grew in this, studied this, and sought to apply this in my life, I can to the conviction and started practicing that the first ten percent of my income goes to my local church and then over and above that, I give offerings to other ministries and missions and individuals who have needs, supporting things like many of you do, Asia’s Hope to sponsor an orphan or to Global Youth Ministries Network, or other valid ministries as well. And then I also have set aside an amount that is just undesignated. I do not know where that is going to go. I just pray about that and that may store up for a period of time and we will see needs that will come up and Madeline and I will together come to an agreement on where some of that should go but that is an undesignated portion. So there is a portion of offerings that are planned and a portion that is not.

Well, the next principle that we see is the proportion or the percentage...the proportion or the percentage. Verse 2 continues, “On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up as he may prosper.” Now Paul’s exhortation here is for each and every Christian to give as we may prosper—that proportion or percentage of what God provides to us. Deuteronomy 8 tells us, “Remember the Lord your God for it is he who gives us the ability to get wealth.” We remember as we are giving back to Him that it is He that gave us the ability to get wealth—He is the source of our income and we are just returning a portion of that back to him. Now obviously there are lots of opinions among Christians as to how much of our income should be given to the Lord’s work.

The common, traditional answer has been ten percent and that is based on the Old Testament readings of the tithe, a practice that was very common throughout all ancient cultures at the time. Now if you actually studied through the Old Testament, you would actually find that there were more than one tithe.

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In fact, there were two tithes that were going on all the time and there was an additional tithe that happened every third year so if you add all those up, there was at least twenty-three percent of tithing or expectation that was going on all of the time in the theocracy of Israel. In addition to that, there were offerings that were given. In fact, Proverbs 3:9 says, “Honor the Lord with your wealth with the first fruits of all of your income.” So there is an expectation for us to be generous with all that we have and that we give to the Lord generously and that we give to him first.

But these passages still beg the question, “Well, how much is this as we prosper? How much do we give?” And when we arrive at the New Testament and we look through all of the New Testament epistles giving instructions to the church, we do not find any specific instruction. It does not say thou shalt give this percentage. It does not say that any place at all. Now we see the tithe referred to in Jesus’ discourse in the gospels and we see the writer of Hebrews refers to the tithes but not in an instructive manner to the church. But Paul perhaps provides, because this question was one that was going on at that time as well, in II Corinthians 9, provides some instructions to the Corinthians.

So look at II Corinthians 9, verses 6 and 7, and see what we find here about this question of how much. Paul writes, “The point is this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.” So the encouragement, he does not give a specific amount, but he is encouraging to give bountifully. Then in verse 7, it says, “Each one must give as he has made up in his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.” So how much is left up for us to decide in our hearts. Now again throughout church history, ten percent has been a guide that has been taught and practiced by many believers.

One of my favorite authors, Randy Alcorn, who I have referred to in the past, he used a bicycling analogy regarding this and since I like to ride my bicycle, I like this analogy. He said, “Tithing is kind of like the training wheels to giving. It is a place you start but once you can balance on your own, then you can go beyond the tithe.” Well, I do believe that all of us experience tension as we wrestle with this question of how much. You have a quote in your program notes from C. S. Lewis that addresses this question of how much. He wrote, “I do not believe one can settle how much we ought to give. I am afraid the only safe rule is to give more than we can spare. In other words, if our expenditures on comforts and luxuries and amusements and so forth is up to the standard, common among those with the same income as our own, we are probably giving away too little. If our charities do not at all pinch or hamper us, I should say they are too small. There ought to be things we should like to do but cannot do because our charitable expenditures exclude them.”

You know, I agree with C. S. Lewis. I do not believe that we actually can reach a final resolution on the question of how much to give. I believe that it is something that we need to prayerfully wrestle with throughout our lives. Well, we looked at some principles here. Principles of giving, the frequency, the

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participants, the place and the proportion. And now in verses 3 and 4, we can see some financial control practices. Listen to verse 3 and 4 again, it says, “When I arrive, I will send those whom you credit by letter to carry your gift to Jerusalem. And if it seems advisable that I should go also, they will accompany me.”

Now Paul, in this case as in other places as well, was always very careful about the handling of money. He wanted church-appointed representatives to be a part of this offering so that there would be no question about whether or not he might be stealing something for himself. Now let’s look over to II Corinthians 8 where he writes about this issue of being careful in the practices of handling money as well. II Corinthians 8:20-21, he writes about this again. He writes, “We take this course so that no one should blame us about this generous gift that is being administered by us for we aim at what is honorable not only in the Lord’s sight but also in the sight of man.”

Paul was expressing to the Corinthian church that he wanted them to know that he was doing absolutely everything possible to do what was right in the Lord’s sight and also in the sight of man. And so do we here at Crossroads. We strive with the way we handle the finances here at Crossroads to do absolutely everything possible to do it right so that it is right in the sight of the Lord and the sight of man. And we have a number of financial control practices that try to reinforce that. Just a few of them are things such as: Rotating of volunteer team members who count the offerings after each and every service and then take that money and make a deposit in the bank so that the money is handled, it is not here, it is safeguarded and it is taken care of in these rotating teams that go on just to add that layer of protection. We have another volunteer member that comes in and enters all of the records into the My Crossroads database to make sure that there is an accurate record of those each and every Monday morning. And then we have auditors that review our books, an external audit firm that reviews our books and provides periodic reports back to the church leadership and the governing elder board every six months to make sure that things are done absolutely above board and correctly.

Now follow me if you will just on a related detour. In some of my reading recently has been from research involving over a thousand churches and over a quarter million believers at those churches and from the research, the authors have developed this illustration that they refer to as the spiritual continuum. The research indicates that every church has people in each stage of spiritual growth. Every church, including here at Crossroads, has people who are exploring Christ or evaluating and wrestling in what does it mean to have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Every church also has people who have accepted Christ or are growing in Christ and also those who are progressing on their journey to become close to Christ and Christ-centered.

Of course, the research also indicates that the most significant spiritual catalyst in growth in each of those steps is reflection on scripture. II Timothy 3:16 and 17 says, “All scripture is God-breathed and is useful

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for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness so that the man of God may be fully equipped for every good work.” So we encourage you to not only obviously attend, follow on our program notes, follow the message but also read and study and reflect on scripture on your own study as well.

Research also indicates another key catalyst in our spiritual growth is increasing generosity. Jesus said in Matthew 6:21, “For where you treasure is, there your heart will be also.” “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Well, in this book, “The Treasure Principle”, Randy Alcorn said it this way, “My heart always goes where I put my money.” So basically what he is saying there is that I can lead my heart. I can move my heart to where I put my money. So if I invest in the kingdom of God, my heart draws closer to the kingdom of God and kingdom things. My heart always goes where I put God’s money or as Jesus said, “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

Well, you know, the text this week brings us to a topic that certainly causes all of us a level of tension—all of us. Just yesterday, I was reading Time magazine and it says the American Psychological Association reports that money is the most common source of stress. I did not have to read Time to know that, you know. It is common, a leading cause of stress for all of us. But even so, I want to encourage you to prayerfully consider taking a step of faith in this area of your life and the area of generosity. Why? Well, certainly not because the church is in a state of financial crisis. I am very thankful for that; very thankful for your generosity there. I want you to give because where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. I want you to give because as you take steps of faith in this area of your life, you become transformed more and more like Christ. You know, if you are a Christ follower and haven’t started giving yet, I encourage you to start. I do not know where but you start some place, start giving some place.

And if you continued on your journey and maturing in the faith but you have reached a comfortable plateau in your giving, I encourage you to prayerfully consider giving more. Perhaps you need to read that quote by C. S. Lewis and just pray about what you should give in response to that question of how much. I do not know. Maybe you are right on target and I certainly applaud the generosity of many people here. It just always encourages me as well. But remember Jesus’ words. I quoted a verse, chapter 6, Matthew 6, verse 21, “For where you treasure is, there your heart will be also.” But that discourse begins in verse 19. It says, “Do not lay up for yourself treasures on earth where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal but lay up for yourself treasures in heaven where neither moth nor rust destroy and where thieves do not break in and steal.” The bottom line; I want all of us to continue to grow spiritually and as we grow in increasing our generosity, we become transformed more and more like Christ.

As we conclude, I want to point out a couple of resources that Crossroads has to help you in this area of

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your life. One of them that you have heard about in the past is the financial coaching. We have personal financial coaching—a whole team of volunteers who have been trained to coach people one on one. It is a free service and you can find out more information or sign-up for that at the Information Center. The second is Dave Ramsay's, Financial Peace University. We ran that program this past winter and we are going to run it again after the new year again as part of our class offerings on Wednesday evenings. Just a great program, a thirteen-week program, to help you get your finances in order. There will be more information about that program as we approach the new year.

Well, a very tough personal topic but before we conclude in a word of prayer, let me just share a cartoon with you to lighten up the load. *Cartoon shared*. That is the best sermon on giving I have ever heard. Oh my, yeh, somebody's got to like it. Would you pray with me?