

1 Corinthians 16:1-11

Introduction

In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul reached the glorious heights of the resurrection theme – Christ’s and ours. He spoke of the evidence for it, the importance of it, what the resurrection would be like, and its place in God’s saving purposes. He ended on a triumphant note, urging the Corinthians to be steadfast and unmoveable, abounding in the work of the Lord.

Now Paul at once practices what he preaches – he gets down to the practical details of the life of the church. **Now about the collection...** (1 Corinthians 16:1) – at first he seems to have come off the mountain top and descended into the valley. Yet it all belongs together. The Lord’s return and our glorious future ought to affect our attitude to money and the way we spend it, and the way we make plans for the Lord’s work.

So often the New Testament teaches us our doctrinal foundation, and immediately follows it with practical teaching. No reach of thought is too high for Paul to scale. No practical detail is too small for him to remember. If his head was in the clouds, his feet were firmly on the ground. And so he begins this final “chatty” section in a very down to earth manner. There is much for us to learn, partly from the direct teaching and also the example. From his direct teaching we learn things about our attitude to money and the ministry of encouragement. We learn from his example of his attitude to God’s will.

Principles about giving

Paul begins with an appeal to church members at Corinth to join with other churches in helping a needy church. The church at Jerusalem was suffering from poverty. Paul mentions the problem in several letters. Jerusalem was the headquarters of Judaism, so very likely the Christians in that city were the most hated and persecuted. They would have been boycotted, and lost their jobs (though even ordinary non-Christian Jews in Jerusalem were known to be poor and dependent on the support of visitors and Jews overseas.)

The needs of the Jerusalem church were close to Paul’s heart. He was concerned that Christians were not behind in their giving. After all, ordinary Jews helped their fellow Jews. The Greeks had associations to help fellow Greeks. Therefore Christians must not fall behind in this matter. Practical support would help to unite Christians together if Gentiles helped Jewish Christians.

Here is a practical way of showing love. One of the great perils of churches is a narrow parochial outlook. Many Christians need to learn to show interest and pray and give to other Christians outside their own four walls. So Paul gives the following very practical and helpful teaching about giving.

It should be regular, **on the first day of every week**. The first day of the week was the day of the open tomb, so now this was the new day of worship for Christians, not the seventh day, or Sabbath, of the former Jews.

They should each take personal responsibility. **Each one of you should set aside a sum of money**. Each individual must play his or her part in the responsibility for the maintenance of the Lord's work. They should not fear people who were better off than others, or who were leaders, or who were in membership for a long time.

Then giving should be proportionate, **in keeping with his income**. (A.V. "as God has prospered him") According to your prosperity, but Paul does not lay down a stated amount. In light of other Scriptures, a tithe seems to be good guide, but it is only a guide.

Giving should be done thoughtfully. **Set aside.. saving it up**. Not a last minute look around for loose change in the pocket or purse. Not a hurried whip-round. It is to be done thoughtfully, carefully, and strategically. We should never be in position of saying "It went completely out of my head."

So giving should be regular, from a sense of personal responsibility, proportionate, and thoughtfully worked out and allotted. A spiritual and business-like approach. Paul himself was careful to show his handling of money was beyond suspicion and criticism. Money to be sent to Jerusalem by men of his choosing. Paul saw a need, made an appeal, gave guidance about giving, but did not touch the money in person at any time. Scrupulous care in handling money. Paul would have approved of the principle of two people counting the offering, checking the accounts and auditing them, making public reports, and the right of addressing any questions to the people handling the money.

Some people find this necessary teaching about giving very embarrassing. Paul did not. It is an important part of discipleship, and one of the best ways to show Christian love and concern. It is undoubtedly one of the clearest indicators to the state of the spiritual life. If we love the Lord, His people, His cause and His Gospel, our giving will be careful, proportionate, conscientious, and as generous as possible. Our giving should not depend on emotional appeal or success stories from the mission-field. Church finances and missionary society finances would be in a very different state of Christian's hearts were right. Jumble sales and various forms of entertainment to maintain the work of the Gospel would be unheard of.

What sort of giver are you? Proportionate, conscientious, prayerful, generous?

Planning for the future in God's will

Paul now turns to his future movements and visits. He wrote his letter while at Ephesus, and plans to visit his readers at Corinth, travelling via Macedonia. And when he arrived at Corinth, he planned to remain and probably stay for the winter with them. But meanwhile he was staying at Ephesus until Pentecost. There was real opportunity for Christian work at Ephesus, but also a great deal of danger. Ephesus was the city of Demetrius and the silversmiths who stirred up a riot against Paul because they were losing money when people turned from idols to the Lord (Acts

19:21-41). So Paul plans to spend spring in Ephesus, summer in Macedonia, and winter in Corinth.

But there is one great principle and condition over all his plans – **If the Lord permits** (1 Corinthians 16:7). Here is the bondservant of the Lord. His life, possessions, being, movements and journeyings are all in the Lord's hands. The Lord has every right to direct his travelling. There is a place for making plans in the Lord's work as well as in our personal lives. We were given a mind, intelligence and common sense. They are there to be used. But everything must be planned under this great proviso – that it is subject to the Lord's will.

And it is with God's will that we begin. There are two dangers in Christian work – that we sit down and do nothing, or that we organise ourselves and ask God to rubberstamp our decision. How easy for God to be crowded out by schemes and planning and organising. There needs to be this constant emphasis that we begin with the Lord's will. The mark of a child of God is that he does the will of God (Mark 3:35). Paul described himself as an apostle by the will of God (1 Corinthians 1:1). He prayed that he might visit Rome in God's will (Romans 1:10; 15:32), and urged the Ephesians to do the will of God from the heart (Ephesians 6:6). The whole of life rests on this one condition – **If it is the Lord's will we shall live and do this or that** (James 4:15).

Commitment to God, whatever the cost, is the mark of the great servants of God in every age. Watchman Nee of China knew of a Chinese woman who wrote inside her Bible "Lord, I want nothing for myself", and when she prayed, she said "Lord, please don't give in to me. Just wait Lord, and I will give in to you."

One of the most challenging aspects of the Christian life is whether we honestly and earnestly seek God's will about the whole of life. Or whether "God-willing" is one of those pious phrases we tack on to conversations when in certain company, but basically we are living thoroughly self-centred lives.

J.Philips wrote, "Beneath earnestness and intensity of the Christian's life there is a self that is uncrucified and a death he has refused to die." There is a great need to die to everything before we can receive God's blessing. **Test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will** (Romans 12:1). But we can only do this if we are prepared to **Count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus** (Romans 6:11).

The place of encouragement in Christian service

Finally in this section, two men are mentioned who are prominent associates. **If Timothy comes, see that he may be with you without fear, for he does the work of the Lord, as I also do. Therefore let no one despise him, but send him on his journey in peace** (1 Corinthians 16:10,11). Timothy was a shy young man and faced coming to Corinth with fear and trepidation. It was hard enough for Paul, and Paul was a veteran campaigner. What hope for the young Timothy, a mere novice. Paul's advice to the Corinthians is to respect young Timothy, not because he is special, but for the sake of the work. They were to be sympathetic and encouraging, and not to look down on him. He was inexperienced and had a lot to learn, but they were not to

rub it in. He was doing the Lord's work, to which he was called and appointed by the Lord, and so they must do all they could to help and encourage.

All of us have so much to learn. In the book "Teach yourself preaching", James Stewart says, "We are bunglers to the end." The man who, after preaching a sermon, thinks he has just preached the perfect sermon, and cannot think of how much his sermon contains many failures and weaknesses of which he should be ashamed, is a man to be pitied. There is a lot to be learned, especially by the young. We need to be corrected and put right on most things. But with all the correction and rebuke, there must be encouragement and desire to see someone succeed. (Sadly, it is also possible to find people in Christian work who not only correct, but will enjoy putting someone down and keeping him there.)

It has always been my advice to students that when they get into their first pastorate, they should find someone who will be an honest critic and help them do better. But this person needs to have the best interests at heart, not someone who is merciless and crushing, especially if they bear a grudge that they are not in Christian work themselves. Rather, their criticism should be constructive, and they should always find something to commend, not just to correct. Amid all the mistakes and immaturity, a word of encouragement means so much, and helps face honest criticism better and with a good heart.

The supreme example of this Joseph, to whom the apostles gave the name Barnabas, "son of encouragement" (Acts 4:36). When Barnabas went to Antioch and **saw the grace of God he was glad** (even when it was someone else's ministry that was blessed) **and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts** (Acts 11:23).

To widen this, we all know one another well and are aware of one another's faults and failings. It is easy to brood on them. But how important it is, and what a long way a word of commendation and encouragement goes, as long as we are truthful and not engaged in empty flattery.

Conclusion

So in the light of our gratitude to God for the glorious resurrection day ahead, our Christian life should be marked by these things - a right attitude to our money and possessions, which are, after all, gifts from God, a desire to be in God's will from first to last, and a spirit of help and encouragement when dealing with our fellow believers.