

Challenges Christians Face

Concerning the Collection – Part 4

1 Corinthians 16:1-4

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Scripture

We continue our study in *The First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians* in a series I am calling *Challenges Christians Face*.

One of the challenges that Christians face is the issue of finances. Four weeks ago I began a section *Concerning the Collection*. My intention is to preach four messages on the biblical principles of financial stewardship with respect to giving to the Lord.

I would like to reiterate that these messages are intended to help Christians grow in this vital area of discipleship. I have no desire to lay guilt trips on you. I want to motivate you on the basis of God's Word to obedience in this area of your Christian life.

As I mentioned previously, the material for this series of messages comes from John MacArthur, whose teaching on the subject I have found particularly helpful.

So, with that in mind, let's read 1 Corinthians 16:1-4. In this text Paul gives us eight principles regarding financial stewardship:

¹ Now concerning the collection for the saints: as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do. ² 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. ³ And when I arrive, I will send those whom you accredit by letter to carry your gift to Jerusalem. ⁴ If it seems advisable that I should go also, they will accompany me. (1 Corinthians 16:1-4)

Introduction

A. *Money Can Be a Curse*

The Bible contains a number of warnings about money. Perhaps they are best summarized in a statement by the apostle Paul:

“For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils” (1 Timothy 6:10a).

Our Lord put it bluntly when he said, “You cannot serve God and money” (Matthew 6:24c).

Money, or rather, the love of money, you see, can be a curse.

Let me remind you of what the love of money can do to people. For the love of money, Achan brought defeat on the armies of Israel and death upon himself (Joshua 7).

For the love of money, Balaam sinned against God and tried to curse God’s people (Numbers 22:5-35).

For the love of money, Delilah betrayed Samson to the Philistines (Judges 16).

For the love of money, Gehazi lied to Naaman and Elisha, and became a leper (2 Kings 5:20-27).

For the love of money, Ananias and Sapphira became the first hypocrites in the first-century church, and they died on the spot (Acts 5:1-11).

For the love of money, Judas betrayed the Son of God and damned his own soul (Matthew 26:14-16, 47-50; 27:3-10).

For the love of money, many people have been cursed. In fact, the apostle Paul said, “But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction” (1 Timothy 6:9).

So, you see, the love of money can be a tremendous curse.

B. Money Can Be a Blessing

But while the love of money can be a curse, the Bible also teaches us that money can be a great blessing.

Proverbs 22:9 (NASB95) says that “he who is generous will be blessed.”

Proverbs 11:25 (NIV) says, “A generous man will prosper; he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed.”

Deuteronomy 15:7-11 says: “If among you, one of your brothers should become poor, in any of your towns within your

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land that the Lord your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart or shut your hand against your poor brother, but you shall open your hand to him and lend him sufficient for his need, whatever it may be. Take care lest there be an unworthy thought in your heart and you say, 'The seventh year, the year of release is near,' and your eye look grudgingly on your poor brother, and you give him nothing, and he cry to the Lord against you, and you be guilty of sin. You shall give to him freely, and your heart shall not be grudging when you give to him, because for this the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in all that you undertake. For there will never cease to be poor in the land. Therefore I command you, 'You shall open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy and to the poor, in your land.'"

So money can be a curse, or it can be a blessing. It all depends on the attitude we have toward money. If we have an attitude of sharing, an attitude of giving, we will be blessed. Remember, it was Jesus himself who said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35).

The Bible calls the wrong attitude toward money and possessions "covetousness," which is a dominant sin in human nature. In fact, not to covet is one of the Ten Commandments: "You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's" (Exodus 20:17).

Now covetousness is so basic to man that I would venture to say that it is probably the first sin to manifest itself in a child. We've all heard a child say, "That's mine!" or, "Give me that!" or, "I want that!" Covetousness is a problem with which we struggle all our lives.

Our society makes the problem even more difficult because it encourages covetousness. Advertisements tell us we need this, and we need that, and we deserve all these things, and it goes on and on. So it's a tough battle.

Some time ago I read about a Roman Catholic priest who said that he had listened to confessions throughout his entire minis-

try and that he had heard confessions to every known sin—except the sin of covetousness. Isn't that interesting?

Covetousness is a subtle sin and one that robs us of the liberty to give the way God wants us to give. Consequently, God cannot bless us in the way that he would like. Romans 7:7-8a says, "What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, 'You shall not covet.' But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness." In other words, Paul said, "The thing that woke me up to my sinfulness was when I saw the sin of coveting and realized that I was a coveter."

But later on in his life, Paul said, "I coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel" (Acts 20:33). Do you know what happened? The Lord gave him victory over coveting in his life.

We have to have the right attitude toward money, and the right attitude is not coveting. The right attitude is a liberal, free, willing, sacrificial heart. That's what Paul is after in 1 Corinthians 16:1-4.

Review

Let's briefly review what I have covered so far.

I. The Purpose of Giving (16:1)

First, we looked at the purpose of giving.

The purpose of giving as stated in verse 1 is "**for the saints,**" that is, for the church. The church is to fund its own ministry and needs. More specifically, as you study Scripture you discover that all giving falls essentially into two categories: to support the ministry of the Word and the ministry of mercy.

II. The Period of Giving (16:2a)

Second, the period of giving.

Our giving is to be **“on the first day of every week”** (v. 2a). It is to be systematic, week after week, so that we come to grips with the stewardship of our money. Even though we may only give once a month, if we receive a pay check once a month, we should nevertheless be sensitive to our financial stewardship every week.

III. The Participants in Giving (16:2b)

Third, the participants in giving.

Paul says that **“each of you** is to put something aside” (v. 2b). No-one is exempt from giving. No matter how poor you are, if you have *anything*, you have *something* to give. Giving is to be a spontaneous, cheerful response of a loving heart toward God who, in his grace, has given us everything.

IV. The Place of Giving (16:2c)

Fourth, the place of giving.

The Greek word for **“store it up”** (v. 2c) is *thesaurizo*, from which we get the English word “thesaurus.” It has to do with a treasury. We are to give systematically and cheerfully to the treasury of the church on the first day of the week. The money collected is then to be distributed by godly leaders.

V. The Proportion of Giving (16:2d)

Fifth, we spent quite some time looking at the proportion of giving.

How much should we give? Paul says that the Christian’s giving should be **“as he may prosper”** (v. 2d). There is no amount or percentage indicated here. We give to God out of what he has entrusted to us.

You say, “Well, how do I know what to give if it is not 10%?” Throughout the Scriptures the principle for freewill giving is always the same: *give as your heart prompts you to give*. 2 Co-

inthians 9:7 says: “Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”

We find the same principle in the Old Testament. In Exodus 25:1-2 we read: “The Lord said to Moses, ‘Speak to the people of Israel, that they take for me a contribution. From every man whose heart moves him you shall receive the contribution for me.’”

So, give as your heart prompts you to give.

Lesson

Now, let’s conclude with three final principles **“concerning the collection.”**

VI. The Provocation for Giving (16:2e)

Sixth, let’s look at the provocation for giving.

Paul said, “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**” (v. 2e).

Paul didn’t want giving to be provoked by an emotional appeal when he arrived. He wanted giving to be in the flow of faithful, week-by-week giving.

Giving should be in the flow of life, not as the result some emotional appeal on a periodic basis. Christians need to learn this because so many Christians do not know the meaning of systematic, week-by-week, sacrificial giving. They wait for some kind of a spiritual goose bump or emotional “zap” from some appeal; then they give. So, they don’t understand the meaning of faithfulness in their giving.

Now there are times when we should give to meet a need immediately, and that’s exciting; but that’s over and above our normal giving. Those opportunities are something beyond the normal flow of systematic faithfulness.

VII. The Protection in Giving (16:3)

Seventh, let's see the protection in giving.

Paul said in verse 3: **“And when I arrive, I will send those whom you accredit by letter to carry your gift to Jerusalem.”**

Paul says, “Once you have given the money, I’m going to put it in the hands of some people that you’ve approved along with accompanying letters that state their trustworthiness.”

Money given to the church is to be cared for by approved men who are godly. That’s the protection in the church.

You say, “But what does that have to do with the church?” Just this: I believe that as you give systematically and faithfully into the treasury of the church, it is incumbent upon the church to choose godly men to care for God’s funds.

In the first-century church, who was it that handled all the money? The apostles did (cf. Acts 4:35). The people didn’t give the money to somebody who didn’t have the spiritual qualification to handle it. They didn’t give it to the bankers or to the people with a background in finance or accounting or business. They gave it to godly men who were the spiritual leaders of the church, some of whom, by the way, did have a background in finance and business. But that was not the primary qualification for leadership in the church; the primary qualification was spiritual.

Now later, the apostles became so busy that they said, “Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word” (Acts 6:3-4).

What we have here is what many Bible scholars call the first election of deacons. The apostles, the spiritual leaders of the church, turned over the responsibility for collecting and distributing the finances to the deacons. The deacons took care of some of the material needs in the church. Notice, by the way, that the deacons were also required to have spiritual maturity.

Now, it is important to recognize that the deacons came

alongside the apostles, the spiritual leaders of the church, to assist them in the ministry of mercy. The apostles had already decided that the money was to be spent on taking care of the widows. They had set the financial priorities. The role of the deacons was to assist in the collection and distribution of the funds.

Now, of course, we no longer have apostles in the church. The special office of the apostle ceased to exist when the last of Jesus' apostles died. Instead, the church is governed by elders who, in our Presbyterian church, govern as a Session. The Session sets the budget for the church. And the Diaconate comes alongside the Session to assist in the collection and distribution of the funds. There is cooperation as the Session sets the budgeting priorities, and the Diaconate then collects and distributes the funds. This is a beautiful picture reflecting what the first century church did.

The principle here is that the funds should be put in the hands of the godly men in the church. Paul said, "Look, you find the men that have proved trustworthy, get the letters of approval together, and I'll send them with the money."

Let the money be entrusted to godly men who prayerfully, in the energy of the Holy Spirit, determine its distribution. That's the protection in giving.

VIII. The Perspective in Giving (v. 4)

And finally, notice the perspective in giving.

Paul said in verse 4: **"If it seems advisable that I should go also, they will accompany me."**

It would seem that Paul was making his service available to the Corinthian church. If the church wanted him to accompany their gift to the church in Jerusalem, then he would do so. He was quite open to their suggestions regarding his involvement in the disbursement of the funds.

Conclusion

For the past four weeks now we have looked at what the Bi-

ble has to say “**concerning the collection.**” Let me make a few points of application.

First, determine your current level of giving. Do you know how much you are giving? What percentage is that of your income? You ought to know how much you are giving. Let me encourage you to base your giving to the church at 10% of your income. Some of you are giving at least that—and more. That’s great! But others of you are saying, “How in the world do you think I can give 10% of my income to the church?” That brings me to my second point of application.

Second, determine to live sacrificially. Many of us don’t pay attention to the money that we spend. We spend money on all kinds of things, and sometimes, things that are really unnecessary.

Let me suggest why I think we need to live sacrificially. We need to live sacrificially because there is a world to win for Christ. There are thousands of people in our very own community who need to hear the good news of the gospel. We have just added a Pastoral Intern to help us reach people with the gospel. It takes money to add staff. It takes money to spread the gospel.

Determine to live sacrificially so that we can pay for our additional staff, in order to communicate the gospel to the growing thousands in our community and around the world.

How do you live sacrificially? Well, it may mean taking the money you would spend on something non-essential and giving it to the church. You may want to sacrifice a cup of Starbucks coffee, a fancy meal, a concert, an entertainment outing, a lavish vacation, or whatever is really unnecessary and give it to the church. You are then sacrificing something for the sake of the kingdom of God.

And third, determine to increase your giving. Let me also suggest that instead of paying all your other bills first, give to God first. God has promised to bless you if you give to God (see Malachi 3:10). But, what happens is that some people pay all their other expenses first, and then decide that they don’t have enough left over to give much to God. And then they wonder why God is not blessing them with the ability to give more to him. As I said, first

give to God, and then notice how God wonderfully meets all your other needs.

Writing in about 125 AD, a Christian philosopher by the name of Aristides looked at Christianity and said this:

They walk in all humility and kindness, and falsehood is not found among them, and they love one another. They despise not the widow, and grieve not the orphan. He that has distributes liberally to him that has not. If they see a stranger, they bring him under their roof, and rejoice over him, as if he were their own brother: for they call themselves brethren, not after the flesh, but after the spirit and in God; but when one of their poor passes away from the world, and any of them see him, then he provides for his burial according to his ability; and if they hear that any of their number is imprisoned or oppressed for the name of their Messiah, all of them provide for his needs, and if it is possible that he may be delivered, they deliver him. And if there is among them a man that is poor and needy, and they have not an abundance of necessaries, they fast two or three days that they may supply the needy with their necessary food.

May this be said of us! I pray that we will take what the Scripture has taught us and apply it to our lives. May God show us where we need to make changes so that we may give of the riches he has given to us for the sake of his kingdom. Amen.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and **membership** in his church family,
develop them to Christlike **maturity**,
equip them for their **ministry** in the church
and life **mission** in the world,
in order to **magnify** God's name.*

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PRAAYER:

Almighty God, thank you for your Word. Thank you for the Apostle Paul's clarity on this issue concerning the collection for the saints.

Help us to evaluate our giving in light of your Word. And prompt us to give in a way that advances your kingdom.

And for this I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

BENEDICTION:

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.

CHARGE:

Now, brothers and sisters, as you leave here today, remember that you are stewards of the gifts that God has given to you!