

1 Corinthians 16 (1-4) – This is How to Practice Giving

There are many ways we can and are supposed to show our love for God, but one of the hardest ways for many is to learn to love God (and His people and His work) with our wallet. There seem to be so many pronouncements about giving, and how much are we supposed to give, and people who manipulate others into giving by telling them of some supposedly promised reward, it can be hard to really know what we are supposed to do, if anything. We can become so cynical or perhaps so complacent that we fail to really investigate what God's Word has to say about it.

So let's investigate for a moment. If you were a journalist asking the Apostle Paul about giving you would likely use the time tested method of asking: Who, What, When, Where, Why, and How. Our text today answers all these simple, but important questions. This text is not everything *about* the subject, or the last word *on* the subject, but it is foundational *to* the subject. This is biblically based instruction on *this* subject from *this* text of scripture. I mean not only to convict you, but to convince you about giving so that you may be confident that you are doing the right thing, in the right way, for the right reasons. God's Word will make it clear for us.

In fact, the Corinthians were investigating. "*Now concerning*" refers to questions that they had asked Paul (cf. 1 Corinthians 7:1, 8:1, 12:1). This "collection" is also mentioned in Romans 15:26, 2 Corinthians 8:1, Acts 11:29, 24:17. Some might think that because Paul addresses a specific need (a gift for Jerusalem) that this was only a temporal, local requirement. However, the rest of the NT argues against that (cf. Galatians 2:10) and this text teaches us some important principles regarding offerings in the church. It is to be a regular part of our worship.

Who is supposed to give? *each of you* (vs.2) – it is personal, we all have a responsibility to do give. A household may give a combined gift, based on whether there are one or more sources of income. If a young Christian has a part-time job, they should contribute from that. Parents should teach their children the principles of giving from their earliest years. Youngsters should be instructed as to how to budget their income (be it an allowance, paper route, etc.). Even the retired person on a fixed income should not exempt themselves from this. Every Christian with an income should express their devotion to God in the grace of giving (cf. 2 Corinthians 8:1-7).

Of course, a few rich people can raise the necessary amounts the church needs but this misses other important aims. When everyone gives this promotes fellowship, and it is a true picture of the power of the gospel, with everyone sharing in gratitude, and increasing the ability of our gifts to help others. In our giving we remember that we are part of the same body, and each part supplies the needs of the other. As we give, we become agents for God to bless others, and we cause them to glorify God and to give thanks to Him and to pray for us. Cheerful giving is one of the concrete ways in which the transforming work of God can be seen in our lives. We live in a world where greed is the rule and the church is held in contempt. Yet there is one truth they cannot deny. Christians give the most to charity year after year. In this we see the life changing work of the Holy Spirit. You have much freedom in your giving, but you do have an obligation. Every believer is supposed to be a giver.

What are you supposed to give? *put something aside and store it up* (vs.2). There are three basic ways we give, by serving, supporting, and sacrifice for the work of the Lord. It is usually

put this way; that we give of our time, our talent, and our treasure. Here Paul is specifically referring to treasure, and that could mean other things we have such as goods, housing, land, food, and such. In this case, Paul is defining it as monetary giving. All of those other things, our time, our talent, and the other items we own and could give; these are all important, but they do not justify our neglect of giving financially to the work of God, the needs of people (Romans 12:13 / 2 Corinthians 8-9 / James 1:27 / 1 John 3:16-17), the living of the ministers (1 Corinthians 9:14 / Galatians 6:6 / 1 Timothy 5:17-18), and the advancement of the kingdom (Philippians 4:10-20). Amongst all our other giving, we are to put aside money to be given.

When are you supposed to give? *On the first day of every week* (vs.2). The early Christians assembled together at first daily (Acts 2:46), and then weekly (Acts 20:7). Paul explicitly says that giving was to be regular, systematic, week after week. We give according to plan more than according to whim. This was to be a continuous commitment, a spiritual discipline, not a one time, haphazard thing. We can give instantly, but we must give regularly. Sometimes it is necessary and right to make a special appeal and to have a special offering, but we would have less special appeals for special offerings if we made a regular practice out of regular giving. Paul told them that they need to become practiced at giving.

Giving “as the Lord leads” may be fine, but this doesn’t always mean we are to wait for that moment and “let Him lead us”. We can do that once in a while, or if we feel a strong urge to give, but this is about how He has already led, proportionate to our income. This is not so much about how you are feeling right then as much as it is about what you have determined before, not impulse giving, but planned giving. Make it a holy habit. Special giving is good, but we are not supposed to wait on special giving and neglect to do regular giving. Every Sunday it is to be done, but if you get paid once a month and want to give a lump sum equal to 4 weeks, then that is fine. The element of worship is not the act of “dropping a check into the plate”; rather, it is the act of setting it aside and giving it. That is the act of worship.

Where are you supposed to give? *the collection for the saints: as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do* (vs.1). To the church, and to approved leaders who give wisely to agreed upon places (vs.3-4). Paul indicates that trustworthy messengers should be chosen to carry the offering to Jerusalem, and if necessary, he would personally accompany the messengers. God’s ministers need to set safeguards over their own hearts, we need to be very circumspect in the way we handle God’s money.

Now why had Paul requested a collection for the needs of the Christians in Jerusalem, when there were also poor Christians elsewhere? There were certain factors that made the saints in Jerusalem, which prior to 70 AD was the center of the Christian church, poorer than the other churches. First they had suffered systematic persecution and discrimination more directly and more quickly than the Christians elsewhere. Their property was plundered, and many were put into prison. Notice that while Paul wants the money to be collected together, he does not mention pooling all of our money together in total. The Jerusalem church originally had all things in common, they sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. One reason they did this was that they were under heavy persecution and would be losing all their possessions anyway. There was also a famine in the land. While this common pooling of resources showed their love for one another, after a couple of decades, it probably had a

devastating long-term impact. All their property, investments, everything they might have derived income from was gone. None of the other churches did this, and the fact it is recorded as an historical oddity shows that it was not continued.

Under the Mosaic system, there was a treasury in the Temple (1 Chronicles 9:26, 28:1ff / Malachi 3:10). In Jesus' day, the outer court within the temple was also called the "treasury" (Mark 12:41 / Luke 21:1 / John 8:20), because it contained chests around the walls for Jewish contributions. Some were for the required gifts, and the others were for voluntary gifts. The local church is the modern day place of worship, the antitype of the Temple, and the church also has a "treasury" to facilitate its financial operations. Look at vs.2 – store it up, this word means to treasure it, to amass a reserve, and that obviously doesn't mean to hoard it for yourself. It is the same word as in Matthew 6:19-20, where we have a sort of play on words; do not treasure for yourself treasures on earth. We are to store it as treasure for heaven, and we do that by giving to the church. It is erroneous to suggest that Paul was merely urging people to save something "at home," or put it aside in a "special place", as this would have defeated the Apostle's purpose in not wanting to have to contact each Christian individually when he came.

The notion that one can simply free-lance our contributions, with no obligation to the local church, is not a biblical notion. Wherever else we may give, our weekly contribution to the local congregation should be unwavering. You can give to your heart's content to those organizations you deem worthy, but this doesn't lessen your obligation to your local church.

Why are we supposed to give? *for the saints* (vs.1): *so that there will be no collecting when I come* (vs.2). Paul mentions the needs of the saints in Jerusalem here, but in looking at the whole of the Bible we see that we are to give, as we said earlier, to the work of God, for the needs of people, the living of the ministers, and the advancement of the kingdom. Your giving stirs up more giving (2 Corinthians 8:4, 9:2).

Another vital truth we need to understand is that giving is an act of worship, and it leads to more worship. 2 Corinthians 9:11-14 – the word for "service" (ESV, vs.12) is where we get the word liturgy from. In the Old Testament, sacrifices to the Lord were designated as "gifts" (Numbers 18:11 / cf. Hebrews 5:1). When the wise men came to worship the baby Jesus, they presented gifts (Matthew 2:11). The term "fellowship" in Acts 2:42 included the act of giving (cf. Romans 15:26 / 2 Corinthians 9:13). When the Philippians gave their money for the support of Paul, God viewed it as "a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God." (Philippians 4:18). Hebrews 13:16 admonishes us to "share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God".

How (much) are we supposed to give? *as he may prosper* (vs.2). You will notice that Paul doesn't give a percentage or say exactly how much. This doesn't mean he is giving us an "out" by saying, "well, I am not prospering right now, so I won't give". No, he is speaking about being proportionate. In keeping with the idea of setting something aside, he is saying as you have prospered, and as you have purposed. Each Christian is to give "as he may prosper" or "according to his ability" (Acts 11:29). This is proportional giving.

Amazingly, some in the early church gave even beyond their ability (2 Corinthians 8:3), and they were commended for it. Those who have more should give more (both in amount and

percentage). When the more prosperous generously give of their abundance, to compensate for the deficit of the poorer folk, the type of “equality” that God desires among his people will prevail (see 2 Corinthians 8:12-15). The willingness of Christians to freely give is often an indication of the state of the spiritual health of a church. Now, sadly, it is the case that many Christians do not even come close to giving as the Lord enables them, and ultimately they end up impoverishing not only the church, but ultimately themselves. Instead, let us be guided by 2 Corinthians 9:7, remembering that as we do so we are laying up treasure in heaven.

Gratitude is spiritual warfare, and thanksgiving is spiritual worship. We must be renewed in our minds about this because it is our natural tendency to become complacent about what we have. We tend to adjust to the level of happiness or prosperity we have. We grow to expect it, to not even notice it. And then we want more. That’s why it’s so hard for people to come down in standard of living. It’s easy to move from a small apartment to a big house, but it seems so awful to do the reverse. Few people have a problem going from an old beat up car to a brand new luxury model, but we couldn’t stand to go the other direction.

This is the way it has always been. Adam and Eve had the whole Garden of Eden but it wasn’t enough when the devil brought a desire for more; we think it’s our right to have it right now. Satan also tempted Jesus in the same way. As fellow heirs of the Kingdom with Christ, we will have all the riches of glory one day. But for now God gives us increase, not simply so we can increase our standard of living, but so we can increase our standard of giving.

Of course, if we are careless with our money we will not prosper as good as we could, but this is why we are to set it aside, first, to make sure we get that accomplished. Indeed, the first thing we should do in getting our financial house in order is to get our giving straight, it will force us to examine things. We should take stock of just where our money is going. You can’t say that you have no money to give to God when you spent money on six lattes this week. Now you can buy six lattes and not be sinning, of course, but you should set aside the money for the church first and see if you have enough left for those lattes, or whatever the case may be.

Think about what Paul is saying about disciplined liberty in this passage. We regularly give requests to God for money sought; we should also regularly give reasons to God for money spent. It is okay to have things, but make sure the work of God is getting something too, set aside, stored up, treasured. If you had a treasure lying around the first thing you would do is to make sure it gets in a safe place, so get your giving to God set in a safe place, set it aside before all other spending, then you won’t have to make sorry excuses.

Make giving a part of your life, and be proactive by setting aside an amount to give before you spend it. Give in proportion to your income and resources (2 Corinthians 8:3, 12; 9:6-11), both when you have plenty (1 Timothy 6:17-19), and also when you have little (2 Corinthians 8:1-4). Give where there is careful handling and distribution (1 Corinthians 16:3). Change your lifestyle from “debt living” to “grace giving” (Ephesians 4:28). Paul has told us the “who, what, when, where, why and how” of giving. Everyone is supposed to give, money, every week, to the local church, because it helps others and is a form of worship, whereby we give out of gratitude to God, for the work of God, the needs of people, the living of the ministers, and the advancement of the kingdom. We give because God has given. See that you excel also in this grace.