

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Concerning the Collection, Part 1

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 16:1-2

Code: 1883

If you will, take your Bible and let's look at 1 Corinthians, chapter 16, 1 Corinthians chapter 16. We now come to the last chapter in this great Book, and what a wonderful time we've had studying it. And now we come to the crowning chapter of all, the one that wraps it up. As I was thinking about this chapter, I couldn't help but think the Apostle Paul must have had somewhat of a sense of humor. I just - I detect it now and then in him, but here, it's very subtle.

The 15th chapter is so grandiose; it's just so magnificent, it's so far beyond anything we could ever dream. He's talking about resurrection. He's talking about glorified bodies. He's talking about the voice of God calling the dead out of the graves. He's talking about great transformation. He's talking about the day when our bodies become like Jesus Christ; the day when the trumpet sounds; the day when heaven explodes upon our reality; the day when every imagination is fulfilled and far beyond; the day when we cry, oh death, where is thy sting, oh death, where is thy victory? And then he says, "Now, concerning the collection." And all of a sudden we're right back down to where we live.

Now, concerning the collection, chapter 16, verse 1. That's what we wanna talk about. Now, I know you've said to yourself, "Well, here comes another message about the collection," just like you always get at the church. Some of you who are visiting are saying, "Oh, oh Martha, we came on the wrong week. Our pastor is preaching on this, this week, that's why we're not there. Well, I'm sorry about that. This will be the fourth message I've given in nine years, on the collection, because in the Books we've studied, this is the way it's discussed. If it isn't in the text, then we usually just go along.

Now, we gave you a special series sometime ago, on biblical standards for giving, and some of that material will be reemphasized in what we say in the 16th chapter today and next week. We'll have to do this in two parts because there are so many things to say. We're gonna look at the first four verses and it's gonna take us two weeks because, believe it or not, there are really loaded with basic principles along the line of giving. It's all about the collection.

But what I wanna say, to begin with, is it's most interesting to me, that the Apostle Paul can come off of some just incredibly grandiose concept and take one step and land at something so very mundane, so very here and now, is the collection, the offering. But you know, as you think about it, that really is a perfect illustration of how Christianity operates. Every glimpse we ever get of future glory is only given to us to encourage us, to a deeper sense of commitment to responsibility here and now. That's really the essence of this whole concept of scriptural looks into the future.

The whole idea of seeing ahead is to render us responsible here and now. For example, in 2 Peter, Peter says, "Seeing that you know all these things, seeing that you understand the day of the Lord is coming and the earth is gonna melt away, and the new heavens and the new earth and all this glory is coming, what manner of persons ought you to be in all Godliness and holy living?" See, that's what Peter says. A glimpse into the future just lays great responsibility on the present. And when the spirit of God, in the 15th chapter, shows us the fantastic reality of resurrection day, and the time of transformation, and the incredible things that God has prepared us, it just has tremendous impact on the way we live right now. And even on how we put our money in the collection.

I mean after all folks, if this body is gonna be transformed and if we're gonna leave this world, this veil tears, to spend forever in heaven, we shouldn't worry about investing too much here and now, right? We ought be laying it aside for God's forever Kingdom. Jesus said, essentially, the same thing when he said, "Lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, thieves breakthrough and steal. But lay up for yourselves, treasures in heaven where moth and rust doth not corrupt, where thieves do not breakthrough and steal, for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. Investing in forever is the issue. Listen, if you're gonna be glorified and if you're gonna get a new forever body, and if all of that is future and this just passing, and you're gonna rot away and go back to dust and back to ashes, there's no sense in blowing a lot of dollars on it. You might as well invest in forever; and so now, a few words about the collection.

Now, let me give you some background. We're gonna spend a little time on background 'cause you got to understand what collection he's talking about. Paul has in mind here, something that's very basic. In the ancient world, poverty was a real issue. Many people were poor. And when I say poor, I mean poor like we don't see poverty in our particular country. If you've visited Tijuana, you see poverty. You've visited, like I have, places like Cairo, Egypt, you see poverty. There are places in the world where poverty would be somewhat like in biblical times. Our society knows very little of that kind of poverty. There are some cases of it, perhaps.

But poverty was a very, very serious issue in that part of the world. So, serious an issue was it that society itself had taken some steps to deal with it. For example, among the Greeks, there were associations known as Paranoi. Now these associations were associations of people banded together to provide interest free loans for people who reached the place where they couldn't meet their needs; people trapped in a disaster; people brought to a place of despair and destitution could apply to these aranoi for interest free loans. And it was also accommodating in the sense that where they couldn't pay the loan back, there were even provisions for gifts to the needy. Now, these were among the pagans Greeks.

The Jews did the same thing. In their synagogues there were groups of officials whose responsibility was to determine to whom to distribute the funds earmarked for welfare. So, that among the Jews, a needy person could apply to the leadership of the synagogue and his needs could be met through

those officials making a decision to grant him a certain amount of money for his needs. So, it was common to the Pagan Greeks and it was common to the Jews to meet the needs of their own poor. The church could certainly do no less, if it was to maintain its position; if it was to be able to defend its theology of love, it certainly could no less than society.

We're not in an unsimilar way today. Where in our society, the government takes care of that. And I'm afraid, very often, the church is a little bit too hesitant to do what it needs to do to meet its own needs and the needs of its own people. I think sometimes we take advantage of government opportunity, when we ought to be giving in the name of Jesus Christ. And I think, in our society, we're very fortunate we can wait till the extremity is really an extremity because the government does provide. And that's fine, if the government chooses to do that. But where the government can provide and where extremity goes beyond that, we have to be ready and eager to share.

Now, I want you to understand that this poverty situation had brought to bear on Paul's ministry, a very strong commitment. When Paul first began his ministry he was called by the Lord Jesus; but later on he visited Jerusalem and he got sort of an official commission from Peter, James and John - this James being different than the one in the gospels; this one being the head of the Jerusalem church - the half brother of Jesus himself.

But these three men, according to Galatians, chapter 2 and verse 9, met with Paul when he was to be sent out with Barnabas. And they said, "We commission you to go the Gentiles." And then they said this in Galatians 2:10, "Only that we should remember the poor the same which I also was diligent to do." Now, when Peter and James a leader of the church, and John, commissioned Paul and Barnabas, they told them, "Remember the poor." In other words there's gonna have to be some kind of sociological ministry in your preaching to get a hearing for the gospel, in many cases.

We're gonna have to reach out to some people who have need. And so they were instructed from the very beginning, before they ever took their first missionary journey to remember the poor. And Paul said, "I did this" and it's true. Here he is in the 16th chapter of 1 Corinthians, collecting money - notice - for the Saints. What Saints? That's very clear, the Saints at Jerusalem, the end of verse 3, "I will send, to bring your liberality, to Jerusalem." And why? Because there was an abundance of poor Christians in Jerusalem - there was a real poverty problem there. And so Paul is collecting an offering to take to the poor Saints at Jerusalem.

It took him well over a year to collect it. At the end of his third missionary journey, he was in the city of Corinth making his final collection from the Corinthians. At that time, the end of his third journey, while he was in Corinth, he wrote the Book of Romans. And at the end of the Book of Romans, this is what he said, chapter 15, verse 25, "But now I go on to Jerusalem," leaving Corinth now, he has now gotten the collection that he's asking for in 1 Corinthians 16, by the time he writes Romans.

He says, "I now have this collection. I go to Jerusalem to minister to the Saints, for it hath pleased them of Macedonia and Achaia" - that would involve Corinth and Thessalonica and Philippi and Berea, some of those cities - "to make a certain contribution for the poor Saints who are at Jerusalem. It hath pleased them verily, and their debtors they are." It isn't just a matter of pleasure; it's also a debt they owe.

In other words these Gentile Christians ought to send for the poor Saints. Why? "For if the Gentiles have been made partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister to them in carnal things." In other words, he says, "Look, if the Gentiles have benefited by God's spiritual work through Israel, the Jews should benefit by God's giving an abundance to the Gentiles economically."

Now you say, "What does he mean by that?" Well, what he means simply is this, Jesus said, "Salvation is of the Jews." Insofar as the whole Old Testament came through the Jews, most of the New Testament came through the Jews. Jesus Christ was a Jew; the whole prophetic office came through Jewish line. The whole message of Messiah came through the Jews and in a sense, we have been made partakers of that, which was given to Jews, and so he says, "If the Jews possession of spiritual things has been dispersed to the Gentiles, then the Gentiles possession of carnal things or money, should be dispersed back in an attitude of thanks." And so he says, "I'm taking this collection, as a thank offering to the Jews to meet their extreme need" - this point, and so that really was his plan.

So, here he is; he hasn't gotten to Corinth yet, he hasn't written the Book of Romans yet, but by time he gets to Corinth and pens it, he collects this stuff to take back to the Jews at Jerusalem. And by the way, he had gathered money from Achaia, Macedonia, as well as Asia Minor, which would be Ephesus and some other cities that he had touched there. So, he had, apparently, a very, very substantial large amount. In fact, in the 4th verse it says, he says, "If it isn't big enough, I'm not gonna accompany it." And he did accompany it, which means it must have been a tremendous amount of money.

Now, why was it that the Saints of Jerusalem were poor? Here's a little historical look. I think that nothing in the Bible states why they were poor, but I took a little time to study that because things like that interest me; and I found maybe four reasons why they were poor in Jerusalem. Number 1, Jerusalem was a poor city to begin with. I think we think of Jerusalem in the times of Solomon, as rich; and we're right, it was. But in the time of Jesus and Paul, it was not. It was not a particularly rich city. It was a poor city. Historians indicate that to us.

Not only that, it was grossly overpopulated because it became such a religious Mecca, and people came in and came in, and came, and many of them stayed; and consequently provided a certain amount of drain on the city's economy. To make matters even worse, when Feast Time came, they

literally drowned themselves in people. As many as a million or two million additional folks could arrive there for the Feast Times. And so, there was always a strain on the resources of Jerusalem. And in those days, Jerusalem was largely dependent upon the gifts of Jews who traveled abroad and made large fortunes and sent back money as a benefaction to be dispersed among the poor and contributed to the Temple.

So, it was a poor city. And it was in great need of those Jews who went abroad sending back large amounts of money. Which, incidentally, hasn't stopped even today. They still do that. Jews all over the world are great benefactors of Jerusalem today. Well, that was the case then. And so there was indication of poverty there, and they were very dependent upon this. Now, that would bring us to the second reason that the Christians there were poor, the Saints there were poor and that was because they were persecuted for their faith in Christ, which would mean they wouldn't be able to get a job, in many cases. They wouldn't be able to get the normal channels of the synagogues to give them money, and none of those Jewish benefactors, who were granting money to the city, would want it to go to those who were confessing a crucified rejected Messiah.

So, the fact of poverty of the city, in addition to the fact of the hatred and persecution that fell upon the Saints; and if you doubt that, all you have to do is read through the Book of Acts, to the 8th chapter, or read 2 Thessalonians 2:14, which states about the persecution. And these two things would have brought about a certain amount of poverty in the church. Thirdly, when the church was born on the day of Pentecost, it was born at a time when the city was literally exploding with people. And no doubt, many of the people who received Christ in those early days, were pilgrims from other cities.

But when they became Christians, they never left. They stayed because this was the church. And they then lived in the homes of other Christians. Something had to be provided for them, so there was an immediate drain upon the resources of the church. In Acts, chapter 2, it says, "They held all things in common and when somebody had a need, somebody else met it." Well, after a while, this became difficult. By the time you come to the fourth chapter, it's evident that they've now drained their resources to the place where they're having to sell their properties.

And so, in the fourth chapter, you have somebody like Barnabas, selling his land to distribute his money to the needy. Well, this can't go on forever because you're gonna run out of land. And so, as you see the church moving through the Book of Acts, you see a continuing drain on the church's resource. And so, they came to the place where the amount of pilgrims and the growing of the church and the growing persecution and hatred, would have created the dilution of funds, and would have resulted in having a mass of people in the church who were without resources.

Fourthly. Another reason I believe they were poor was because, according to Acts 11:27 there was a famine in the land. And this famine lasted for four years. In fact, the church at Antioch, which was the

first church ever founded outside Jerusalem, sent Paul, accompanied with some gifts to the poor, at Jerusalem, because of what had come about by way of famine, which was predicted by the Prophet Agabus. So, these are the reasons that brought about a basic poverty problem in Jerusalem that was probably more severe than other parts of the world.

And in line with the need in Jerusalem, and in line with Peter and James and John's instruction to Paul to remember the poor, Paul spends over a year collecting money. And he is now writing the Corinthians to ask them to have a part in this collection. This is not the first time they've heard about it. It's evident to me that they had even asked him about it. That's why he begins by saying, "Now, concerning the collection..." Now, you remember that when we first started studying Corinthians, I told you that 1 Corinthians is written in response to a letter from the Corinthians asking about a lot of these issues.

And so, he's responding to their questions about what they're to do in the collection. "How are we to collect this money?" And what Paul really does with that is he gives them instruction that sets out principles for all the church's history, as to how the church should best be receiving its funds. Now, these are not theeopcommands by God, but these are patterns given by Paul, which I think form a very good basis for the church's giving, even today. So, they knew about it. And it's another one of the subjects; there's a clean break in 16, and he moves to this theme about which, no doubt, they had asked questions.

Now, Paul says, "I want you to take this collection and finally, I'm gonna get the whole thing together; I'm gonna take it and I'm gonna deliver it to the Jews in Jerusalem. And that is precisely what he did. "After many years," he says in Acts 24:17, "I am now bringing alms to my nation." Finally, after all these years of collecting it, well over a year, and it could've been even more than that, collecting these amounts of money.

Now, let me add a thought. It is not just sociological what Paul is doing. It is also theological. Paul knows this: There is a basic dichotomy between the Jews and the Gentile, right? It goes way back; there's a basic animosity there - a hostility. The Jerusalem church is Jewish, the Gentile church in Asia Minor, Achaia, Macedonia, Galatia - other parts of the world, this is Gentile.

Now Paul, in his heart, always has this consuming passion to see the body of Christ become what? One. He writes in Ephesians 2, about the unity of the body, about "they too, becoming one new man as the middle wall of partition is broken down." He wants the Jew and the Gentile one. He wants no bond, no free, no male, no female, no Jew, no Gentile, but all are one in Christ to be a reality. And he realizes that maybe there's one great way that he can do that. And he can in a sense, accomplish two things, in one act. Not only relieve the needs, economically, of the Jerusalem church, but in an overwhelming act of love, this money from the Gentiles will go a long way to solidify union.

For example, if there's somebody that I meet who has a need, my act to meet that need not only is sociological but invariably, gains a response of love. This is without a doubt, that's what happens when you are reaching out to somebody in need, they feel the sense to reach back to you. One time I had the occasion to meet someone's need recently. They needed a certain amount of money and I gave them that amount of money and they're response was just tears first of all, and then the statement, "Would you mind if I hugged you?" And I said, "No. Not often offered such a thing, I accept that, yes." And so, this person gave me a hug of love.

Well, you see there was no way that such a gift could be kept simply as a sociological act. There was to be a heart response. Paul knows this. And Paul can see that if the Gentile church would just reach out and love, and meet this Jewish need, it would go a long way to making that unity; that beautiful oneness that he wants in his church. So, that really is on his heart as well.

It might be interesting for you to note this; that several times in the New Testament - and we won't take time this morning to develop it, but several times in the New Testament, 2 Corinthians 8:4, 2 Corinthians 9:13 and Romans 15:26, to be exact. When Paul refers to the collection, he calls it the coinoneato describe a collection. And the word, coinonea, means what? Fellowship. But to him, it is inseparable. You cannot share money without sharing fellowship. And so, that's what he's sees, as he takes the offering to the Jewish Christians, from the Gentile churches. Great opportunity for them to repay a great spiritual debt, in an act of overwhelming love, and that's why in verse 4, he says, "If it isn't big enough, I'm not going with it. I'd be embarrassed."

Now, let's begin to look at the principles outlined here, for receiving the collection. And I think they'll be very practical. And you know, I got going so much this morning, I only finished two points. And I don't know how many I finally had on your outline there, probably six or seven; I was really going to town on these. But I only had two, so I'll have finish next time. But let's share with these two, to begin with.

Number 1, is the purpose of giving. Now, Paul is gonna outline for us, some basic directives for Christian giving - they go way beyond this occasion in Corinth and I think that's why the Holy Spirit put them here, because they have such an impact on us. What is the purpose for giving? Verse 1, "Now, concerning the collection," here comes the purpose, "for the Saints," and then he adds, "it's the same collection that I have given order to the churches in Galatia, this is what I want you to do." In other words, the same collection that's going to go to the Saints in Jerusalem, "The one that I told the Galatians about; I told the Macedonians about it; I told the Achaean about it; those in Asia Minor know about it. And I want you to get in on it" but notice the purpose, "for the Saints."

Now, I am convinced that this is not only the purpose for this collection, but as you study the New Testament you will find again and again, that the primary purpose of all collections was to comeback

to the church. From Acts, chapter 2, they shared everything and they held in common. In Acts, chapter 4, they shared again, and they held it in common. They were very involved in meeting their own needs. In Acts, chapter 6, they were distributing food to the widows, among those in those in the church who could not support themselves; so that the church gives to support itself. The church is to invest in its own life and in its own people.

Now, I am not saying that we are to have nothing to do with people outside the church. In Galatians, the Apostle Paul says that, "We are to do good unto all men, specially those that are of the household of faith, but we are to do good to all good men." And the story of Luke, chapter 10, the story of the good Samaritan who went out of his way to minister to a Jew who was in a different culture and a different religion, and a completely different set of circumstances as indicative to me, that there are times when God wants us to do good to those who are not of the household of faith; God wants us to do good to those that are bleeding on the highway, whoever they are. But Paul's point here is that the church's primary responsibility is to make sure that it funds its own needs. That's basic.

Now, notice also, that is not one local church funding only that local church, but one local assembly, here in Corinth, caring for the needs of another local assembly, in Jerusalem. So that the church, when it really is the church, and when it understands what it is universally, will meet its needs anywhere, not just selfishly pouring it on at its local point of existence. But the church is to meet its own needs.

Let me share with you two things. We are to give, to support those among us who are poor and needy, that's Number 1. In other words, we give for the people, for the congregation's needs, whatever they are. There are people in our church who, from time to time, have their needs met, as we give - as we give money to them, as we supply what they don't have. This is a primary thing. The church in that day, in fact, had a great advantage over us. They didn't have to do things the way we do, building things, and all of the kind of complexities that we have today. We believe God has led in His church today, the way it is; but in that day, the monies would be directly poured back into the lives of the people to meet their physical needs. To meet their spiritual needs.

Just as Paul's offering was not only act of sociological welfare with economics in mind but it was an act of binding together a unity and a love, so we are to give money that can be used, not just to meet physical but to meet spiritual ones as well. When you give to the offering at Grace Church, some of it will go to meet the needs of people who don't have what they need, the basic necessities of life. And some of it will come right back to you because it'll provide classrooms and Books and teachers, and opportunities for you to grow spiritually. It'll provide ministries for you. And that's a primary area the church has responsibility to cover. Real sharing and real unity will come to the place where it finally resolves itself in the giving of money.

In Hebrews 13:16, it says, "Do good and share, for with such sacrifice, God is well pleased." And Jesus said, in Acts 20:35, it is recorded that Jesus said, "It is better to" what? "give than to receive." A basic Christian truth - we are to give to support those who have need, in the church. Now, that's just basic. Whatever you have should be available to anybody else who has need of it. And we'll talk next week how that works as it comes into the church and is distributed because he covers in the second verse.

But let me take you to a second thought under this point. We give to support the church, not only its people but its leaders as well. Not on this occasion but on other occasions, the Apostle Paul received collections for himself. For example, in the Philippians 4, Paul responds to the Philippians by thanking them for the offering they gave him. He says in, verse 15, "Now you Philippians know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me as concerning giving and receiving, be ye only. For even in Thessalonica, you sent once and again, to my necessity."

In other words, Paul says, "You gave me money. You supported me." And he had every right to that, as a leader in the church. Look with me at 1 Corinthians 9, for a moment. I don't really feel self-conscious preaching about this because it's right here in the Scripture, and I want you to understand what the principle is about supporting those who are in leadership in the church. By the way, I don't have any ulterior motive; I want you to know that. The church already gives me too much. And one time I asked an Elder why they give too much, and they said, "Because you're always talking about stewardship, so we wanna watch how you do it." So, I guess that's fair enough.

Chapter 9, verse 1, says, "Am I not an Apostle? Am I not free? Have I not seen Jesus Christ, our Lord? Are not you my work in the Lord?" And look, he says, "I'm an Apostle. And if I'm an Apostle then," look at verse 4, "have we no right to eat and drink? Do I have a right to eat and drink? Have we no right to lead about a sister or wife, as well as other Apostles?" In other words, do I have the right to eat and drink? Do I have the right to have a wife? Do I have the right to have a little coterie of people that go around with me, and minister with me? Do I have a right, Barnabas and I, to stop working, so that we can do this job?

Because if I have a right, as an Apostle, to eat and drink and have a family, if God so designs; and if I have a right to have a group of people to go along with me, that are depending on me; and if I have a right to stop working to preach, then somebody's gonna have to pay me. He says, in verse 7, "Who goes to war at his own expense? You know, any soldier that has to raise his own money to fight? The government pays him. Who plants the vineyard and doesn't eat its fruit? Who feeds a flock and doesn't drink the milk of the flock?" And even Moses said in the Law, "It shouldn't muzzle the ox while he treads the grain." If you want the ox to really tread the grain, let him eat a little as he goes.

And so what he's saying here is there's a basic principle. Verse 11, "If we have sown to use spiritual things, is it such a big deal if we reap carnal things?" In other words, if we give you spiritual food, then you need to provide for us in return. So that the then, has two responsibilities; it has the responsibility to give in order to meet the needs of its people and its leadership.

Now, look at another verse, 1 Timothy 5:17. This is most interesting. It says, "Let the Elders, that rule well, be counted worthy of double honor; especially they who labor in the word and doctrine." Now, here you have another verse that deals with the financing of the ministry. "Let the Elders," an Elder is a synonym for Pastor, or Elder, or Bishop, or Presbyter or any of those terms - "the leaders of the church," those who are the teachers and the leaders who rule, it says, "Let the Elders that rule well, be counted worthy of double honor; especially they who labor in the word and doctrine."

Now, you'll notice something. There are Elders in the church. Some of them rule well, which means that there may be differences in how effectively they minister. And some of those who rule well, labor in the word and doctrine, especially hard. And those who rule well, and those who labor in the word and doctrine, with great diligence, are worthy of double pay, the Greek said. So, not only is the church to support its leadership, but it is support its leadership, not necessarily on an equivalent basis; but dependent upon how diligently its leadership works. And that's a basic principle.

So, the church then, is called upon to support its people and its leaders. And that's the interchange and the share. And you know one of the great joys of the Pastor - one of the great joys of receiving from the church, is the joy of giving back. Not only the spiritual thing, but giving back into God's church, some of what God's church has given financially. So, it's just...all we're doing folks is trading it, see? See, I preach to you, then you give it to me, so I can eat and get strong enough to preach it back to you. That's how it works.

You know I think of that as I spend money. My wife gives me \$3.00 on Monday and says, "Here's your lunch money for the week, honey." And when I run out on Thursday, she said, "Did you blow the \$3.00 already?" I'd say, "I need a couple more." I handed out my little dollar or two dollars for lunch and I realized that that food that I am eating, is food that you have purchased for me, in order that I might energize myself to do what God's called me to do, to give you the food that comes out of the word of God. See, so we're just sharing it all. Just sharing.

Now, when any one of us gets off in a corner and starts piling up his own closet, then I don't know that we're always being honest and faithful with the whole picture. So, we need to understand that. I'm not saying God wants us all poor and barefoot either. If God made Abraham and Job rich, then God wants to make some of rich, that's fine. It's just says, in 1 Timothy 6, "Charge them that are rich that they don't horde it but that they be willing to share." So, the church is to give to its people and its leaders. That's basic. That is the purpose of giving.

Secondly - and this is all we'll talk about, just briefly, the period of giving. He even discusses here, when we are to give. Verse 2, "Upon the first day of the week, let every one of you lay by him in store, as God has prospered him that there be no collections when I come." That collection word there is the same as the word in the first verse, lavia- it means something opposed to a tax. Something opposed to a prescribed amount. I don't want any of those collections when I come, because it all to be taken care of on the first day of the week.

Now, the normal day for the church to meet was the first day; did you know that? It always has been. In John, chapter 20 is where it all started. People say, "Well, how do we ever get away from the Sabbath and how do we ever get on Sunday? Well, here it is. In John 20:19 it says, "The same day at evening" this is Resurrection Day when Jesus rose - "being the first day of the week when the doors were shut, where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst." The first post-resurrection service was held on Resurrection Day, Sunday, first day of the week. Well, that became such a great day, such a glorious day, Resurrection Day, that that became the standard day.

And you move over to the same chapter, the 26th verse, and eight days later, again the disciples inside, eight days later would be the next Sunday, Thomas with them, then came Jesus. The second service they ever had after resurrection was also was on a Sunday and that became the pattern. And so, later on, as you move into the Book of Acts, you see them gathering on that day. Over in Acts, chapter 20, for example, it says, "And we sailed away from Philippi and we came to Troas and on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached to them." So, by the time you're into Acts 20, it's the pattern of the church to meet on the first day of the week. And by the time you get to Revelation 1:10, that day has a name and it's called the Lord's Day, the Lord's Day.

You might also be interested to know that the Day Pentecost, in which the church was born, was a Sunday, the first day of the week. You might also be interested to know that the church never did celebrate the Sabbath as such. In Colossians 2:16, Paul says, "Don't let anybody bind you to a Sabbath." In Romans 14, it says the same thing. And it is the only one of the Ten Commandments not repeated in the New Testament. So, the Sabbath was set aside in favor of Resurrection Day, and the church was to come together on the first day, and that's why he says what he says here, "On the first day of the week, let every one of you lay by Him in store."

Now, you say, "Well, why - why on the first day of the week?" Because that's the day of worship and how you handle money is in inextricably tied with the depth of your worship. I know people say, well you know, how I do it. I wait till the end of the year, in December I figure out my whole thing and then I write a big check. That's not what God wants, that's really disobedient to this principle. Because you see then, you're only dealing with the stewardship of your money once a year and God wants you

deal with it, how often? Every week.

Do you realize that how you handle money and how I handle money is a barometer of my spirituality? It really is. In fact, listen to this. In the Book of Luke in the 16th chapter, and this verse really speaks to my heart. Verse 11 says, "If therefore you have not been faithful in the unrighteous money, who will commit to your trust the true riches?" Boy, what a verse. In other words He says, "MacArthur, if you're not faithful in how you handle money, I'm never gonna give you people. I'm not gonna entrust to you, the true riches, souls, if you can't handle dollars."

You see, how you handle your money will have a great deal to do with how God uses you with his people. And then he goes on to say, "You can't serve God and," what? - "money." So, there are a lot of Christians who need to realize that maybe the reason that they're not having great spiritual ministry is because they haven't really dealt with the financial area of their life. I know a guy who's out of the ministry - totally out of the ministry for no other reason than that. He could preach with the best of 'em, he could lead with the best of 'em, fantastic personality, great beloved man - he's out of the ministry because of that reason and that reason alone. Couldn't handle money. And he had no credibility, and God wasn't about to entrust to him the true riches.

Beloved, God wants to use you in marvelous ways. But until you're dealing, every day, every week, with the reality of the fact that every dollar in your pocket, every dime you have, every dollar in your bank account is a stewardship entrusted to you by God. Until you're dealing with that on a constant basis, I don't think you've really come to grips with what Paul is saying here. Why is it that we are to give each week? Why is that we are to give week by week, by week, rather than sporadically, or hit and miss, or whenever we feel like it? It's because God wants us to deal with the reality of stewardship of money, constantly, moment by moment.

Now, you're saying, "Well, I only get paid every month. Does that mean I have to put a check in every week and sort of spread it out?" No, I don't want you to be legalistic about it. I don't think that's what it's saying. I think He's not saying on every single first day, of every single week, make sure buddy, you drop something in there. No, no. I think what He's saying is, let there be a consciousness, that when you come to worship God, you can only worship God and break bread at His table and fellowship with His people when you have dealt with how you handle your stewardship of money. That's the issue. So, that you need to deal with it.

Now, if you're paid every two weeks and only place that gift in every two weeks, you still need to be sensitive on that off week. Who knows but what the spirit of God might say to you. You know, there's somebody who has a real need. Maybe you're gonna meet them today and they're gonna need \$50.00 and you ought to be ready with \$50.00 if you have available to give to that person if they need it. Or maybe the Pastor is gonna say, you know, so and so has a need, like we mentioned last week. And Bill Harry's need or somebody else's need, and you might say, "Boy, God's speaking to my heart.

I'm gonna give extra for that need."

So, in other words, you need to be ready to deal with that thing every week. You may say, "Well, I only can give my check once a month, or once every two weeks." But the stewardship is still there for the rest of those weeks too, if God so speaks, right? That's why Patricia and I have been able, through the years, to keep a little fund. Just a kind of a little fund that's in the background that we don't mess with until there's a need, and then we have a little to draw out, so we can be available to God. Don't all come at once. Or, you'll ruin our little fund, you know?

But those are things that you have to deal with on a constant basis, and you have to be ready, even on the week you're not giving or the time you're not putting that check in the offering to be sensitive to what God's spirit is saying, and to be dealing with that issue, if nothing more than to say, God, this was one week when my stewardship would speak well of my commitment.

You know, you see, it isn't just the money you give, it's the rest of the money too that has to be entrusted as a stewardship. The purpose of giving in, is to support the church; the people and the leaders. And then beyond that, to reach out to anybody you see on the road, who's bleeding and has a need, whether he's a Christian or not. And the period for giving is the first day of the week. That's the only time we take an offering here. Not on Wednesday and other times. Unless there would be some special missionary need or some need at the moment, but the regular giving is on the Lord's Day, 'cause that's what they did then.

So, that when a need comes along, we don't have to get up and holler at you and get you all emotionally traumatized and say, and get you all worked up, so you give emotionally. We want you to learn deal systematically, week by week, with stewardship, so that when needs come, there's money available because you've been faithful. And you've given out of love to God, not out of some emotional stimulation. Well, next week, we're gonna get to the really great part. Let's pray.

Thank you Father for giving us great fellowship this morning. Thank you for even the offering we received that came from the hearts of these precious people. So much of it was sacrificial, Father. Thank you for that. Maybe there was even a widow here who gave her little mites. Or maybe there was a wealthy man who gave much. Some Father, perhaps who couldn't give anything because they have such great need. But thank you Father for what was given, for every heart that had it in a spirit of sacrifice.

Thank you for the great truth that we learn from our Lord Jesus, who was rich, but for our sakes became poor, that we, though His poverty, might be made rich. And we know that the most of all, the thing He gave us was salvation. He gave himself on the cross. He gave everything. He gave His life for us. Help us to be willing to do what we read at the very beginning, this morning, to do the thing that expresses love in the supreme way. Greater love hath no man this that a man lay down his life

for his friends. Oh Father, teach us that we can't look upon our brother and close up our compassion and really say we love you.

So, help us to love you and to love the fellowship, to love the body and even to love the ungodly enough to reach out and give and give to meet the need. And know full well that we'll never out give you, because you'll pour on us abundant blessing. Help us to be cheerful, hilarious givers. Thank you Father, for the encouragement of your word to us, in Jesus' name. Amen.

Available online at: <http://www.gty.org>

COPYRIGHT (C) 2015 Grace to You

You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (<http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright>).