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

Concerning the Collection, Part 3
Scripture: 1 Corinthians 16:2-4
Code: 1885

We thought we might finished last Sunday in 1 Corinthians Chapter 16 the first four verses, but we didn't. In fact, when I was...when the time ran last week, I had only really ten minutes left in my sermon. Now it's hard to stretch a ten minute sermon into a whole morning sermon today. So I have 40 minute introduction I've added to it. You think I'm kidding, huh? You'll see. And I...as I was praying about what the Lord would have me to do, I realized I just had about ten minutes or so left and how could I add something on the beginning that would make it all meaningful and I just pulled out some things I'd been reading in the past and some thoughts I'd been having. And I thought well, I'm just going to approach a subject that'll lead us right into this. And I want to share it with you this morning and I don't think it's one we've really dealt with in the years that I've been at the church in a thorough way.

So I want you to really listen as I share with you what God has shown me in His word. And it's just going to be a matter of looking at some passages. It's not going to take much commentary on my part, other than to just point out where we are in the text. Let me begin by saying this, 1 Corinthians Chapter 16 and verses 1-4 is a text which deals with the objective in the heart of the apostle Paul to meet the needs of the poor saints in Jerusalem. Paul had this great burning desire to collect an offering from the Gentile churches who were somewhat wealthy in order to give it to the poor saints at Jerusalem who were in dire need. Now the Corinthians knew about this, but they had some question about how Paul wanted the collection to be made. And so they asked him what was their part in this collection for the poor saints. And he responds in this book by writing 16:1-4. These four verses as instruction to the Corinthians as to their part in the gifts needed by the Jerusalem church.

But this goes way beyond that because while you have here basically a statement relevant to a specific situation in the Corinthian church it can be broadened to teach us principles of giving that are as far reaching and poignant for us today as they would have been for the Corinthians then. And we've already begun to discuss these. But I was thinking that behind this whole thing here is this need to meet the dire distress of poor people. And so I began to search the Scriptures. In fact, when I was flying to Chicago I was going through my Bible searching the Scriptures to find all the things I could about those people who were poor and how God felt.

And I want to give you the divine attitude that's behind the heart of Paul in meeting the needs of these people. Now you can go as far back in the Old Testament as the time of the exodus when God first called out His people. When He first established a nation. And the Bible tells us in the book of

Exodus, as well as other places, when it reflects on the exodus itself, that God called them out of the house of bondage. That God called Israel out of slavery. That God called Israel out of oppression. That He called them out of the place of poverty and destitution. In fact, in Exodus Chapter 20 and verse 2, in the text that is the preamble to the Decalogue or the Ten Commandments, God identifies Himself in this way. He says, "I am the Lord thy God who have brought thee out of the land of Egypt out of the house of bondage."

In other words, God sees Himself as a liberating God. As a God who frees people from bondage, who frees people from poverty, from slavery, from depression and oppression. In Deuteronomy Chapter 26, let me read you something of what is said here relative to this element in the Exodus. Deuteronomy 26 in verse 5. You don't need to look it up, I'll just read it to you. Deuteronomy 26:5, Moses is talking. He says, "And thou shalt speak and say before the Lord they God, A Syrian ready to perish was my father. He went into Egypt, sojourned there with a few and became a nation great, mighty, and populous." In other words, a few people went into Egypt, but they came out a nation.

Maybe several million, that's where the nation was really born in slavery, poverty, and oppression. "And the Egyptians badly treated us, they afflicted us, they laid on us hard bondage and we cried to the Lord God of our fathers. The Lord heard our voice, looked on our affliction, our labor, and our oppression and the Lord brought us forth out of Egypt. Now the whole point that's he making here is that God redeemed the people out of poverty and bondage and slavery and oppression and need. God has always, always identified closely with people in great distress.

You know what's sad? What sad is that Israel was a nation born out of poverty, born out of bondage, born out of oppression and Israel was undone. Israel was scattered. Israel was destroyed for doing to the poor among it's own people exactly what the Egyptians had done to them. The kingdom was divided after Solomon. Israel split into two parts, the northern kingdom with ten tribes, the southern kingdom with two tribes, Judah and Benjamin.

The southern kingdom was known as Judah, the northern as Israel. They existed co-equally for a while, with unmitigated evil in the north and evil and good mixed in the south. Finally in 722 B.C. the northern kingdom was scattered into oblivion. The reason? Well, for the reason for their scattering, you need to look at Amos. Amos is one of the little prophets, small book, very important man. In Amos Chapter 2, listen to the reason God took the northern kingdom away. Amos 2:6, "Thus saith the Lord for three transgressions of Israel and for four I'll not turn away it's punishment. Here they come. The four, "they sold the righteous for silver." Number one, for money they would sell a righteous man. Second reason, "and the poor for a pair of shoes." They would do anything to step on the neck of the poor. If they could get a pair of shoes out of it, they would sell the poor. And verse 7 says, "They pant after the dust of the earth on the head of the poor." In other words, they want to push the head of poor people into the dirt. "They turned aside the way of the meek." And then the other sin, "a man and his father go in unto the said maid to profane my holy name immorality." And

then the next one, verse 8, "They lay themselves down on clothes laid to pledge by every altar and drink the wine of the condemned in the house of theirs god."

So what you have a wrong dealing with the righteous. A wrong dealing with the poor, immorality and idolatry. For those four things, God carried away the northern kingdom, but one of them was the way they oppressed the poor. God really desires that His people not do that. In Amos Chapter 5, in verse 11, we find again these words. "For as much therefore as your treading is on the poor, you take from him burdens of wheat. You have built houses of hewn stone, but you will not dwell in them. You have planted pleasant vineyards, but you will not drink wine of them for I know your manifold transgressions, your mighty sins, you afflict the just, you take a bribe, and you turn aside the poor in the gate from what is just for them."

In other words, they had oppressed the poor. Chapter 6, verses 4-7, identically the same thing. Only here you have their ritz and what they have become in their oppression of the poor. They gained everything from the poor. They pushed the poor into the dirt, and consequently they gained everything for themselves. And verse 4 of 6 says, "They lie on beds of ivory, stretch themselves on couches, eat the lambs out of the flock, and the calves of the midst of the stall, the very best meat, the lamb and veal they eat, and they drink wine in bowls," cups aren't big enough, "and they put on the fanciest ointment they can find, but they are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph."

They could care less about the needy. They could care less about the poor. They could care less about those who are trodden down and all they do is get fatter and fatter and fatter and fatter in their ivory beds and their couches and their fancy food and their fancy music and drinking and smelly perfume. God really indicts the rich, not because just they're rich, but because they have become rich at the expense of the poor. They have widened and widened the gap. When God established Israel, He said at the end of every seventh year, you release all the slaves.

At the end of every 50thyear, every piece of property returns to it's original owner. You know why? Because nobody could really stack it up. It prevented it from being piled up. You may buy a piece of land in the 48thyear. Two years later it goes back to its original owner. Consequently, God maintained a close gap between the rich and the poor, but as we begin to pile it up, pile it up, we see Israel all of sudden ignoring the seven year release. No doubt ignoring the 50thyear and they just keep piling it up and piling it up and the gap gets wider and wider and wider and wider and the rich are richer and the poor are poorer and they grovel the poor in the dirt and God says I'm going to come in and wipe your nation out.

And in Amos Chapter 7, verse 11, "Thus says Amos, Jeroboam will die by the sword," that was the king, "Israel shall be surely led away captive out of their own land." Verse 17, "Your wife will be a harlot in the city. Your sons and daughters will fall by the sword. Your land shall be divided by line. You'll die in a polluted land and Israel shall go into captivity away from his land." God says, I'm going

to take you right out of that land.

Do you see what happened? Israel went right back into captivity for doing the very same thing the Egyptians had done them when God saved them out of captivity. And the southern kingdom, you say what about them? The same thing. The very same thing. One hundred years before the southern kingdom went into captivity a prophet came along and he could see what was happening. His name? Isaiah. And in Chapter 10, Isaiah predicted the inevitable. In Chapter 10, in verse 1, "Woe unto them who decree unrighteous decrees and who write grievousness which they have prescribed to turn aside," now watch this, "to turn aside the needy from justice. To take away the right from the poor of my people, that widows may be their prey and they rob the orphans." And Isaiah says in the voice of God as it were, "what will they do in the day of visitation and the desolation which shall come from afar? To whom will you flee for help and where will you leave your glory? Without me they shall bow down unto the prisoners. They shall fall unto the slain for all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still."

In other words, God says because of what you've done to the poor, because of the oppression of the needy, I'm going to come and I'm going to take you into captivity. Isaiah saw it a hundred years ahead. A hundred years later, at the time in which the captivity occurred another prophet came along, his name was Jeremiah. And in Jeremiah Chapter 5, verse 26, Jeremiah saw also the inevitable. He says in Jeremiah 5:26, "For among my people are found wicked men. They lie in wait as he that setteth snares. They set a trap. They catch men. As a cage is full of birds so are their houses full of deceit. Therefore, they have become great and grown rich." In other words, they rich by trapping people, by deceiving people, by catching people.

"They are grown fat. They shine, ye they pass over the deeds of the wicked. They judge not the cause, the cause of the fatherless, yet they prosper and the right of the needy, do they not judge shall I not punish them? Shall not my soul be avenged," says God. Jeremiah saw it. Isaiah saw it. And in 586 B.C. it came to pass. They went into Babylonian captivity. The southern kingdom made captive for the oppression of the poor, the very thing from which they themselves had been freed when God brought them out of Egypt.

And in Jeremiah Chapter 34, the sum of it all is stated in verse 17 as God speaks of the terrible judgment. And this is what it says, "You have not hearkened to me in proclaiming liberty. Everyone to his brother, every man to his neighbor." In other words, you didn't do what I told you about the seventh year. "Behold I proclaim a liberty for you saith the Lord. A liberty to the sword, to the pestilence and to the famine and I'll make you to be removed unto all the kingdoms of the earth." Israel was scattered. Judah was scattered because they oppressed the poor. They oppressed the poor.

It's interesting to me something. They don't know God yet, but you want to know something? The nation Israel has learned its lesson. There's one thing you'll find in Israel today. They will not oppress the poor. They provide for them. They learned a lesson. God identifies with the need of poor people. Listen to Psalm 146, verse 5. "Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help whose hope is the Lord his God. Who made heaven and earth, the sea and all that there it is who keep it's truth forever." Now listen further about God. "Who keepeth justice or executeth justice for the oppressed, who giveth food to the hungry, the Lord looses the prisoners, the Lord opens the eyes of the blind, the Lord raises those who are bowed down, the Lord loves the righteous. The Lord preserves the sojourners. He relieves the fatherless and widow." That's the kind of God we have.

He's not only a creator, He's a lover of the poor and the needy and the widows and the orphans. God has always identified with those in need. And in Proverbs there are two verses that we must not miss. Chapter 14, verse 31 says "He that oppresseth the poor," now watch this, "He that oppresseth the poor," listen, "reproaches his maker." When you oppress the poor by not paying him a wage that is fair, by not sharing your abundance with his need, you reproach God. Why? Because God cares for that poor person.

In fact, the opposite truth to that is in Proverbs 19:17. Listen to this. "He that has pity on the poor lendeth unto the Lord and that which he hath given will he pay him again." In other words, when you withhold from the poor, you mock God. When you lend to the poor, you invest with God who will pay you back. God is identified with the poor and the needy. You all know that one point and time God came into this world, right? And He came in the form of a man, didn't He? And God's great heart for the poor and the needy wasn't any different when He was incarnate either.

Look with me at Luke Chapter 4, verse 18. Luke Chapter 4, verse 18, listen to this, Jesus arrives in Nazareth, the beginning of His ministry in Galilee. And He stands up in the synagogue and He opens the Scripture to Isaiah and this is what He says. Luke 4:18, "The Spirit of Lord is upon me. Because He hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the," what, "poor. He hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives recovering of site to the blind to set at liberty them that are bruised to preach the acceptable year of the Lord."

Did you notice how He identified with the poor and the broken and the needy and the helpless? God always does, always. In Matthew 25, verse 31, we have a glimpse of the future. Watch this identification again. "The Son of man shall come in His glory and all the holy angels with Him and He'll sit upon the thrown of His glory and before Him shall be gathered all the nations and He'll separate them one from another as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats." Matthew 25:33. "He shall set the sheep on His right hand and the goats on His left." And here is the judgment of the nations at the return of Jesus. This is future here. Look at the criteria for judgment. This is incredible. On what basis are their sheep nations that go into the kingdom and goat nations which are cast into everlasting fire? On what basis is this made? What is the criteria for judgment?

Verse 34. "Then shall the king say to them on His right hand, come ye blessed of my Father inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." Why should we get your kingdom? "For I was hungry and you gave me food says Jesus to them. I was thirsty and you gave me drink. I was a stranger and you took me in. I was naked and you clothed me. I was sick and you visited me. I was imprisoned and you came to me." And the righteous will say to Him, "Lord when saw we thee hungry and fed, or thirsty and gave thee drink, when saw we thee a stranger and took thee in and naked and clothed thee or when saw we thee sick or imprisoned and came unto thee? Lord what are you saying? When were you ever like that?"

And the king shall answer and say unto them, "Verily I say unto you inasmuch as you have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, you have," what, "done it to me." Did you see that? The very criterion for judgment ultimately is how you treated the least among those in the family. And when you treat someone who is poor and naked and hungry and imprisoned with kindness and love and meet the need, you have done it unto whom? Unto Christ. Do you see how inextricably identified God is with people in need? Can't separate it. And further he says, "those on the left hand, depart from me you cursed into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels." Why? Why hell for us? "For I was hungry and you gave me no food. I was thirsty and you gave me no drink. I was a stranger and you took me not in. I was naked and you clothed me not, sick and imprisoned and you visited me not."

Then shall they also answer saying, "Lord when did we ever see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or imprison and didn't minister to You." And He'll say unto them, "Verily I say unto you inasmuch you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me." See? God identifies with the poor. He identifies with the oppressed. Listen, when God came into the world, did He come to a palace? Did He come with a fancy robe? Did He walk on a red carpet? Did He have all the gravy of life? I think not.

When our Lord Jesus came into this world, He was born in a small and insignificant village, Bethlehem, Ephrathah though thou be little among the sons of Judah. Out of these shall He come forth who is to be ruler over my people. He was born to an obscure family, Joseph and Mary. He was born in borrowed stable and his first visitors were animals and it got a little better. There were shepherds, they were considered the lowest level of employment. His parents were too poor to bring a lamb for an offering when they went for the purification after His birth to the temple. They had to bring two pigeons. That was the gift of the poorest of the poor.

He was teacher in Judaism. And teachers in Judaism were very poor and in Matthew 8:20, he said "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay His head." The only home He ever knew was a borrowed home that of Mary and Martha and Lazarus or else He slept on the side of the hill of the Mount of Olives. The one thing He did own was His

cloak and they gambled for that at the cross. Even in incarnation, God identified with the poor. God identified to the needy. God identified with those without.

Go all the way back. When God set about to choose a nation, He chose one in poverty. He chose one in slavery. He chose one totally oppressed. When God wanted to choose special people to do special things, He got tremendous joy out of picking nobodies to become somebodies. Have you ever noticed that? Listen to the words of a dear lady by the name of Hannah. She can't believe God's going to use her. She can't believe. God's going to give her a son. Not just a son, but Samuel. So she says this, 1 Samuel 2:7, "The Lord maketh rich and the Lord maketh poor. He bringeth low, He lifteth up." Watch this. "He raiseth up the poor out of the dust and lifteth up the beggar from the refuse to set them among princes and to make them inherit the throne of glory." Isn't that great? Hannah says He...I'm a beggar, I'm...I'm the poor. I'm the low and He lifted me up to set me among princes. That His business. He loves to do that.

When God looked around the world one day, He was looking for a mother for the Messiah. He found Mary. Mary was a nobody. Mary was poor, needy. God promised her a son. And do you remember what Mary said? Listen to what she said. Luke 1:52, "He hath put down the mighty from their seats," she said. "And exalted them of low degree. He has filled the hungry with good things and the rich He hath sent away empty." Mary said God is in the business of reversing the trends in the world.

When God wanted a people for His name, He chose some poor slaves in Egypt. When God wanted a great man Samuel, He chose a poor woman. When God wanted to come into the world in human form, He chose a nobody with nothing named Mary. And the next time God did some specific choosing, He picked out twelve men to help in His ministry. Only one of them probably had any money and that one was Matthew. And I'm not too sure he got his the right way. You say yeah, but when He come to the church, what did He do? Did He pick out all the superstars, hotshots? Going to knock them dead folks? Nope. 1 Corinthians Chapter 1, verse 26, Paul says, "You see your calling church. You see it. Not many wise, not many mighty, not many noble," just plain us folks, "God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise. God has chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things that are mighty the base things of the world. And the things which are despised hath God chosen ye, and things which are not to bring nothing things that are." God identifies with the poor and the common and the needy and the oppressed and God exalts His name by lifting them up to the level of princes and makes them kings and priests, you see.

In God's church, God wants us to keep the perspective, doesn't He? In fact, in James Chapter 2, He says, "My brethren, my brethren, if there comes a man into your assembly hath a gold ring," now gold ring isn't a big deal today, all of us who are married have a gold ring, but He means a rich man. "Man comes in fine apparel and then comes also a man in crummy clothes, vial raiment, rotten, stinking clothes, and you have respect to him that wears the fine clothes and you say sit here fellow and a great place. And you say to the poor over there in the corner under the footstool will you buddy."

That's a free translation, but that's the gist of it. You get that rich man right down there. We can use this guy. Hmmm, he's got dough. Put the poor man in the corner. You're partial.

"Hath not God chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith?" Don't you love that? "And heirs of the kingdom?" God is in the business of picking the poor. We might as well realize it, if we want to identify with God, we better identify with poor people, needy people. But you have despised the poor and you have thus broken the royal law, the law of love. In the early church in Acts 2, the poor people sold their land...I mean, the rich people sold their land to give it to the poor didn't they? Acts 2 and Acts 4.

Now, I don't want to get...I don't want to overstate this. God also calls some rich people. You've got to have some rich people to share with some poor people, right? I mean, in the Old Testament there was some really rich people, probably rich beyond what we could even imagine, like Job. Job was so rich, he was rich to begin with. God made him poor and then God made him richer than he'd ever been. Abraham was rich. Isaac was rich. Jacob, Joseph no question the patriarchs were rich.

There were other rich people. David was rich. Solomon was rich. Come to the New Testament, Joseph of Arimathea was rich. He was a disciple. Barnabas was rich, rich enough to sell some land to give to poor people. Cornelius was rich, he had a household full of servants. Paul met all kinds of wealthy people in his travels and he was so pleased that they were wealthy, even the lady Dorcas wealthy. There were many wealthy people and they were very needed in the church because they could share, but what the Bible condemned is when the rich get rich by oppressing the poor. See? Paying wages that aren't fair.

Hey I'll tell you the greatest example of somebody was rich and shared. God. 2 Corinthians 8:9, "Jesus Christ who was rich, but for your sake He became," what, "poor. That we through His poverty might be made rich." Nothing wrong with being rich. Only wrong of being rich if you get it wrong and if you don't share it. That's why 1 Timothy 6:17 says this, "Charge them that are rich." You commend the rich people. "Not to highminded," you know big stuff, way above everybody else. "Trusting in their uncertain riches." But you tell them to do this," I love this, "do good, be rich in good works ready to distribute, willing to share." You tell them that.

Paul says, you're going to get them. You just tell them that. Tell them to distribute it and share it. And if they don't, they don't. They may never lay hold on eternal life. Boy riches can be a curse. James Chapter 5, listen to this, "Come now you rich, weep and howl for your miseries that will come upon you. Your riches are corrupted. Your garments are moth eaten. Your gold and silver are rusted. And the rust of them shall be a witness against you and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. You heap treasure together for the last days." You've been stacking it up and it's just going to rot you corrupt you. You say, you mean are you referring to anybody with money? Anybody who's rich? No, verse 4 qualifies it. "Behold the higher of the laborers who have reaped down your fields which is by

you kept back by fraud cries out and the cries of them who have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of sabaoth." In other words, God says in my ears comes the cry of the workers that you underpaid to get so rich.

If you're an employer be generous. Opt out on the side of generosity, will you? Figure out what they need to live and give them more. You've got enough. Share. Lest the cry come from these who have been restrained from what is right and it entered the ears of God. God identifies with the poor. There was an awful king in the Old Testament. His name was Jehoiakim. And Jeremiah indicted Jehoiakim in the 22nd Chapter of Jeremiah. It's along the same line. Let me just share with you what happened. Jeremiah 22:13, "Woe unto him who builds his house by unrighteousness," this is Jehoiakim, "and his chambers by wrong who uses his neighbor's service without wages." Freebies. Jehoiakim said man, I'm going to build me a palace that won't quit. I'm going to get everybody to do it for nothing.

And of course, since he was the king, he'd get them to do anything he wanted. So he got service without wages and he didn't pay the people for the work. He said, "I'll build myself a wide house with big rooms and I'll special cut-out windows. And I'll panel that deal with cedar and paint it purple." I like it up to there. Not too hot about the vermillion. Verse 15, "Shalt thou reign because thou closest thyself in cedar? Did not thy father eat and drink and do justice and righteousness and then it was well with him. He judged the cause of the poor and the needy, then it was well with him." You forgot that if you really want to be happy in life, don't oppress people to get fat, you do righteously like your good and Godly and precious father Josiah did.

But he says in 17, "Your eyes and your heart are for nothing but covetousness and shedding innocent blood and oppression and violence. Therefore thus saith the Lord concerning Jehoiakim, the son of Josiah, king of Judah, they shall not lament for him saying aw my brother or aw sister. They'll not lament for him saying aw Lord or aw his glory. He shall be buried with a burial of an ass." Oh, pretty straight stuff, huh? God is not too excited about people who get rich at the expense of others. Be fair and share.

This is a principle all throughout the Scripture. It's everywhere. We won't have time to develop it any further. God identifies with the poor. Do you understand that now? Now let's go to 1 Corinthians 16 and just quickly finish it up. The Jerusalem Christians were poor. It was a matter of sharing. So Paul is collecting this offering and the Corinthians say well, what are we supposed to do have our share. And he gives them four verses of instruction. And do you remember that last time I told you that there are all kinds of great principles here. Let me just remind you of them. First of all, we saw the purpose of giving, of all giving in verse 1. Giving is for the saints primarily, for the saints. And we are to give to the saints' physical need and also their what? Their spiritual need. And sometimes we are to give to the saints in the pew and sometimes we are to give to those who minister to us. We saw that in the Scripture.

But we are giving first of all to the those in the family. Beyond that, of course, we are to give to any who have need. God loved the stranger and the sojourner too, didn't He? And He met his need. Then we saw the period of giving in verse 2. On the first day of the week. That is giving is to be regular systematic, week after week as we really come to grips with the stewardship of money every week. Not just piling it up and throwing it all into one shot. Week, week, week after week. Period of giving.

And we saw the place of giving. Let everyone of you lay by him in store and we shared with you that the store is the assembly of the church, and that we are systematically to give when the church comes together on the first day into the store of the church, the thesaurus, the treasure. And that that treasury is to be dispensed by Godly men. So the purpose, the period, the place. We saw fourthly, the participants in giving. Who's to do this? "Let everyone of you," verse 2. Everybody. Nobody is exempt from systematic week by week giving. This is to be just as spontaneous, joyous, cheerful response of a loving heart toward a God who has given us everything.

The participants, everybody, doesn't matter how much you have or don't have. Everybody. Fifth, we saw the proportion of giving. How much are you to give? As God has prospered. There's no amount, there's no percent. From out of what God has given you, you give. You say well, how do I know what to give? I mean, it's not ten percent. No. How much should I give? Just remember some principles. Number one whatever you give is invested with God, right? So whatever you give, you sow. So 2 Corinthians 9:6 says "Sow sparingly, reap," what, "sparingly. Sow bountifully," what, "reap bountifully." So when you want to decide how much to give, you decide how much you would like a return on.

And the Bible says in Luke 6:38, "Give and it shall be given unto you, press down, shaken together, running over." So whatever you give, God will multiply and give it back. He'll multiply and give it back. Remember our verse in the Old Testament in Proverbs. "You lend to the poor, you lend to the Lord and He'll pay it back again." Only always with interest. So I don't know what the amount is, but I know this, whatever God has given you from out of that, you invest with God. And there's another principle. It should not only be as investment, but it should be sacrificial. David said "I will not give the Lord that which costs me nothing." And the widow gave 100%. And Zacchaeus gave 50%. It should be a sacrifice. And the Macedonians, it says, gave liberally out of their deep poverty, 2 Corinthians 8:2. And Philippians 4, Paul says, "You gave so much, you gave so much but don't you worry, my God shall supply all your," what, "needs according to his riches in Christ."

Do you understand what happened? Paul had a need. They gave so much, they then had the need. It's just like Jesus who became poor that we might become rich. So you invest with God, give sacrificially. Another principle to remember is this that you're giving will in measure out of your spiritual overflow. In other words, it says in 2 Corinthians 8 that "the Macedonians," watch this, "first

gave themselves and then out came the flow of their gift."

So there are some principles. So the purpose, the period, the place, the participants, the proportions. All right, number six. These are going to be quick, so hang on. The provocation for giving, verse 2. The end of the verse, "do all this the first day of the week so there's no collections when I come." Now watch this, now watch this, Paul is saying giving is not to be provoked by emotional appeals at periods of time. It is to be systematic, week by week. He's saying look, you do this so we don't need some big appeal and some big gathering when I get there. This all ought to be in the flow of faithful systematic week by week giving.

And we won't even need a special offering when I come. Giving should be in the flow of life, not as a result of some emotional appeal on a periodic basis. Boy I'll tell you, Christians need to learn this. So many Christians do not know the meaning of systematic week by week sacrificial generous giving. They wait for some kind of a spiritual goose bump, when they get some emotional zap from some, you know, distended stomach baby in a picture or from some missionary with a tremendous need or some deal that comes up and then they just give. But they don't know the meaning of that faithfulness. Now there may be times when we have to give to meet a need immediately, because some needs are immediate

I remember when a missionary came through here and she said oh if I only had the tapes that I could take back and feed my soul and the word of God. I'd give out and give out and have nothing coming in. And so we said, we'll let you have the tapes and we'll take a little love offering to get the money just to support the tape ministry and give you all the tapes on the whole thing. And so I told the people that and I said I'll be in the front if you'd like to hand me the money. And they came down and gave me thirteen hundred and some dollars. So we just wrote her a check and said here is thirteen hundred and some. And she says oh, wow that's so much. Well, that's what they wanted to give. So that's our expression of love. So go get some tapes and whatever God lays on your heart. That's great isn't it?

See that's over and above. And some times there will be those kinds of things. And that's an exciting thing. But that should never be the way we give. That should be something beyond the normal flow of systematic faithfulness. Paul says I don't want it to be some emotional deal when I get there and I don't want to have to brow beat you and struggle with you to get it. Just start now and when I get there it'll be all done. So the purpose, the period, the place, the participants, the proportions, the provocation. Are you ready for this? The protection in giving, verse 3.

When you're going to give your money you say well, I don't know what they're doing with it over there at Grace Church. I'm putting in there every week. All right, verse 3 will help. There's a protection. "And when I come," Paul says, "whomsoever you shall approve, I will send them with letters to bring your liberality to Jerusalem. And when I arrive the NAS says whomever you may approve I'll send

them with letters to carry your gift to Jerusalem." Now watch this. He says, look once you've given that money I'm going to put that money in the hands of some people to take it to Jerusalem. Who were those people be? People approved by you with accompanying letters to state that they are truly trustworthy people.

Now watch this, the protection in all giving in the church is that the money be cared for by approved, Godly, honest men. See that? That's the issue. That's the protection in the church. You say well, what are you trying to make a point out of this for? What does it have to do with the church? Just this, that I believe that as you give systematically and faithfully into the treasury of the church it is incumbent upon the church also to choose out those Godly men who should have the care of those God's funds.

Beloved, that's why we go to the tremendous extent we do to choose Godly elders. I praise God that we have 33 Godly men to do that. You know, listen, in the early church, who was it that handled all the money? They came and they laid it at whose feet? The apostles feet. They never gave the money to anybody who didn't have the spiritual qualification to handle it. They didn't give it to the bankers and the people with the finance background. They didn't give it to the business men. They gave it to the Godly men. And later on, the apostles got so busy in Acts 6 they said look we've got to give ourselves to the teaching of the word and we've go to give ourselves to prayer so you find some other men to handle this business. And you know what their qualifications were? They've got have had some financial training. They've got to have some business. No, he says, actually you find men full of faith and full of the Holy Spirit.

See, you know what you see churches do a lot? They have two boards. They say the deacons over here, now you guys handle the spiritual and we'll get some guys that really know money and they'll handle the money. So then over here you determine what God wants to do and we'll see if we can support it. That doesn't make any sense. Did you ever know anything God wanted to do but He couldn't because He didn't have enough money? Doesn't make any sense.

You know what I believe, whish, don't ever give money to anybody less spiritual. All you do is create a bottleneck at a lower level. Put the funds in the hands of the Godliest people there are. Paul says look you find the people that are approved and you get the letters together and I'll send them with the money. Let it be entrusted to Godly men who prayerfully in the energy of the Holy Spirit determined its direction. That's the protection you're given. I'll tell you something people, I'd have a hard time giving to a church, I mean this, if I didn't really believe in my heart, that Godly men cared for those things.

So the purpose, the period, the place, the participants, the proportions, the provocation, protection, eighth you ready? The perspective. I'm going to quit with this one. Short one, verse 4. I love this, this is...this is really funny. The perspective, what is the perspective in giving. It is to be generous. It

is to be generous. Look at this verse 4. This is really an insight into Paul. "And he says look if it's suitable I'll go along with it." In other words, listen, if you give enough so that I won't be embarrassed I'll go along and accompany it. Isn't that good? I'm not about to take a long trip to Jerusalem though if you just give a little bit. So that's just a nice little way for Paul to say, you know, come on, stretch yourself a little. If it's a suitable offering, I'll even go.

I like that, be liberal he says. The end of verse 3, he says, I'd really like to send them with your liberality. And the word is carous, your grace. Your over-abundance, your generosity. People listen to this, when you give, give generously. We have so much and God so identifies with those who need. The money that comes we want to give it to those in physical need, to those in spiritual need. To support those who minister to us who have no other support than what we give them and then they in turn have to take their funds and spread theirs around too.

I don't know about you, but God's given me a whole new sense of responsibility to those who don't have anything or those who less than I have. Listen, we can't do any less than give. God made the sun that gives. God made the moon, it gives. God made the stars, they give. God made the air, it gives. God made the clouds, they give rain. God made the earth, it gives. God made the trees, they give. The sea, it gives. God made the flowers, they give. God made the beasts, they give. God made man, does he give?

Not always. May it be said of us what was said by the Lord Jesus, "when you give, don't let your left hand know what your right hand's doing. Do it in secret and let God openly reward you." Listen, in 125 A.D. a philosopher named Aristideslooked at Christianity and this is what he said. "They are remarkable people." He said, "They walk in humility and kindness and falsehood is not found among them and they love one another." He said, "They despise not the widow and they grieve not the orphan. He that hath distributed liberally to him that hath not. If they see a stranger they bring him under their roof and they rejoice over him as if he were their brother. For the call themselves brethren not after the flesh, but after the Spirit and in God. But when one of their poor passes away from the world and any of them seem him, then he provides for his burial according to his ability. And if they hear that any of their number is imprisoned or oppressed for the name of their Messiah, all of them provide for his needs. And if it's possible that he may be delivered, they deliver him. And if there is among them a man that is poor and needy and they have not an abundance of necessity, they will fast two or three days that they may supply the needy with his necessary food.

Isn't that great? I don't know what God said to you this morning personally. I just know what the Scripture said. I shared that with you. I hope you'll take it and apply it. I want God to show me just where to make changes in my life to give of the riches He's given me. Let's pray.

Thank You Father for being so straightforward with us. I want to share your love for the poor and the needy and the oppressed. I thank you that you've given me a pattern in Jesus who was rich but

became poor. Help me to be faithful. From my riches, to come down to poverty if need be to share with those who have need. First of all, in the family and then to the stranger and the sojourner that You also love. May it be so that Your spirit convicts each heart in a specific way. May we remember the words of Jesus who said when you give a feast, don't call the rich and the famous and the important. But go out and call the blind and the halt and the maimed and the poor who can't repay you and then wait for God to repay you. Father, help us to be willing to do that. In Christ's name we pray, Amen.

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