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A1319 – May 12, 2012 1 Corinthians 16:1-9
Collections & The Will Of God

Moving on from the greatest chapter on resurrection, 1 Corinthians 15, turn with me today to 1 Corinthians 16. Paul has one more issue to address from the letter they had written to him and to which he is responding. The opening words of 1 Corinthians 16:1, **Now concerning**, which Paul has used in 7:1, 8:1 and 12:1 he now repeats again. The expression is Paul's way of signaling that he is shifting topics. The topic he now shifts to concerns how collections are to be made for the saints of Jerusalem.

Apparently the Corinthians had developed a novel way of making collections that was not the way collections were being taken in the churches of Galatia and they wanted to know if Paul considered it legitimate. Paul recommends, **Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so do you also.** They should follow the same procedure of collections for the saints as the church of Galatia. The Church of Corinth was always developing novel practices that distinguished them from other local churches Paul had planted. Paul didn't want local churches to distinguish themselves by novel practices. When they did it only made visitors from other local churches uncomfortable. Paul wanted local churches to have the same practices so that Christianity had a unified testimony wherever it was in the Roman world. Distinguishing oneself is a sign of a superior attitude which betrays the underlying sin pattern of arrogance. The Church at Corinth had all the signs of a superior attitude underlying arrogance. Paul has tried to humble them in three basic ways.

1. By equating the believers at Corinth with the believers of all other churches (cf 1:2).
2. By contrasting the humble servant lifestyle of the apostles with the arrogant selfish lifestyle of the Corinthians (cf 4:6ff).

3. By reminding them of universal practices in local churches (cf 11:16).

Local churches do not need to develop novel practices, they need to be biblical. Novelty comes and goes but the word of God stands forever. Churches that invent novel practices reveal the underlying sin of arrogance. Furthermore, these novel practices typically undermine or substitute for the focal point being fine exegetical teaching of the word of God. In the end, novelty is powerless to create lasting changes in men while the word of God is powerful to change men forever. Therefore novelty is irrelevant but the word of God is entirely relevant. Novelty may catch people's attention but it is nothing more than a fleeting fad, the word of God is forever. Therefore, the Church at Corinth needed to depart from their novel practice of taking up collections and follow the same procedure all the churches of Galatia practiced. Following such universal practice would reveal humility and a unified Christian testimony from church to church throughout the Roman world.

Now observe that these collections were being taken up **for the saints**. They did not take up collections for non-saints, but for saints. These saints happened to be at Jerusalem as we see in verse 3. Paul taught that the church should always take care of its own first and then others. In Gal 6:10 Paul says, "do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith." Therefore we are to especially do good to the saints, not humanitarian causes, not alma maters, not secular charities, not organizations, but the saints. After that we might do good on occasion for others.

On the flipside of this truth is that churches should only receive money from saints. We should not let the work of God be supported by those who are not the people of God. If we accept support from pagans then pagans can say that the only way we keep our Christian organization running is because they are supporting us. Therefore the church should reject money and other assets from non-believers.

Finally in verse 1, who are **the saints**? Saints are all believers not a special class of believers like so many religious sects and cults have claimed. One of the hallmarks of heretical teaching is that they will reserve the use of the word saint for a superior class of religious people who claimed to have done

miracles or rose through the ranks of a secret indoctrination program. But Scripturally, all believers are saints. The moment a person puts their faith alone in Christ who is the Son of God who died for their sins and rose again, they are a saint. Saint comes from the Greek word for holy and means “set apart.” Through the gospel God sets apart all who have believed so that they are positionally saints before him. It does not have anything to do with a degree of holiness a person has attained through good works, miracles or otherwise, it is a standing that God gives to all believers free of charge at the moment of faith alone in His Son.

And the saints here in Corinth are being encouraged to follow the same collection procedure as the churches in Galatia that Paul had established. Verse 2 gives the collection procedure in the 1st century. **On the first day of every week each one of you is to put aside and save, as he may prosper, so that no collections be made when I come.** There are four aspects to the procedure. First, **On the first day of every week.** When is the first day of the week? The first day of the Jewish timetable began at sunset on Saturday night but the first day of the Roman timetable began at sunrise on Sunday morning. Which timetable is Paul using? It is difficult to be dogmatic. Corinth had Jewish and Gentile believers. However, since the city of Corinth was a Roman city he is probably referring to the Roman timetable where the first day of the week was Sunday. Furthermore, as the early church gradually became dominated by Gentile believers the regular meeting was held on Sunday to commemorate the Lord’s resurrection. Some people in the early church began referring to Sunday as the Lord’s day to remember the resurrection.

Second, on Sunday they were to **put aside and save.** This simply means to take what you intend to give and put it in a special savings designated for the collection. Believers then and now need to carefully monitor their spending habits and live on a budget.

Third, how much should a person put aside and save? **As he may prosper.** The Greek verb *euodow* is passive indicative of the prospering which the Lord has given. The word means “as you succeed” or “in proportion as you succeed.” A person may be able to set aside and save \$1 a week or \$100,000 a week. But according as a person is prospered so he should set aside and save. Why?

Fourth, **so that no collections be made when Paul comes.** The principle is quite simple, save some each week so that you will not have to make a large withdrawal from your bank account later. We don't know what practice the Corinthian's were introducing but this is the procedure they should follow and was being followed by the churches in Galatia which Paul planted.

Now it is significant that Paul does not mention the tithe. This is not a tithe. The word "tithe" means "a tenth" and that's where people came up with the idea that we are supposed to give 10%. But Paul doesn't use that word. He doesn't say give 10%. He says give as you are prospered. And giving as you are prospered is very different than paying a tithe. The tithe was an OT tax levied on every Israeli citizen who was male and over 20 years of age. And it was not just 10%. There were three taxes in Israel that amount to the total amount which averaged out to be 23 1/3% annually. But there is no tithe for the NT Church because the NT Church is not a nation. We are a people from every nation. The Church and Israel are distinct. So in OT Israel there was an obligatory "tithe" for all citizens who were male and over 20 years of age but in the Church there is voluntary "giving" as you are prospered and these are clearly different systems.

Now as I said the tithe in OT Israel amounted to 23 1/3 percent of your annual produce, not your assets, land was an asset and it wasn't taxed, no property tax, all that was taxed was your produce. There were three taxes or tithes, three tenths. The first tithe or tenth was an annual tenth of your total income that was given to the Levites, they were the tribe chosen to be priests and they were the Bible teachers in the land. They were given a tenth because when the land was parceled out to the twelve tribes every tribe was given land except Levi. Therefore they didn't have any land, they didn't raise any crops. Their job was to serve YHWH on behalf of the people and teach the Bible. So since the Levites didn't have any assets the other tribes were to give an annual 10% of their produce to support the Levites.

The second tithe or tenth was an annual tenth of your total income that was given for a big party in Jerusalem. The Lord wanted them to go up and buy whatever they wanted and just have a good time, enjoy Him. Too often people think God is like a big stone statue sitting in heaven all stone faced and cold. Baloney, these people need to read the Bible. The Lord knows how to have a

good time. So this was a real splurge, buy whatever you want but remember to do all this to the Lord, rejoice in Him, He gave you the abundance now give thanks. So the second tithe was another 10%, now we're up to 20% of your annual production, not assets, assets were not taxed, only income.

The third tithe or tenth was not an annual tithe but a tithe every third year. So another 10% every third year which averages out to 3 1/3% per year. This was given to local Levites, local aliens and local orphans and widows. So it was a local tax and some people have tried to get social welfare out of this but the problem is that it was not based on social status. It was based on judicial status. Judicially these people could not have title to land, they were not allowed by law to hold land titles. So every third year they would receive a tenth. The person could be rich, they could have a business and be making millions of dollars a year. That didn't matter. What mattered was they could have no title to land and therefore they would receive a tenth from the local citizens.

So there are your three tithes for OT Israel; 10% for the Levites annually, 10% for a big party in Jerusalem annually and 10% every three years for locals who can't hold land titles. And if you do the math then they average out to 23 1/3% annually. Now that's a very interesting system. It was a national tax system that was obligatory on all citizens! Is that the system we're supposed to follow in the Church? Are we really under that? Where are all the NT passages discussing this if we are under it?

We are not under it. And if someone asks you, "Say, do you tithe?" You say, "No, tithing was a national tax in OT Israel and it averaged out to 23 1/3% annually. Do you tithe?" And see what kind of response you get. The bottom line is there is no tithe for the Church. The tithe system was a national tax system for Israel. We are not the nation Israel, we are the Church and we are under a different system called voluntary giving according as you are prospered. As our doctrinal statement reads, "The Scriptural way of raising money for the support of God's work, whether in the Gospel or for the benefit of His saints, is by voluntary offerings by believers, all schemes violating this principle being wrong." When I say schemes I mean garage sales, fundraisers, brewing beer, selling hats, we don't do any of those schemes that may draw in the money of unbelievers because then the unbelievers can turn around and say, "Well, their operation is still going because we propped them up." So we

don't accept money raised through schemes that may bring in the money of unbelievers. We depend entirely upon voluntary offerings of believers who are responding to Bible doctrine and they want to say thanks to the Lord and keep this ministry going because this ministry is teaching Bible doctrine.

And that basically finishes up verse 2. They should voluntarily put aside and save some money on each Sunday as they are prospered so that when Paul came they wouldn't have to make a big withdrawal from their bank account.

Verse 3, When I arrive, whomever you may approve, I will send them with letters to carry your gift to Jerusalem; 4and if it is fitting for me to go also, they will go with me. Now let's take these verses apart.

First, we are alerted to the fact that Paul is planning to visit them. This is the second indication Paul is planning to come. And we might say a word about planning. There are two errors Christians make with planning. One error is the Christian who says, well, I never plan because the Bible says you shouldn't plan. That's misconstruing what the Bible teaches. These people never get anything done because they just sit around like lazy bums. The Bible does not teach that we should not plan. The other error is the Christian who plans everything and then gets upset when things don't go according to plan. Both are wrong, both are sinful. The proper Christian doctrine on planning is that you plan what you are going to do but then if that plan doesn't go as scheduled then you adjust to God's schedule. Proverbs says it this way, "A man plans his ways, but the Lord directs his steps." It's fine to plan, it's just that we need to be willing to adjust when things aren't going according to our plan, we need to recognize that God can send us a few curveballs and if He does we just adjust to Him, we don't get arrogant and get mad and expect God to adjust to us. I think one of the simplest adjustments you can make in your life to bring the stress level down is to learn to adjust to God's plan each day. And those of you who are too bullheaded to admit that you're not God and you don't control history are just going to have to suffer until you learn to face up to the facts and get with God's program. You see here in vv 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and especially 7 that Paul had plans to come and stay with the Corinthians for some time, if the Lord permits. So Paul planned to come but he knew that God may send him a curveball and he might have to leave earlier than he wants. And Paul's not going to throw a hissy over it if that happens. Paul was willing and ready to adjust and you should be too. It will make life a lot easier.

Now verse 3, **When I arrive, whomever you may approve, I will send them with letters to carry your gift to Jerusalem;** The Greek word **approve** means someone who has passed the test, someone who has a proven track record of reliability and faithfulness. In this context it's someone who can handle money faithfully, they're not given to economic lust, they're not going to take the money and run. They're going to deliver it just as planned. Paul's going to send them **with a letter** so that the saints at Jerusalem understand who these people are, that they are believers and not some secular group trying to get a good word in with God, they're just believers who are giving to the saints at Jerusalem who are obviously in need.

Now if you turn to Acts 11:27 you see why the saints in Jerusalem were in need. And the way this problem was solved was interchurch; independent local churches began to cooperate with one another to solve a problem. Verse 27, "Now at this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. ²⁸One of them named Agabus stood up and *began* to indicate by the Spirit that there would certainly be a great famine all over the world." The word "world," *oikoumenos*, refers to the Roman Empire, "And this took place in the *reign* of Claudius." Claudius Caesar reigned from 41-54AD, so this was the problem, it was a famine in the Roman world and Paul is writing to the Corinthians in 56AD, it's two years after Claudius' reign but the effects of this famine were still being felt and the hardest hit region was Judea because you see verse 29, "And in the proportion that any of the disciples had means, each of them determined to send *a contribution* for the relief of the brethren living in Judea. ³⁰And this they did, sending it in charge of Barnabas and Saul to the elders." So there were several years when the Roman Empire was facing economic distress because of a series of famines, these are recorded in Josephus and Seutonius and Orosius. And the worst famine effects were in Judea and Jerusalem so you find saints in local churches throughout the Roman Empire cooperating with one another in making contributions to the saints in Jerusalem. You see it prophesied in Acts 11 and it's the after effects of the famine that's we're seeing in 1 Cor 16.

So Paul says, whoever you approve, I will send them with letters to Jerusalem so they know they're getting relief from fellow believers. Now he also says in verse 4, **and if it is fitting for me to go also, they will go with me.** In other words, if you consider it appropriate that I travel with

them then I'll travel with them. If not, Paul would say, fine, I trust your judgment. Paul wanted each local congregation to be autonomous and handle their own contributions the way they wanted to without him interfering. Paul held to the independence of the local church and not all this hierarchy business you find in Roman Catholicism and so many Protestant denominations. Just let these people do with their money what they want to do rather than sending it up some organizational chain for them to do who knows what with. So Paul has politely given them the final say. And if they want Paul to stay out of it, fine, if they don't mind Paul traveling with those approved then that's fine too. But if Paul was able to travel with them then Paul would disciple them. Paul would use the days and hours of travel to train them in Bible doctrine.

Verse 5, **But I will come to you after I go through Macedonia, for I am going through Macedonia;** ⁶**and perhaps I will stay with you, or even spend the winter, so that you may send me on my way wherever I may go.** ⁷**For I do not wish to see you now *just* in passing; for I hope to remain with you for some time, if the Lord permits.** ⁸**But I will remain in Ephesus until Pentecost;** ⁹**for a wide door for effective *service* has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.** Paul's plan, because Paul planned, was to stay in Ephesus, that's where he was when he wrote this letter. He had been in Ephesus for probably close to two years and he was planning on staying in **Ephesus until Pentecost**. Now Pentecost is late Spring so he's going to stick around Ephesus until late Spring. Then he's planning to leave Ephesus and travel to **Macedonia** and go strengthen the churches there for the Summer, he's following up with churches he already planted like Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea. Paul didn't stick around and hold people's hands, he evangelized them and followed up quickly with training, then he left them and returned later to check on them, strengthen them and leave again. So when he goes through Macedonia his plan for the Summer and much of the Fall is to strengthen those churches. Finally, at the end of the Fall he's planning to make his way to Corinth where he says in verse 6 he hopes to **stay with** them and perhaps even **spend the winter**. Winter wasn't a good time to travel by sea so you basically stayed put. So Paul hoped to be there and he could set some of these problems in order that he's addressing in the letter. That's Paul's plan but you see in verse 7 it's all contingent on **if the Lord permits**. Paul knew and I know and I hope you know that history is up to Him. It's not up to you. You can make plans but

those plans only succeed **if the Lord permits**. He may very well have a different plan and you'll have to adjust.

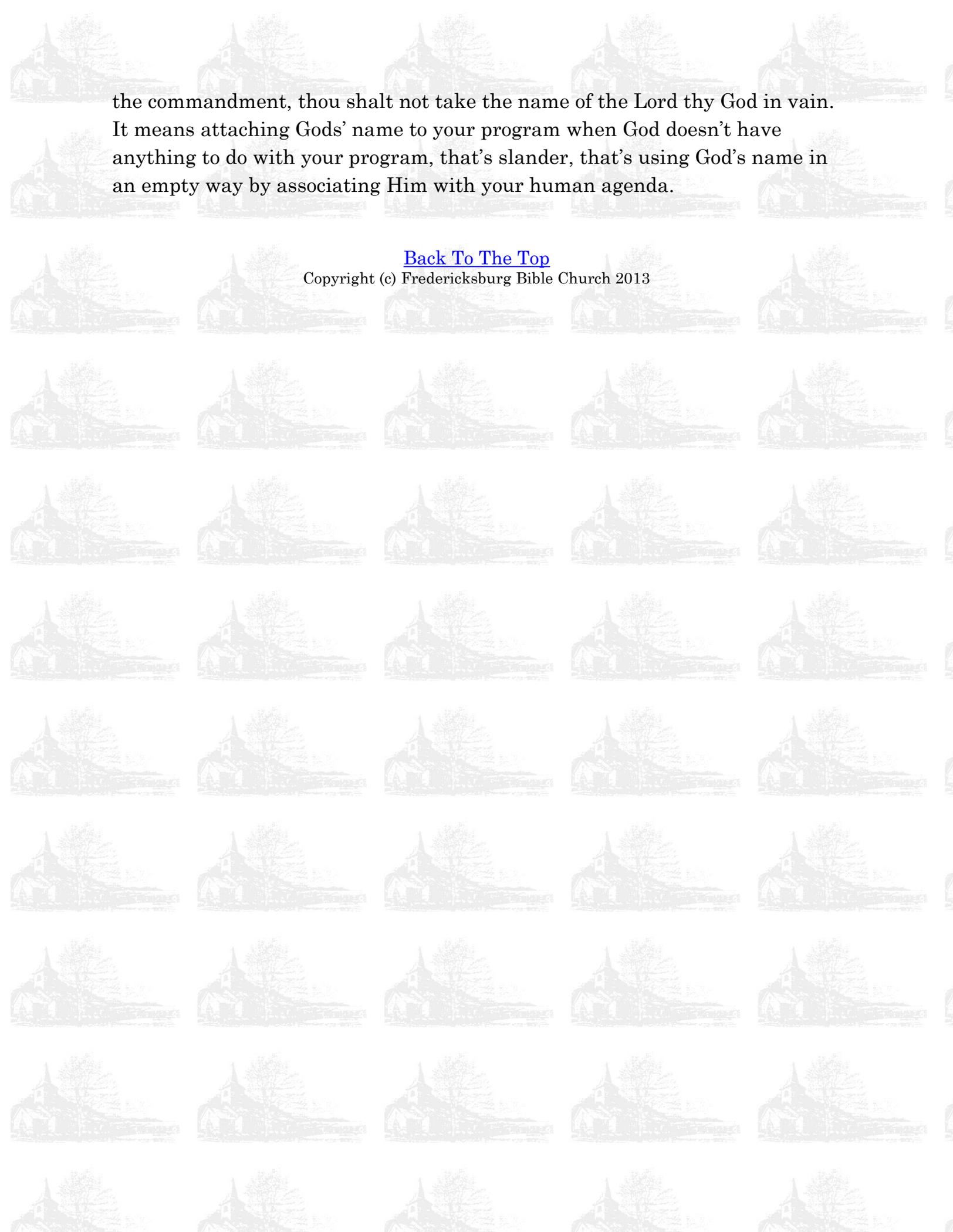
Now I want to spend the rest of our time on that last phrase in verse 9. Paul wanted to stay in Ephesus for a certain reason that if you read to fast you miss but is very important. **For a wide door for effective service has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.** Now he's talking about his ministry in Ephesus which was the one place Paul spent the longest time. He spent more than 2 ½ years in Ephesus. When he first tried to go in toward Ephesus he was turned off by the Holy Spirit, it was not the time to go in and minister at Ephesus. Later when it was time he met some strange Jewish disciples in the region, they had been baptized by John years before promising to believe in the one who was coming after him, that is, in Jesus. But they had left the land before Jesus was pointed out by John. So they were believers but they had not believed in Jesus, they were lacking some information. So Paul provided the information and of course they believed it and were baptized by the Spirit into the Church. Then he went into the synagogue at Ephesus for three months; he had three long months working with those Jews and proselytes to Judaism to preach the kingdom and then there was a division and so Paul took his disciples that he was training and he started training them daily in the school of Tyrannus. For two years Paul taught in that school, five or six days a week from noon to 5pm (that was their siesta, people didn't work in the hot of the day in the ancient world, they worked from sunup to lunch, then they took a siesta till about 6pm when it cooled off again and they went back to work till sundown). So Paul just set up shop in this school during the siesta and taught Bible for five hours a day, five or six days a week. So powerful was this Bible teaching schedule that Luke reports "all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks." So powerful was it that many who were magicians brought their books with their secret incantations that they used to converse with demons and they were confessing them; that is openly reading their incantations, which was to destroy the efficacy of the incantation, these incantations had to remain secret, so by openly confessing them they were destroying the power of the incantations and they were burning the magic books and the price of the books is put in there, it was millions of dollars. And this was all because of Paul's ministry at Ephesus. It was a powerful ministry; it was what Paul called here **a wide door for effective service**. But Paul also had **many adversaries** at Ephesus. And it was just a matter of time before the word of

God made such inroads in Ephesus that there was an explosion. And the short story is that Paul's ministry of the word was so effective that people were changing the way they were spending their money. Rather than buying the little pagan trinkets that were so popular they started spending their money on things that were valuable and this was upsetting certain businessmen that were making a lot of money of these little pagan trinkets. And so the gospel was affecting their wallet and whenever you affect someone's wallet you can be sure you're going to have a war on your hand. So it happened and Demetrius led an attack against Paul and the Christians and they dragged them into the theater. It's a massive theater, seats 25,000 and it's still there today. They yelled and rioted and this went on for about two hours and the whole thing was chaos so the Roman officer responsible for keeping law and order said that's it and he shut the whole thing down. That's what Paul means by these **many adversaries**. Great ministry but lots of **adversaries**.

Now what I want to point out to you is that most people would say if they have **adversaries** that's a door closing. God is clearly closing the door. People like to try and read God's will that way, if it's hard then God is telling me to move on, if it's easy, that's God's will. That's not how Paul determined the will of God. Paul said, I've got **adversaries** and that means I'm doing something right, the word of God is scoring points. That's not a closed door, that's a wide open door. And it's easy to see how this is so. The gospel and the word of God are offensive and if you're putting it out there day after day, year after year it's going to have repercussions and people in the community are going to get mad and people in the community are going to ostracize you and people in the community are going to spout off their mouth against you and people are going to leave the church and spew rumors and all I have to say is praise God because that means the word of God is landing punches and I don't worry about those people because they're just a bunch of whiny bags, that's all they are, wha, wha, wha. What they really don't like is the word of God and when the word of God is taught it gets under their skin so they throw a hissy. The commentary is on them, not me. And if I didn't get resistance by teaching the word here, and I do get resistance, but if I didn't get resistance I'd just quit because the door would be closing. But as long as I get resistance, as long as people are upset about this part of the word of God or this teaching of the word of God then I say great, at least the word of God is making waves, it's therefore still an arena of effective service. And in your

personal life if you're not getting resistance you better go check and see if you really are living the Christian life, maybe you're just trying to keep the storm at bay by being so nice and sweet but you never challenge anyone with the gospel, you never comment on the pagan filth that is coming out of these people's mouths. So it may be calm but you don't want it calm, you want people to think about the gospel, to think about what God says and if you're not getting that you better go check and see if you're really a living witness because if you're not you're supposed to be. If people can't tell you're totally different from every other Tom, Dick and Harry then you probably are not living the Christian life and speaking up when the Spirit gives you an opportunity. And then when you start hearing cries from the enemy camp, you'll know the word of God is scoring points. And so don't ever confuse the easy way out with the will of God, Paul didn't. 1 Cor 16:9 is the verse. Paul said the presence of many adversaries means the ministry of the word is scoring points, it's God's will, effective service, time well spent. Let's be honest, the easy way out that appears to be a wide open door, that's your will, that's just you doing what you want to do so you can lead a tranquil life and have 500 friends who are a mile wide and an inch deep.

So then there are two things today. First, we are not operating under the tithe but under voluntary giving as you are prospered. The tithe was a national tax for Israel. They had three taxes, one annual tenth for the Levites, another annual tenth for a big party to enjoy the Lord in Jerusalem and one tenth every third year for the local Levites, widows, orphans and strangers in the land. So 10% is clearly out the door, try 23 1/3%. However, we are not operating under the tithe but under the principle of voluntary giving according as one is prospered. And if you appreciate the word of God and you want to show thanks then you give to support this local ministry so this ministry can help other believers, so this ministry can spread the word of God to others who may need the gospel or may need training or don't have good Bible teaching where they live (e.g. live streaming, DVD, digital libraries, conferences, etc...). Second, having enemies and going through hard times is not an indicator that you are out of the will of God or God is closing a door. For Paul it was exactly the reverse. He knew that the word of God was making waves and therefore it was an open door, wide open for effective ministry. So don't try to interpret God's will by identifying the easy route and following that. That is probably your will and you're just following what you want and saying that's God's will, which by the way is one of the meanings of



the commandment, thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain. It means attaching Gods' name to your program when God doesn't have anything to do with your program, that's slander, that's using God's name in an empty way by associating Him with your human agenda.

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