

## The Essentially of Giving (#41)

1 Corinthians 16:1-6

This first epistle to the Corinthians begins with the statement in 1:9 that “God is faithful, by whom (we are) called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.” **This theme is then developed with accompanying words of correction and instruction to show that there pulsates throughout the whole Body of Christ one common resurrection life by the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit.** The letter finally concludes with these words, as seen in 15:58, 16:2, “Therefore, my beloved, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as you know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord. Now concerning the collection for the saints...Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him.”

**In the original Greek there is no break between what we call the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> chapters.** So Paul is virtually saying that a shared resurrection life in Christ is a serving life. The Lord Jesus gave Himself in death and resurrection, not in order to save us from sacrifice, but rather to teach us how to give ourselves and our substance in *continual* sacrifice. **Therefore, Paul finds no difficulty in moving from the theological heights of chapter 15 to the practical depths of chapter 16.**

**The occasion for this instruction in stewardship was a crisis in the church at Jerusalem.** Because of persecution and opposition, many believers had suffered the loss of their goods and some even the loss of their lives; and Paul felt it was his duty to provide financial assistance for such poverty-stricken saints in the mother church.

**Embedded in Paul’s admonition are principles that will abide for all time.** We will do well, therefore, to consider this essentially of giving in three aspects.

**First of all, there is the purposeful regularity of giving to God.** Verse 2 says, “Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store.” **Orderliness and regularity are two characteristics of our God. We see this in nature as well as in the church.** The word to His believing people is seen in 1 Corinthians 14:40, “Let all things be done decently and in order.”

We have been told to establish the habit of giving, “Upon the first day of the week.” **The history of the church reveals that “the first day of the week” quickly became the day of worship, giving, and service for the people of God.**

**Indeed, our text appears to be the earliest mention of this fact.** On what better day, therefore, could Christians take time to settle their accounts with God?

**In Old Testament times the tithe, generally speaking, was an annual tax; but in the New Testament we find that giving to God was to be a weekly contribution as an act of worship. In God’s wise economy this was to be the remedy for our lack of discipline, irregularity, and indifference in our acts of worship.** Oh, that God would indelibly impress on us this holy habit of giving on the first day of the week.

Gladis and Gordon De Pree get to the heart of the matter of our gifts to God, “Someone will raise the inevitable questions: Does God lack for anything? Why should I give to Him my limited means, my precious time, my one short life? Will make Him, owner of the universe, any richer? No. But it will make me, creature of God, more than a dead-end receptacle. It will make me a live being through which life flows back to God.”

**We also see the encouragement of the honor of giving.** He says, “Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store...that there be no gatherings when I come.” **All giving to God should be a matter of spiritual conviction, leading to practical expression.** Too often we have dishonored this holy habit by using carnal pressures to extract money from uninstructed and undisciplined Christians.

**The apostle Paul insists that giving is not only a holy habit but also a high honor.** That is why he wanted the collections to be made before his arrival in Corinth. He did not want their generosity to depend on his presence. **How far removed this is from the general practice in churches today. With shame we have to confess that often when the preacher is away we do not even attend, much less give to way we should.**

**It is obvious that purposeful regularity of giving to God is bound up with the habit and honor of this ministry.** We should never forget this essential principle in the matter of stewardship.

**Next, there is the personal responsibility of giving to God.** He says, “Let every one of you lay be him in store...” **Although these words are addressed to the whole church throughout time, they also have a particular relevance for the local assembly.** Paul was writing to the church of God which was at Corinth (1 Corinthians 1:2). **What was true of Corinth is also true of any local congregation today. With that in mind, I want you to notice two things.**

**First, we see the inclusiveness of this personal responsibility.** He says, “Let *every one* of you lay by him in store...” **No member is excluded. The words are specific and the application is inescapable.** Old and young, rich and poor, must all be involved in this matter of Christian stewardship. As Paul reveals later in 2 Corinthians 8:2, the churches of Macedonia gave liberally and did so out of “deep poverty” **Our Lord commended the widow’s mite to teach us that no one could be too poor to give, but he also received the wealth of Barnabas to demonstrate that no one could be too rich to sacrifice for God.**

**This principle of personal responsibility goes even deeper.** Money has an inclusiveness about it because God always associates the *gift* with the *giver*; **giving is essentially personal.** Money has no value whatsoever, unless it is the expression of life, labor, and love. **Furthermore, God has no favorites in His purpose of blessing, and since He wants to bless everyone He expects everyone to give.** This is why the Lord Jesus said in Acts 20:35, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.”

**We also see a directive concerning this personal responsibility.** He says, “...Let every one of you lay by him in store...” The Williams Translation reads this way, “On the first day of every week each of you must put aside and store up something in proportion as he is prospered.” **This is a matter which is deliberately and dedicatively set aside for the Lord Himself.** It involves *thought, time, and planning* in this whole matter of stewardship and puts to shame the present-day procedure of so many who come to worship without the preparation or consecration of their gifts. **So we see that this “laying by in store” is an activity of stewardship which takes place before the money is brought to the central treasury of the church.** It is something that husbands and wives need to talk about. This eliminates any hastiness and untidiness in the whole area of giving. **It is clear, therefore, that all giving represents personal responsibility to God. No one is excluded and no one can act without thoughtfulness and deliberateness.**

**Next, there is the practical responsibility of giving to God.** He says, “Lay by...as God hath prospered.” **Years ago Hudson Taylor, founder of the China Inland Mission, started each New Year by giving a check to the order of The Hebrew Christian Testimony to Israel in London.** He marked it “to the Jew first.” When David Baron, the sainted scholarly leader of the fine organization, received the gift he immediately responded by sending his own personal gift to the CIM with the notation “and also to the Greek.”

**Responsibility in giving is an understanding that we cannot always be taking without giving.** If we have any sense of reasonableness and responsiveness, we are bound to understand that we have a responsibility to give back in some measure what God has so graciously given to us.

There are two thoughts that we need to look at. **First of all, we see the consideration of what we receive from God.** He says, “Lay by...as God hath prospered...” We must remember that the prospering of God is never limited to the material gains of our daily work. *Spiritually*, He blesses us “with all spiritual blessings...in Christ” (Ephesians 1:3); *physically*, He prospers us with health and strength, “For in him we live, and move, and have our being” (Acts 17:28); *temporally*, He “daily loadeth us with benefits” (Psalms 68:19). **Over and above this He supplies what we need to live our normal lives: the talents, times, and strength for our toil.** There are all His gifts. We need to remember this when we face up to our responsibilities of giving to God. **All giving reflects the measure of our appreciation of God’s prospering hand on us.**

**But, we also see the calculation of what we should return to God.** He says, “Lay by...as God hath prospered.” Before we decide on our regular giving it is will to point out that the collection for which Paul was asking was something over and above the normal giving of the church at Corinth. Of the six or more words that are used in the New Testament to describe our monetary gifts to God, the apostle uses a special term in our text which means “an extra collection.”

**Notice also that Paul does not state the exact amount that we are to give to God, but leaves the matter open to the practical reasonableness of every yielded believer.** Instructed Christians in Paul’s day would know that under the Law the Jews were bound to give one-tenth of his income to God. Then, of course, there were freewill offerings, trespass offerings, and costly journeys to the temple. It has been estimated that the total of religious gifts among the Jews in olden times could not have been less that one-fifth of each man’ income, and some very probably gave as much as one-third of it. This is something to bear in mind when we talk too flippantly about a “basic tithe.”

**If the Old Testament saints, under Law, could give amounts of this kind, can we, under grace, give God any less?** So the New Testament leaves this matter wide open for us to act in proportion to the prospering of God. It is important to emphasize, in this connection that yielded believers are those who have given *everything* to God. **Were this not so, there would be no basis for Christian stewardship.** But having made that clear, the Bible goes on to show

**that, in terms of practical living, while everything may be dedicated to God, He also demands in cash or equivalent the basic tithe, and still deserves in cash or equivalent the extra offerings.** For some, giving will represent more than this, but for no one will it involve less.

The final word is summed up in the Scripture passage that we have before us, “Let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him.” **If there is a genuine consideration of what we receive from God, there will also be a genuine calculation of what we return to Him.** Such giving will cost because the *cross* inspires it, and the *church* receives it. And this is how heaven has *planned* it; we must give to keep the work of God alive.

**In his book “The Royal Route to Heaven” Dr. Alan Redpath tells the following story.** “A certain Christian once said to a friend, ‘Our church costs too much. They are always asking for money.’ Her friend replied in this fashion. ‘Some time ago a little boy was born in our home. He cost us a lot of money from the very beginning: he had a big appetite; he needed clothes, medicine, toys, and even a puppy. Then he went to school, and that cost a lot more; later he went to college, then he began dating, and that cost a small fortune. But in his senior year at college he died, and since the funeral he hasn’t cost us a penny. Now which situation do you think we would rather have?’ After a significant pause the friend continued, ‘As long as this church lives it will cost. When it dies for want of support it won’t cost us anything. A living church has the most vital message for all the world today, therefore I am going to give and pray with everything I have to keep our church alive.’”

**We have considered the essentially of giving.** Taking this truth seriously will make great demands on us. Before we refuse to bow to the Word of God, let us remember that this is the price of keeping our church alive, and she must live if the Savior is to be glorified and the world is to be evangelized. **May God give us the grace, then, to be *purposeful, personal, and practical* in our giving; and blessing will most surely come to our lives as well as to our church.**

If you are not saved, why not tonight?