

Giving is an act of worship

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[0 : 00] The reading this morning is from 1 Corinthians chapter 16, and reading the first nine verses. 1 Corinthians 16, 1 to 9.

Verse 1. Now, concerning the contribution for the saints, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do.

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 contributions need not be made when I come.

And when I arrive, I will send those whom you accredit by letter to carry your gift to Jerusalem. If it seems advisable that I should go also, they will accompany me.

Amen. May the Lord bless us that reading. May it be his praise and his glory. Father, sing, I will offer up my life in spirit and truth.

[1 : 27] In the first two verses, we read that, Now, concerning the contribution for the saints, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do.

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 contributions need not be made when I come.

Last week, I dealt with the principles of giving.

He's dealing with a number of topics that the Corinthians have written to him about. So, for example, in chapter 7, verse 1, it's concerning marriage.

In verse 25 of the same chapter, it's concerning unmarried persons. In chapter 8, concerning food offered to idols.

[2 : 46] 12, concerning spiritual gifts. And finally, concerning contributions. And so, there is this inquiry that the Corinthians have made relative to giving.

Now, how did they come to make this inquiry? Well, the possibility is that they had heard something of the sort that the apostle had given to the churches of Galatia.

And this had come to their notice by somebody telling them, or it had been passed on by word of mouth. When you read the epistle to the Galatians, there's no extant record of such a direction.

And not found anywhere else in the New Testament either. So, it may be that these directions, whatever they were, and they're in line with what he says here in the first two verses, were given orally in one of his missionary tours, such as you find in Galatians 18.

The churches of Galatians 18.

[4 : 25] So, this is now what he's now saying the Corinthians are to do. Now, this is a serious issue for this very reason.

The town of Corinth had a very bad reputation in the first century world. It was a seaport, and it had all the ills and sins and evils belonging to seaports.

If it was today, we would say that these ills were drugs, high rates of crime, and prostitution. So, what he's now saying is that whatever the problems were in first century Corinth, you have to live a life that's different.

Now, in that well-known gospel text in 2 Corinthians 5 and 17, he says, Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.

The old has passed away. Behold, the new has come. So, in teaching this to the Corinthians, he is saying this, that whatever you do, whatever you, how you carry on your life, you have to carry it on in such a way that it reflects the glory and the honor of Jesus Christ.

[5 : 54] The Corinthians, he hopes, will continually be changing, just as you and I are changing in the grace of God.

So, in 2 Corinthians 3.18, we read, And we all with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another, for this comes from the

Lord, who is the Spirit.

Now, this is what he's saying about the Corinthians. He is saying that despite all the problems that they had. In chapter 6 of the first letter, he writes this, Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God?

Do not be deceived. Neither the immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor greedy, nor drunkard, nor revilers, nor robbers, will inherit the kingdom of God.

And if you wonder where that list has come from, that list is actually based on the Ten Commandments. In other words, there were people living in Corinth who had broken every commandment of God's law.

[7 : 40] What are the Corinthians? He goes on, And such were some of you, but you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God.

So they are new people. There are people today, when Paul wrote this letter, who had the testimony that once they were murderers, but God had stepped into the lives in such a way that they didn't do that anymore.

There were people who had been thieves, who were high on the crime list. What is being said is, that's past.

They're living in a new direction. So this is the inquiry that they are making, and this is the response that he is saying. You have to live a new kind of life, and you have to live it for the sake of Jesus Christ and the gospel.

So we move on. Concerning the contributions for the saints, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do.

[9 : 06] On the first day of every week, each one of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper. So that contributions may not be made when I come.

Now these contributions were being made in verse 3. I will send those whom you accredit by letter to carry your gift to Jerusalem.

The contributions as such are being made for the people of God whom he calls the saints. Now Paul had very early on in his ministry, he had visited Peter and James in Jerusalem.

And when they realized that he was preaching the same gospel as they were, they gave him the right hand of fellowship and said that we, that's Paul and Barnabas, should go to the Gentiles and they would go to the circumcised, only they would have us remember the poor.

Which very thing I was eager to do. Remembering the poor. I was eager to do it.

[10 : 30] Why? Because it's completely in line with the teaching of Jesus. And we find out, if you look at Acts 11, you'll find there an instruction that the apostle gives for the collection for the poor.

Now what has happened here is that there's a prophet called Agabus. Agabus. He appears twice in the Acts of the Apostles, one in chapter 11 and the second he tells about Paul's forthcoming imprisonment and that's in Acts 21.

But if we go to Acts 11, verse 28, we read this. And one of the named Agabus, he stood up and foretold by the Spirit that there would be a great famine over all the world and this took place in the days of Claudius.

And Luke has recorded it. But he's also recorded something else. And it's this. And the disciples determined, this is in response to this prophetic word, everyone according to his ability to send relief to the brethren who lived in Judea and they did so sending it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.

So here we have it. The act on this very agreement that Paul has made.

[12 : 07] He's made this agreement with Paul and James that they should remember the poor. And here it is in Acts 11.

The people are responding to Paul's challenge. Now, why are they responding? That's the question. Why are they responding to the poor and the needy?

And the answer is this. That the grace of God in the mercy of God has touched their very hearts. And that's what the reason that they started to give of their own substance. And he writes in 2 Corinthians 8 about them.

We want you to know, brothers and sisters, about the grace of God which has been shown in the churches of Macedonia. for they gave according to their means as I can testify and beyond their means of their own free will.

[13:20] So here was an exemplary action that these disciples had carried out to remember the needy and the poor in Jerusalem. And they've carried it out because God's grace has touched their very hearts.

There's another reason why this might have happened. And we read that in the book of Proverbs chapter 3 verses 9 to 10 this My son honour the Lord with your substance and with the first fruits of all your produce then your barns will be filled with plenty and your vats will be bursting with wine. So that is there in the Old Testament. It's in the book of Proverbs chapter 3 verses 9 to 10. And I want to consider finally what the fruit of a blessing is involved in making these gifts these contributions this responding to the grace of God and to the needs of others.

Going back to what I've just quoted from Proverbs My son honour the Lord with your substance and with the first fruits of all your produce then your barns will be filled with plenty and your vats will be bursting with wine.

So the instruction that Solomon gives to his son is that he should honour the Lord in this way. If you read the first nine chapters of the book of Proverbs you'll find that all the directions all the advice that's been given is addressed to his son.

[15:08] Now according to the scripture Solomon only had one son at least that we know about who was Rehoboam. But in the fourth chapter the sons then become plural.

Hear O sons a father's instruction and be attentive that you may gain insight for I give you good precepts do not forsake my teaching.

The record of the reign of Rehoboam you'll find it in 1 Kings 12-14 or indeed in 2 Chronicles 10-12 and that record shows that neither Rehoboam nor his father Solomon lived up to the teaching of this book because if they had lived in Israel would have been an entirely different thing.

But I want to come to something else. This idea of honoring the Lord is expressed by a Hebrew verb kavod which means to honor to respect or to reward.

So the idea of honoring the Lord in the way that you give is in fact an act of worshipping God because that's what's entailed if you honor the Lord.

[16:40] It's not so much a monetary or a practical thing. It's a spiritual response of the heart and that spiritual response is being made possible because the grace of God has come into your heart and mine.

So here we have it. The idea not only of honoring but also the idea of worship and the idea of reward.

My son honor the Lord with your substance and with the first fruits of all your produce then your barns will be filled with plenty and your vats will be bursting with wine.

And you find that this decree of Solomon's in Proverbs 3 9-10 is itself based on the Mosaic law about giving in Exodus chapter 23.

And if we follow that through God indeed does repay. Let me tell you this very true story told to me by a friend of mine Samuel McKibben who's been in the ministry for 40 years.

[18:01] And he told me the story about when his son Byron was 14. Byron had been attending the church and had learned about tithing but wasn't very sure about what it was.

So one evening he asked his father and his father explained it to him that what you do is with whatever wage you get you give a tenth. Now at this point in the story Byron had just started a paper round.

So he took seriously what his father said and the following Sunday he tithed it. He gave a tenth. But that's not the end of the story because during the week he met one of his customers and the customer said to him ah I've been looking for you and he wondered what all this was about.

He went into his pocket and produced an envelope. He said don't open that just now you'll see it later. So Byron stuck it in his pocket and went away home. When he opened it inside was money and that money was identical in amount to the money he had already tithed the previous Sunday. God sees and he rewards. This is not a prosperity gospel but it is the sober teaching of God's word.

[19:33] And it comes to us as a challenge. And that challenge I found last week in the prophet Malachi 3 verse 10. Bring the full tithes into the storehouse that there may be food in my house and thereby put me to the test says the Lord of hosts if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you an overflowing blessing.

So this is a spiritual matter. This business of honoring the Lord with your substance. It's not a material matter.

It's a spiritual matter. Because in so doing what God is doing is reading the attentions of your heart and mine as we give.

one Christmas a long time ago I heard this commentator talking about Christmas and he said that at Christmas God gave a part of himself.

No he didn't. He gave all of himself. And that all was expressed in something we're about to commemorate in a moment.

[20 : 57] The death of Jesus Christ in your place and mine. That is what we remember. God has given sacrificially for us.

And so the conclusion is that we should do the same. second Corinthians nine and seven still talking on this theme.

Each one must do as he made up his mind not reluctantly or under compulsion for God loves a cheerful giver.

This then is the challenge that came to the churches of Galatia and now comes to you and me. And as we think on what has been said which I have sought to bring to you from the Lord let us see to it that we honour the Lord in this way and ask him to pour out an overflowing blessing.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.