

Jason Upchurch - 1 Corinthians 16:1-4 - Financial Cooperation With Other Churches

This morning we get to talk about finances to the glory of God. Specifically we are talking about helping other churches who are in financial need. And I think this is going to be a helpful passage for us to think on this morning because many times people view churches almost like a competition.

Almost like it's your favorite football team or basketball team and everyone else is subpar. Maybe it's more like your little brother: you can pick on them, but no one else can pick on them.

And I understand that, but the NT vision for the advance of the gospel is bigger than our church. It's bigger than what we're doing right here. The vision of the gospel is so comprehensive that God calls us to help other faithful, gospel-preaching churches and often in a financial way.

Now when it comes to finances and Christians, there's a lot we could talk about.

Budgeting - The money and assets we have are God's and we are called to be good stewards of what God has given us. We should have a plan for what we do with God's money.

Investing - What is investing, what are responsible ways to invest as believers?

Giving - the Bible talks about giving: giving to other believers who are in need, giving to the church to further local gospel ministry, giving to the poor in general, so on.

And I think it's especially timely that we talk about these things now because unless you haven't peeked at the news in a year, economic conditions are not awesome.

Inflation is at historic highs. The stock market is plunging downward. Home prices are up, gas is up, food is up, nobody can find people to work so service is down even though minimum wage is the highest it's ever been.

And as believers it's easy to become cynical along with the rest of the world. And we can begin to think of our finances how the rest of the world thinks about finances. What most people call common sense when it comes to finances is often some of the most unbiblical advice imaginable.

It's in the midst of all of this that we as believers need to have a bedrock theology of finances. And to the point here: how we view other churches.

So here's what I want you to walk away with this morning: faithful Gospel believing churches should be ready to financially support other faithful gospel believing churches who are in need.

So to be as clear as possible: if we know of a faithful church that is struggle to keep the lights on or struggling to support its people who have significant needs, we should be willing to help them by sending money. Not just corporately as a church, but individually as well.

Yes we should certainly do some due diligence to see why they're struggling, figure out if something is systemically wrong. But we should be willing to help other faithful gospel churches if they fall into financial need. We get that from this little section.

Now, a little context here: If you remember, the history of the early church was the the gospel message of Jesus's death and resurrection began in Jerusalem. Then spread south to Judea and north to Samaria. And eventually began spreading throughout the Roman world.

In those early days, it was the Christians in Jerusalem - mostly Jewish - who financed gospel ministry. They are the ones who sold fields and gave money to the apostles so that people could eat and stay and hear the gospel message. They also supplied Paul and Barnabas and the first missionary teams with money to go tell the good news of Jesus to the Roman world.

But as time went on, the mostly-Jewish believers in Jerusalem who had initially funded gospel ministry to the Gentiles fell on hard times financially. And so Paul called on the mostly Gentile-Christians throughout the Roman world to help their Jewish believing brothers back in Jerusalem.

That's actually pretty huge to understand. Because everyone said that believing Jews and believing Gentiles are one in Christ but you know how you actually prove you believe that? With your money.

If you're sworn enemy is now truly your brother in the Lord, you'll be lavishly generous to them just like Jesus - who was once our enemy - was lavishly generous to us in giving us eternal life.

And that's where we pick it up here.

Paul has finished his discussion on the centrality of the resurrection of Jesus, and now turns to a practical principles we need to understand as we think about using our finances to the glory of God.

1) Faithful churches should financially aid other faithful churches. Read 1

So the first thing we need to note here - as obvious as it seems - is that we are commanded to give to other churches. This is not optional.

The ESV says that Paul directed all the churches in Galatia to give.

The NIV says: Do what I told them to do.

The word that Paul uses here is an interesting word. It is a command.

In fact, it's often translated as a command or instruction.

Jesus instructs the 12 disciples in **Matt. 11:1**.

In **Luke 17:9** Jesus is talking about how we are servants in the Kingdom and when we've done all that we are commanded to do we shouldn't expect lavish praise. Instead our attitude should be one of humility when we stand before the Lord: "Does he thank the servants because he did what was commanded? (Same word) So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded say, 'We are unworthy servants, we have only done what was our duty.'"

It is the duty of faithful Christian churches to aid - many times financially - other Christian churches.

And the word that's used here has an interesting nuance. It's not just a command. But the idea is that it's a command that's appropriate to the situation.

If I told my kids to go take a bath, that would be a command and they'd need to do it. It's a command.

But if my kids had played in the mud all day and were filthy and I told them to go take a bath, not only would it be a command, but it would be obviously appropriate for the situation.

That's the idea behind this word here. It's not just a command, it's a command that is clearly appropriate for the situation.

If a faithful Christian church is hurting financially, of course we're going to help them out. That's not just a command, it's appropriate for the situation.

And I think most of you know this, but not only have we financially helped other churches out, but other churches have financially given to us. Very generously in different seasons of our church.

And other churches who have made it clear that if we ever need financial help they are ready and able to support our ministry. That's gospel partnership, you guys. And it's glorious.

2) When we give money to a church, we are giving to people. Read 1

So Paul says that the collection is for the saints. The idea here is that they're collecting a large sum and sending it but that the large sum ultimately goes to individual saints. There are actual people on the other end who are helped by that giving.

In the same way, if we were to give money we simply write a check to the church. But that money is dispersed out and blesses actual individual people.

When we give money to other churches it's not just anonymous dollars from one church going to coffers in another church to aid in some vague notion of ministry.

It's Christian individuals in our church giving money to Christian individuals in other areas of the world. Maybe close by, maybe far away. But the stress here is on individuals helping individuals.

I don't know about you, but a lot of times when I give to a ministry or missionary cause it feels a little like a drop in this massive nameless bucket. Like, does my contribution really matter? Does it really aid anyone? And sometimes churches and ministries are really bad at collecting and distributing money, let's just be honest.

But when we're talking about generously giving to other faithful gospel believing, gospel preaching churches the answer is yes: it does matter because it aids individuals.

Now, in context, the situation in Corinth was likely alms giving. Giving of alms is giving money to those who are so impoverished they need food and basic necessities to function. This usually happens in famine conditions where there is no rain and therefore no food. What food is left is expensive because there's not much of it.

When Paul is on trial in the book of Acts he says in **24:17** that he came with an offering of alms. He was likely talking about this gift here. The money he collected from the Corinthians and other churches.

So giving money goes from individual to individual. The second thing we need to note is that it goes to aid the saints. **Read 1**

Usually when we hear the word "saints" we think of people who are super spiritual: mature, godly, devoted people who have done more for the Kingdom than we could ever do.

But that's really a false idea that we get from the Catholic Church. In reality, everyone who is a believer in the Lord Jesus is a saint. From the least to the greatest in the Kingdom, we are all saints.

The word saint comes from the Greek word *hagias* - which means holy or sacred. Someone or something that has been set aside by God for a special work.

Everyone who has been saved by faith in the blood of Jesus is holy and sacred. Not because we are internally sacred or holy, but because we have been covered by the righteousness of Christ. And so our Heavenly Father looks on us as though we are holy and set apart because of the blood of Jesus.

That's how he looks on you. That's how he looks on me. That's how he looks on every believer in every church. So when we are giving money to aid **saints** in another location we are aiding those who are in our same situation: wretched sinners saved by God's marvelous grace and set apart for a holy calling.

We are giving to a sacred, holy cause. We're giving to brothers and sisters who have been purified by the same blood of Christ that purified us.

We're not giving money to a big machine, we're giving it to people - to saints - who have been set apart by God through faith in the gospel.

3) We should plan to give money. Read 2

Paul encourages the believers in Corinth to have a plan to save up and give. This is where personal budgeting becomes tool that God uses from his Kingdom.

Benjamin Franklin: "If you fail to plan, you are planning to fail."

Most people don't naturally gravitate toward generosity. We don't naturally gravitate toward planning with our finances.

That's why car dealerships have on-site financing. Most people who walk up to a dealership have absolutely no plan. No plan for what vehicle they want, how much they want to spend, if they can afford anything, how much insurance will be, gas will be. The dealership wins because the dealership has a plan.

God's people often fail in the area of generosity because we don't have a plan.

So notice some of the key components here of God's plan for generosity. First, set aside money regularly.

Read 2

He says on the first day of the week. That's Sunday, when they would be gathered together. This would probably be part of their regular giving, but this seems to be a special offering specifically for Jewish saints. So set aside a little bit each week.

I would encourage you guys in your budgets - and you should have a budget - to set aside a little bit regularly for special generosity situations so that when those opportunities come about you're not trying to figure out how to help.

So when a missionary comes that you want to bless, a neighbor is in financial need, you know a kid down the street who wants to go to Bible camp, someone needs help fixing their car. You have that set aside already.

We do this to some extent with our church budget. We have a generic line under missions and a general fund for other expenses. We also a fair amount of cushion in our checking account in the event that something comes up and we want to give.

It's good for churches to do that, but individuals as well.

Paul also says this is for everyone. **Read 2**

So there's no exemptions here. Everyone is called to this budgeting process for the Kingdom. Whether you're 10 and make \$5 a week, or 20 and make \$1000 a week, set aside a little bit for when you see Dirk Darrow or an SMI or Brian Thrush or your friend who wants a Bible or someone who's in a tough financial spot and needs some help.

Paul says "as you've prospered." This is the proportional idea. Give according to what you have. If you have a lot, give a lot, if you don't give what you can. That's okay.

I remember in high school seeing really well off business men at church and when the offering plate would roll around they'd whip out their wallet flip through and drop a \$20 in the plate. And I was thinking "is that the tip?" There was no plan, and certainly not in accordance with how God had blessed them. It was last minute and made up on the spot.

In the same way, I've seen people on social security and a fixed income barely making it give when, in reality, they probably shouldn't have given because now they're robbing Peter to pay Paul.

Paul doesn't set a number or percentage. He just says as God has prospered you, you prosper other people.

You don't want a last minute scramble to give when people are in dire need. Not only will you likely not have as much to give, but it's a sign of poor stewardship. Stewardship implies planning.

5) We should give generously because God gives generously. Read 2

I want to come back to this word prosper. We saw a moment ago there is a proportional aspect here. But this idea goes deeper than that and I think it's worth some reflection.

First of all, the word used here is used in the passive sense. Literally the Greek says: "as prosperity has happened to you." I think the NIV really misses the richness here completely when it says "in keeping with your income." The idea isn't that you went out and worked hard and so be kind and give a little.

No, the idea is that whatever it is that you have, whatever amount of prosperity, has been given to you. Who's it been given by? God. This is often what is called the divine passive in Scripture. When something happens to someone, and there's no explicit mention of who it is, it's referring to God.

In the OT the Kingdom is taken away from Saul (passive) and given to David. Who did that? God did that.

The entire Assyrian army is destroyed (passive) in a night. Who did that? God.

Here: as you have prospered, passive. This is a subtle reminder by Paul that everything we have is given to us by God. Proverbs tells us over and over that riches come by hard work. And that's usually true. But not universally true. Sometimes the lazy wicked person is rich, sometimes the righteous, hardworking man is poor.

But whatever anyone has comes from God. And anything that God gives us above the eternal hell we deserve for our sins is grace and prosperity.

And because God is generous to us, we are called to be generous to others.

Look over at **2 Cor. 8**. This passage is usually used to talk about being generous with giving to our local church. We can call it tithing or giving or whatever you want to call it. And I believe we should be generous. But that's not the context here. The context is that Paul is talking again about individuals in the Corinthian church giving money to other churches in dire need. **Read 1-7**

Isn't this amazing! The churches in Macedonia were suffering their own poverty and hardship. And yet they pulled together a "wealth of generosity" for the saints in Jerusalem. They were begging Paul to take their money. Paul's like "Guys, you're really poor and should use the money to help yourself" and they're like "No, the saints in Jerusalem who we've never met and only heard of need it more, please take it!"

That's amazing. That's gospel cooperation. And Paul wants the Corinthians to think the same way. **Read 8-15**

So Paul says "be generous like Jesus was generous." Jesus was rich, he became poor - Jesus was basically homeless. And he died in abject poverty. Why? So that when someone places their faith in him they gain all the riches of the Kingdom of God. Jesus was rich, he became poor, so that we who were poor - in our sins - might become rich.

And Paul says, "Look, others churches get this. They get financial cooperation. I'm asking you guys to do anything different."

And he quotes **Exodus 16:18. Read 15**

Why does he quote that? That's when the Israelites were in the desert and gathering manna. And the idea is that just like God rained down manna every morning and everyone had what they needed. Some people gathered a little too much, others not enough, but everyone shared. In the same way, God pours out finances on all of us. Some more, others less, and yet we can all share and benefit to the glory of God.

And so Paul urges the Corinthians again to be ready to give money to the churches in Jerusalem. **Read 9:1-12**

He says again that he wants these guys to be ready to give. He doesn't want to show up and have this big awkward moment where he's like "Hey guys, give me the money for Jerusalem" and they don't have any. That would be really bad. So he urges them again to be ready.

And Paul never preaches a prosperity gospel. He never says give some now so you'll get more money later. No. He says give now and your reward of righteousness will be seen in heaven. You give, and the reward is that God is pleased and that God pours out grace. **Read 7-8**

We give generously to other churches in aid to spread the gospel because God has given to us. And our reward is that we please the Lord. We make God smile as people thank him for his provision.

The end result of all of this is praise to God who might use us to give to others. **Read 13-15**

When we sit down at the table to eat, we pray for the meal. Specifically we give thanks to God. And one time we started eating and I thanked Jodee for the meal, it was good. And one of our kids was like "Wait, we just thanked God for that meal not Mama."

Well, that's true. But God uses people to dispense his blessing. It's not an affront to God to thank my wife, and it's not an affront to my wife to thank God. God generously gives through the generous hearts of his people.

That's what Paul is getting at. We have the ability to be the provision of God and God will be thanked and praised for it.

Alright, let's look at another aspect of giving to other churches **back** in **1 Cor. 16**.

6) We need to use discernment and accountability. Read 3-4

So Paul wants the Corinthians to start saving up for this offering for the Jerusalem church. And when he arrives he'll send a team to Jerusalem. That team will be comprised of people who are accredited by the Corinthians.

Let me fill in some details for why this is significant.

A lot of times we just sort of gloss over some of these passages that talk about travel. It's hard for us to know where Paul is or where he's going because we're not all that familiar with it.

But if we slow down a little, we get a better idea of what's going on. Watch this. **Read 5-9**

Paul is in Ephesus and it's likely late summer or fall time. So Paul is going to wait until late Spring to come to Corinth. Pentecost is late Spring. The route Paul mentions is about 700 miles. On foot, maybe a boat in there somewhere.

What that means is that the Corinthians are going to be saving up a long time for this gift to send to Jerusalem. It's going to be a chunk of change.

So when he comes, he wants people that the Corinthian church have vetted to take the money. That word **accredit**

He doesn't want anyone doing anything wrong with the money. **Read 3**

This gets a little tricky, different versions say it a little different. But it seems like what he's getting at is that he wants the Corinthians to find people in their own congregation who are trustworthy. They need to vet to make sure they're good.

Then, that team will go with a letter from the church explaining who they are to the church in Jerusalem. That's the letter he's talking about. And if the Corinthians want him to go as well, he'll accompany the gift.

BTW: Think about Paul's humility in this last line. Here is the apostle Paul, who has chastised them and rebuked them for 15 solid chapters and here at the end he's deferring to their judgement.

"If it seems advisable." Advisable to who? Advisable to the church. The apostle Paul is submitting to the judgment - the advisability - the Corinthian church on whether or not he needs to accompany this financial gift to Jerusalem.

How do we apply this as a church? Two ways.

First, we mentioned last year that we are part of the Inland Northwest Cooperative. This is a church planting network started by Indian Trail Church and Grace Christian Fellowship and includes:

Trinity Church in Spokane Valley, Connection Point Church, Fourth Memorial Church, Faith Bible Church, First Baptist Sandpoint, 3 churches in Missoula and others. It's specific to the Inland Northwest and our goal is to plant churches, train pastors and cooperate together. We've decided to be an associate member for a year - which means we commit nothing financially - while we evaluate how this cooperative is going to work. But so far I'm excited to partner with other churches in the work of church planting in our area.

The second way we apply this: On Aug 28th, we're going to take up a special offering for our missionaries: the Robisons and the Darrows. Both of them have indicated they could use help financially. Now, you can't tell them this! This is a surprise.

And what I want to challenge everyone to do is every Sunday until the 28th of August, after church, set aside some money as the Lord has prospered you. If it's \$5/week or \$50 a week, whatever. And on Aug 28th bring everything you've saved up for that special offering to church and our whole offering that week will be split between the Robisons and Darrows.

This gives us 2 months to save, to have a garage sale, to sell that extra whatever, to budget, to whatever.

And by God's grace we'll bless them through generosity to the glory of God.

Pray