



CHARIS-MATTERS

STUDIES IN FIRST CORINTHIANS

Text

First Corinthians 16:1-12

Topic

The Corinthians are encouraged to give to the work of the Lord as they are going through their lives seeking to minister the Gospel to those all around them

Title

“Give Ready to Go”

Introduction

Our generation of believers is being described by the derogatory title, *Consumer Christians*.

What is a Consumer Christian? One author puts it like this:

[Our recent] culture has groomed an entire generation of [consumer Christians] who have come to believe the primary reason for the church’s existence is to meet their individual needs.

Unfortunately, this mindset isn’t just limited to “seekers” or new believers. This mindset prevails in the lives of many long term Christians. They view the church as a medium providing a product or a service: good religious feelings, theatrical experiences, Disney-like children’s programs, and “moving” sermons.

The irony is that there’s nothing moving about it...

It's always easier to criticize and to go negative. Instead of deriding believers for their attitude of consumerism, how about we explain the normal Christian life?

We can do just that from the last chapter of First Corinthians.

One basic principle is presented in verse fourteen where you read, "Let all that you do be done with love." In verses one through twelve you learn that two of the things you're to do with love are *giving* and *going*.

A believer who gives and goes from a motive of love for Jesus is definitely not a Consumer Christian!

I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 Let Your Giving To The Lord Be Done With Love, and #2 Let Your Going For The Lord Be Done With Love.

#1 Let Your Giving To The Lord Be Done With Love

(v1-4)

Christian financial ministries point out that God has given us more than eight hundred verses about money in the Bible. A major part of their program for teaching you to properly manage your money as a believer is to give regularly to your church. Both Dave Ramsey (of *Financial Peace University*) and Crown Financial Ministries encourage you to tithe, which is giving 10% of your income. Truth is, they encourage you to give beyond a tithe.

With so many verses in the Bible, and so much good counsel for Christians, why is it that pollsters say believers give on average **less than 2%** to their local church? (And that amount seems to be dropping).

Let's see what was going on with the church at Corinth and, as we do, we will uncover some principles for New Testament giving in the context of our love for the Lord.

1 Corinthians 16:1 Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also:

Around the time of Paul's writing the mostly Jewish church in Jerusalem was suffering terribly:

- Church history records that there was a severe famine.
- Adding to the difficulties of the famine, the Christians were being systematically persecuted.

Paul had instructed the churches in the regions of Galatia to collect financial aid for the Jerusalem Christians. Apparently the believers in Corinth had asked him about it and his response was for them to participate in taking a "collection for the saints" in Jerusalem.

We would consider this a 'special' offering. Still we can discuss some things about giving in general as we read Paul's instructions to them.

1 Corinthians 16:2 On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come.

The last day of the week, Saturday, is the Jewish Sabbath. The church – including both saved Jews and Gentiles – worshipped on "the first day of the week," on Sunday. It was the day Jesus rose from the dead; the day Jesus first appeared to His gathered disciples; and the day upon which the church was born in the Book of Acts.

Sunday worship is not a new, Christian 'sabbath.' It is not a day to be filled with rules and regulations and restrictions. Indeed, most of the early Gentile believers were slaves who worked seven days a week but had Sunday evenings to themselves.

You can worship any day you want, morning or night. Sunday morning is our time of worship and celebration and for doing the work of the Lord.

It seems that Sunday worship in the New Testament included the receiving of your offering to the Lord.

“Each one of you” makes it personal. Paul assumed every Christian would give. He was following the teaching of Jesus who said to His followers, “**When** you give,” not “**If** you give.”

“Lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper...” There is no hint of a tithe, or any other percentage, being required. Does that mean we’re to give less than 10%?

We are not to think in terms of limits. Because God’s love is showered upon us, we should want to give to the work of the Lord as much as we possibly can, and more all the time.

Next Paul said, “that there be no collections when I come.” With regard to the special offering for the poor saints in Jerusalem Paul didn’t want to come and start a pledge drive or a fund raising effort. He didn’t want to coerce them or shame them into giving. He assumed they would want to give and that he could simply receive the funds set aside for Jerusalem.

It’s just my opinion but I think one reason we have Consumer Christians is because churches adopt consumer models from the world and apply them in the church. Christians are treated like consumers rather than disciples.

1 Corinthians 16:3 And when I come, whomever you approve by your letters I will send to bear your gift to Jerusalem.

There was no Western Union in those days; no wire transfers between banks. The monies collected had to be hand-carried. It was best to send several men to insure the safe delivery of the money. The fact they would carry “letters” of approval meant these were men of solid character and integrity. They wouldn’t be stopping at every Starbucks along the way, dipping into the offering to pay for their java habit.

1 Corinthians 16:4 But if it is fitting that I go also, they will go with me.

Paul wanted to accompany them with the offering, but that would depend on the Lord’s direction. It was a segue into his travel plans.

Before we discuss his travel plans in the next few verses, let's review some principles on New Testament giving.

- “Every” believer is called upon by Jesus and by Paul to give to the work of the Lord. That should come as no surprise, really.
- Giving means your money. Serving is an act of love and obedience but no where in the Bible does it say we can substitute serving for giving. They are two separate delights.
- Giving is to be regular and systematic. It can be weekly, in the offering or the offering box. It can be monthly, or quarterly, if that's how your finances work. It can be mailed in or given online. But do it regularly and systematically.
- The portion is left up to you. The New Testament sets no limit, like 10%, on your giving. You're free to give as God leads. His leading will not be less than what the Old Testament saints gave. Here's why. We're not under the law, but rather motivated by love. We are to give because of love and not because of fear of breaking the law. We should not give less because of love than because of law. Just the opposite is true.

How, then, might I determine my portion for giving? The New Testament examples emphasize sacrificial giving. It should cost you something.

- Jesus held up for an example the widow who gave for an offering only two mites, but from her want, as greater than the rich who gave from their abundance (Luke 21:1-4). Her two mites were a huge sacrifice of her personal finances.
- The apostle Paul held up the example of the sacrificial giving of the Macedonian Church. In Second Corinthians 8:2-4 he wrote, “Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints” (NIV). Again the key is that they gave sacrificially.

Keep this in the context of letting all you do be done with love. Giving is an expression of your love for the Lord; it is an act of love. The kind of love

we're talking about is what Jesus called "first love" when He talked to the church at Ephesus in the Revelation. It is the first love of your engagement, a romantic love that desires to lavish extravagant gifts upon the one loved.

That's partly why Paul would go on, in Second Corinthians, to describe New Testament giving as something to be done both willingly (8:4-12) and cheerfully (9:7).

In verse four Paul began to talk about his travel plans.

#2 Let Your Going For The Lord Be Done With Love

(v5-12)

Paul used the word "go," which always reminds me of the Great Commission Jesus left us with to "Go into all the world and make disciples."

We can look at Paul's 'going' plans and discern a few things about going through our lives.

1 Corinthians 16:5 Now I will come to you when I pass through Macedonia (for I am passing through Macedonia).

1 Corinthians 16:6 And it may be that I will remain, or even spend the winter with you, that you may send me on my journey, wherever I go.

1 Corinthians 16:7 For I do not wish to see you now on the way; but I hope to stay a while with you, if the Lord permits.

If you read the Book of Acts you find that God radically altered Paul's plans. It doesn't mean we should quit planning, or that it's OK to be double-minded and flakey. It simply means we must submit our ways to the Lord.

- Paul had a plan; you should have a plan. As you go about your daily business, you should be planning how you can best minister to those whom God has set around you.
- Paul wanted to be thorough; you should want to be thorough. He wanted to spend quality time ministering to them. Whatever ministry you do, it ought to be the very best you are able to perform.

- Paul was flexible; you should be flexible. Having plans doesn't eliminate the need to sense and follow the Lord's leading.

1 Corinthians 16:8 But I will tarry in Ephesus until Pentecost.

1 Corinthians 16:9 For a great and effective door has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.

It is so important to recognize open and closed "doors" of ministry. Paul had wanted to go to Ephesus once before. God closed the door; He wouldn't let Paul go there. Instead, that first time, God sent Paul to Macedonia.

Immediately he was put in prison overnight at Philippi. Then he was run out of town from Thessalonica. He might have thought he'd chosen the wrong door - but Paul knew that all these things happened for his good and God's glory.

Mean time Apollos (who we will read about in a moment) was sent to Ephesus and had a very effective ministry.

When Paul finally got the green light to go to Ephesus, when the "great and effective door... opened" to him, he was met by "many adversaries." One sense of what he was saying is that he couldn't leave Ephesus yet because there were still adversaries to overcome!

So often we view opposition and hardship as the closing of a door. Paul expected and experienced opposition. You should expect and will experience opposition. Opposition is an opportunity to stand in God's grace and share His mercy.

1 Corinthians 16:10 And if Timothy comes, see that he may be with you without fear; for he does the work of the Lord, as I also do.

1 Corinthians 16:11 Therefore let no one despise him. But send him on his journey in peace, that he may come to me; for I am waiting for him with the brethren.

Timothy was a young disciple who was Paul's companion on many of his journeys. His mother, Eunice, and his grandmother, Lois, are mentioned for their raising him in the things of the Lord. We know nothing of his father except that he was a Greek. He is first brought into notice at the time of Paul's second visit to Lystra where he probably resided and where it seems he was converted during Paul's first visit to that city. The apostle called him his "own son in the faith" and arranged that he should become his travelling companion.

It is terrible that Paul had to warn the Corinthians how to treat Timothy. Here you learn that some of your greatest difficulties will come not from your adversaries in the world, but from your acquaintances in the church.

1 Corinthians 16:12 Now concerning our brother Apollos, I strongly urged him to come to you with the brethren, but he was quite unwilling to come at this time; however, he will come when he has a convenient time.

"Apollos" was a Jew from Alexandria, described as eloquent and mighty in the Scriptures. He had been instructed in the way of the Lord according to the imperfect view of the disciples of John the Baptist but on his coming to Ephesus he had been more perfectly taught by Aquila and Priscilla. He became a preacher of the gospel first in Achaia and then in Corinth.

The Corinthians apparently had asked Paul to send Apollos to them. Paul suggested it but Apollos said "No."

From this you learn that you must respect the leading of God's Spirit in someone else's life. You should never try to manipulate others, even for what you believe to be their own good.

Men like Paul, Timothy, and Apollos tend to intimidate us. They seem so much larger than life on the pages of the Bible.

They were men of like passions with us - no different in the sense that they were believers who were 'going' through their lives following God's leading.

You are 'going' through the world on a daily basis. You may not feel like a missionary, since so much of your life is local. But you are just as much given the Great Commission to "Go... and make disciples."

Over the years the church in America has promoted a 'give or go' mentality. In other words, if you can't 'go' into some full-time ministry or mission, then just 'give' towards it.

I think this, too, has contributed to a consumer mentality. It leaves you feeling unconnected, more a spectator than a participant. The more you feel you are a spectator, the more you will demand a spectacle and, before you know it, you are giving less-and-less to the work of the Lord rather than more-and-more out of the motive of love.

I think we need to return to the more biblical understanding that every Christian is to give **and** go.

- We are each to give regularly and sacrificially of our monies to the work of the Lord through the local church.
- We are each to be going through the world with the understanding that our surroundings are our mission field.

Give ready to go!