

# "Giving"

## 1 Corinthians 16:1-2

Baxter Exum (#962)  
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### **Introduction:**

If you have been here over the past few weeks, you may remember that we have been looking together at the acts of worship that we perform on the first day of every week. As I was preparing for this series, I had a hard time deciding in which order I should preach these five lessons. It would be rather difficult to arrange them in order of importance, and so I finally settled on simply preaching the lessons in the order that we currently perform each act of worship in our weekly service.

Several weeks ago, therefore, we started with a lesson on public prayer. We then continued by looking at the act of singing. We moved on to the act of preaching. And then last Sunday, we looked together at the Lord's Supper. This morning, I would like for us to bring our series to a close as we look very carefully at the giving that we do together as a congregation. I certainly realize that there are two big extremes on this issue. On one hand, there are some churches that seem to talk about giving all the time. It seems that some groups are only interested in doing whatever it takes to get more and more. I have told you before about stopping by one church down in Crystal Lake just to get some basic information so that I could learn more about that particular denomination. And in the information they gave to me, they included a carbonless form where I was supposed to fill out my yearly salary, and (even as a potential visitor) the form explained that I would be sent a monthly statement based on a percentage of my income. It was almost like filling out a form for the IRS.

And then on the other hand, there are some preachers who are almost terrified to ever preach on the subject of giving. As I was preparing this morning's lesson, I kept reading articles written by preachers who were giving advice on how to bring up such a sensitive subject. And so apparently there are preachers out there who are scared of preaching on the subject of giving. I think we understand why some may be scared. Some simply want to avoid the opposite extreme. Others do not want to appear to be self-serving. Some man-made denominations are actually structured so that the preacher gets a "cut" of the weekly contribution—he gets a certain percentage. And so if he can raise the contribution, then he is guaranteed a raise in his own salary. I can guarantee that this is not the way it works here at this congregation. Historically, we have used the salary schedule of the local school district as a basic guide.

And so when it comes to preaching on this subject, I do not share the fear that many may have. As I see it, this is one of the most exciting and challenging subjects that we could ever study. As Paul put it in **2 Corinthians 8:8**, giving is one way that we are able to prove our love for God. And when we think about it, what could possibly be more important than proving our love for God? We might say that giving is where the rubber meets the road. Giving to God is where we apply the Christian faith.

And as I thought about it even more, I realized something: If I cannot preach on the subject of giving, then I cannot really preach on much of anything. After all, Jesus Himself talked more about money than he did about heaven and hell put together! Jesus spoke more words about money than He did about faith and prayer combined! All of this certainly tells us something about the importance of good financial management in the eyes of God.

I should preface my comments, though, by pointing out to our visitors that this is a "family discussion." In other words, I am speaking primarily, this morning, to the members of the Four Lakes congregation. Our guests are certainly invited to listen in, our visitors are certainly invited to look at the Scriptures with us this morning, but any lesson that I preach on giving (as a responsibility) is going to apply primarily to the members of this congregation. If you are not a member here and you choose to give, we will not stop you. We will not chase you down the sidewalk and try to give it back. But as a responsibility, we are speaking to the members of this congregation.

If you will, I would invite all of you to turn with me to the book of **1 Corinthians 16**. **\*\*PPT\*\*** We know that the book of **1 Corinthians** was written by the apostle Paul to a church that he had helped to establish in the city of Corinth. It was written somewhere around 55 AD, and was apparently written in response to a series of questions that the church had submitted to Paul in some kind of written form. And so all through the book, Paul starts off various sections by saying, "***Now concerning....***" And he would then go on to cover some topic that they had asked about. Our text for this morning follows the same pattern, because apparently the church had asked about some kind of collection. If you will, then, please look with me at the opening verses of **1 Corinthians 16**. In **1 Corinthians 16:1-2**, these are the words of the apostle Paul. He says...

***<sup>1</sup> Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so do you also. <sup>2</sup> On the first day of every week each one of you is to put aside and save, as he may prosper, so that no collections be made when I come.***

By piecing some things together we understand that Paul was talking primarily about a collection that was being taken up for the benefit of the saints in Jerusalem who were undergoing a time of extreme famine. The church in Jerusalem was suffering, and they needed some financial help.

I am mindful that in times of crisis, we have traditionally been a very generous congregation. You might remember the situation shortly after Hurricane Katrina. Very early on, the politicians were all arguing with one another. The Democrats were blaming President Bush. They were saying that the federal government should have

done more. They should have gone in sooner. The Republicans were saying, **“Wait a minute! Louisiana has a Democrat for a governor, and a Democrat as the mayor of New Orleans! They should have asked for help sooner!”** And as all of the arguing was going on, this congregation wrote a check for somewhere around \$10,000, and the help we sent actually got there before FEMA! The funds that we collected were used for food and for a temporary shelter at the Goodwood Boulevard Church of Christ in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Our funds helped construct a shower out behind the church building for the benefit of hundreds of people whose homes had been completely destroyed by the flooding.

What I’m saying is: God’s plan works! Back in **1 Corinthians 16**, therefore, Paul was dealing with a similar emergency—a famine in Jerusalem. And as Paul got ready to collect the funds, he established several basic principles that still govern church finances even today. As we study these two verses, I would like to briefly point out four very basic principles that will hopefully deepen our understanding of how God wants the church to be funded even today.

**I. One of the first things we notice comes in verse 1 as we notice that GIVING IS A UNIVERSAL COMMAND. **\*\*PPT\*\*****

We notice in **verse 1** that Paul says, ***“Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so do you also.”*** In other words, this was not a command that was limited to the church in the city of Corinth, but it was something that Paul had consistently taught in other places. We know that Galatia was a Roman province, and so there were multiple congregations that were spread out through that area. Paul’s command, therefore, was the same whether it was in Asia or whether it was in Europe—in Galatia or in Corinth. The needs may be different, but God’s plan for the collection is consistent. It is an instruction that crosses cultural and language barriers. All around the world, Christians are to follow the command that is given here by the apostle Paul.

Some have tried to teach that Paul never really “commanded” giving. In **verse 1**, however, Paul uses an interesting word, ***“...as I directed the churches of Galatia, so do you also.”*** The word that we translate as ***“directed”*** literally means, ***“to arrange thoroughly; i.e., to charge or appoint.”*** The same word is used in **Acts 18:2**, where we are told that the Roman Emperor Claudius, ***“...had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome.”*** In **Luke 17**, Jesus uses the word twice in two verses as he tells a parable about a slave and a master, ***“He does not thank the slave because he did the things which were commanded, does he? So you too, when you do all the things which are commanded you, say, ‘We are unworthy slaves; we have done only that which we ought to have done.’”*** And so just as Claudius had commanded the Jews to leave Rome, and just as a master would command a slave to do something, Paul is directing churches all around the world to follow his instruction concerning the weekly collection.

With that in mind, there is an interesting verse in the next book, in **2 Corinthians 8:8**. Paul is discussing the collection, and he says, ***“I am not speaking this as a command, but as proving through the earnestness of others the sincerity of***

***your love also.***” Some might say that Paul contradicted himself, and yet we need to understand the context. Paul was trying to motivate the congregation to follow through with what they had promised, and he did not want them to be giving simply out of a sense of obligation. The motivation for giving is love. And so in a sense our giving is commanded (in that it is required), and yet in another sense it is something that we do with joy. As Paul went on to say in **2 Corinthians 9:7**, ***“Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”*** And so we find, first of all, that giving is a universal command—it was not limited to the church in Corinth.

**II. As we look back at 1 Corinthians 16, we find a second basic principle, and that is, our giving is to be done ON THE FIRST DAY OF EVERY WEEK. **\*\*PPT\*\*****

This is not a difficult passage to understand. We are to give on the first day of every week. Several years ago, however, I ran into a man who taught that Paul did not really mean ***“on the first day of every week,”*** but what Paul meant was that we were to give every pay period. And so this man taught that if you are paid every two weeks that you should give every other Sunday. However, when we go back and look at it, Paul was very clear. We are to give on the first day of every week, and it is hard for me to imagine why we would want to change what the apostle Paul wrote. It is really not that difficult. If we get paid every other week, I can even let you borrow a calculator. You take the paycheck and divide it in half—that is the amount that you have made in one week. I am not good with numbers, but even I can figure that one out! For those of us who get paid yearly, it is quite simple to take that yearly figure and divide it by 52, the number of Sundays in each year.

Several weeks ago, one of our members told me about a new personal goal she now has to make up her contribution when she is out of town on Sunday. She asked about the best way of doing that. I told her that what we tried to do in our family was to put our check in the basket on the Wednesday before we leave so that it will be counted with the rest of the contribution on the following Sunday. The same thing would also apply to when we are sick or when the services are cancelled due to weather—we can give it early, we can mail it in, we can give it when we get back, we can hand it personally to the treasurer, but we should make it clear that our funds are to be counted along with those from the rest of the congregation on the first day of every week. As we will find out in just a few minutes, the basis of our gift is not whether we are in town, whether we are sick, or whether we get two feet of snow on Sunday morning; rather, the basis of our gift is whether we have prospered during the week. And so if we have had some kind of an income, God has commanded that we share some of it with Him.

The same basic principle applies in other areas of life. I can think about my cell phone bill. What if I go on vacation and am out of town on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of the month when that bill is due? Do I just skip that payment? No, I either pay it early or make it up when I get back. Concerning the IRS, what if I am sick and cannot get to the post office this coming April 15? Do I simply skip paying my taxes for the past year

because I was sick on the day it was due? No, if I have prospered over the previous year, I need to get that form in on time. And I would suggest that if the world ends tomorrow, I would much rather be caught owing the IRS than the Lord Jesus Christ.

You know, I find it very interesting that those in the denominational world have figured this out pretty well. They may only partake of the Lord's Supper on Christmas and Easter, they may do it once a month or once a quarter, but for some reason they have figured out that the collection is to be taken every week! I have no idea why they have figured one out but not the other! It is absolutely amazing!

### **III. As we go back to 1 Corinthians 16, we find a third lesson as Paul describes A PERSONAL GIFT TO THE CHURCH TREASURY. **\*\*PPT\*\*****

In verse 2, Paul says that, "***...each one of you is to put aside and save...so that no collections be made when I come.***" Paul is talking here about a personal and premeditated contribution. The command is very clearly given to "***each one of you.***" He is speaking to Christians. According to Chapter 1:2, Paul is speaking to the church of God which is at Corinth. He is speaking to the saints. For this reason, this congregation will never ask for funds from people in this community. You will never see us ringing bells on a street corner. We have four programs on television right now. You will never hear any of those programs ask for money. I guarantee it. Not only that, but they will offer free materials. With the Bible correspondence program that we offer here, we even pay the postage. We will not ask for money from those in the community, because giving is the responsibility of individual Christians.

Paul, then, says that "***each one of you is to put aside and save.***" In other words, if we have something to give, then God wants us to give it. This applies to the wealthy and the poor—"***each one of you.***" This applies to the self-employed millionaire as well as to the retired widow living on Social Security. If we only made two dollars last week, God expects us to set aside some of that aside for the weekly collection. Somebody might say, "***That's ridiculous! How could God expect something like that!***" If we had the time, we could turn to Mark's gospel account, and we could read about the poor widow who only had two coins totaling less than a penny. The Bible says that she put both of those coins into the temple treasury. That was all she had, and the Lord praised her for doing it and said that she had given more than those who had given out of their abundance. As Paul says, the command applies to, "***each one of you.***"

If husbands and wives give a single check, if they have a joint checking account, then they need to make this decision together. It needs to be discussed from time to time. It needs to be a mutual decision. If you are a Christian teenager, and if you have any income, then you also need to be giving—whether you get an allowance or have a part-time job. In my opinion, little children also need to be trained. If they get a dollar for an allowance, they need to get that allowance in coins so they can split it up and give some of it to the Lord.

What I find interesting here is that each person is to make a personal gift to the church treasury. When Paul says that **"...each one of you is to put aside and save,"** the implication is that there is a place to save it. In fact, the original word is closely related to the same word from which we get the English word "treasury." It is interesting that God had a treasury in the Old Testament. Once we turn over to the four gospel accounts, we find that Jesus and the twelve apostles had a **"money box."** And once we get to the book of **Acts**, we find that people were coming and bringing money and laying it at the apostles' feet. They were sharing their funds by bringing contributions to a common location. They pooled their resources.

And the reason Paul gives is at the end of **verse 2**, **"so that no collections be made when I come."** In other words, he was not telling them to just save up at home, but he was telling them to be regular with the contributions, so that they would not need to have a special collection for every need that the church might have. By being regular with our contributions, we allow the church to plan for the future and to use the funds wisely. We turn down the pressure, and we allow it to truly be a free-will offering. We can hardly imagine running out of toner for the bulletin and making an emergency call to every member to bring 45¢ to the church office on a Saturday night before we can place an order with Gordon Flesch to finish printing the bulletin. In the same way, Paul wanted to avoid an emergency collection by having each individual Christian make a personal gift into the treasury of the local congregation on the first day of every week.

#### **IV. As we close our thoughts on this passage, we need to notice one more thing, and that is, WE ARE TO GIVE AS WE MAY PROSPER. **\*\*PPT\*\*****

We have already touched on this just a little bit this morning, but the idea is that we are to give in proportion to our income. If we have no income, if we have no resources, then we are not required to give. And this is one of many ways that God's plan is better than my cell phone plan. If I lose my job and have no money, they don't care. But God understands! Our giving is to be in proportion to our income.

Unfortunately, in our society it is so tempting to give God the leftovers. Perhaps we start with our weekly income, and we start subtracting our obligations. We have rent or a mortgage, and groceries, and insurance, and school loans, and a car payment, and cable, and property taxes, and income taxes, and eating out, and cell phones, and movies, and credit card payments for a bunch of junk, and by the time we get to the end of the week, there is nothing left for God (or maybe we throw in a \$10 or a \$20 and hope it's okay). But we have looked at it backwards. We do not give God what is left over; we are to give to God first. We look at our income, we decide what to give to God, and then we structure our lifestyle around what is left—not the other way around!

And so when it comes to the amount that we are to give, we are simply told to give as we have been prospered. And this is basically all that the New Testament ever says about the amount of our giving. As I was preparing this morning's lesson, I consulted some denominational material to see what they are teaching these days,

and a lot of those guys are telling their people to tithe. They are telling their people to give 10%. Apparently they never got the memo—Jesus died and came back to life—we are no longer under the Law of Moses. And so as we look at the Scriptures, Christians are never told to tithe.

On the other hand, I can hardly imagine a Jew in the First Century saying, **“Thank you God, that Jesus died. Thank you for nailing the Law of Moses to the cross, so now I can drop my giving from 10% to 3%!”** That is hard for me to imagine. But the reality is that God has not demanded a percentage under the New Covenant. For many people, that is probably a great relief. For a comparison to the tithe under the Old Testament, for a little challenge, perhaps we could imagine taking our check for this morning and multiplying it by ten. Could we live on that amount? Perhaps that puts the Old Covenant into a little perspective.

But instead of a fixed percentage, God has simply put us on the honor system. God has basically said, **“Baxter, I am leaving it up to you. Give as you have been prospered. I am trusting you to make the right decision.”** And what an honor that is—to think that God has not given us a percentage, He has not levied a tax on us, but He is leaving the amount completely up to us!

### **Conclusion & Invitation:**

As we close, I realize that we have covered a lot of material, and I realize that it came from only two short verses. Did you notice how simple God’s plan is? We have not read anything about car washes or fund raisers. We have not read anything about any high-pressure techniques. We have not relied on guilt. But instead, God’s plan is incredibly simple. It is a matter of individual Christians all around the world coming together on the first day of every week to make a free-will contribution into the treasury based on an honest and personal evaluation of how we have prospered over the previous week.

I may not preach on this subject again for more than a year—maybe two. I would suggest getting started right away by taking a small step here and there. Perhaps start by making a commitment to contribute 52 times between now and this time next year—no matter what. Perhaps make a commitment to discuss this with your family. Perhaps make a commitment to reevaluate how you have been prospered and to reevaluate your contribution in light of any changes over the past few years. Perhaps we can start by living within our means—avoiding debt and cutting frivolous expenses. As most of you know, a lot of us have a check from the government coming in a few weeks, as part of an “Economic Stimulus Package.” Regardless of what we think about the plan, let us think of that check as a gift from God. Our president has said, “Don’t save it, spend it!” I would encourage all of us to remember the Lord’s church when those checks come in. We have several one-time type needs as a congregation—a copy machine for the classes downstairs—I’m sure Harold can think of more. Perhaps we can use the stimulus check as a challenge to set apart at least some percentage for the Lord. Perhaps we can start by giving cheerfully.

I am so thankful for your attention over the past few weeks as we have studied God's plan for worship: Prayer, Singing, Preaching, the Lord's Supper, and Giving.

There may be someone here this morning who would like to move from being an observer to being an active participant as a child of God. The Bible teaches that God sacrificed His only Son so that our sins could be forgiven. We respond to that sacrifice by turning away from sin and allowing ourselves to be buried in water for the forgiveness of our sins. If you have any questions, we hope you will talk to us. But if you are ready to obey the gospel right now, you can let us know as we sing the next song. Let's stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: [church@fourlakescoc.org](mailto:church@fourlakescoc.org)