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GENUINE SPIRITUALITY: A STUDY OF 1 CORINTHIANS

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THE COLLECTION 1 CORINTHIANS 16:1-4

INTRODUCTION

Now that Paul has dealt with the significant theological and behavioral problems within the Corinthian Church, he begins to conclude this letter by responding to a couple of practical issues. The first of these is the collection being taken for the impoverished believers in Jerusalem. On Paul's third missionary journey, this collection has been a reoccurring point of emphasis. For reasons not known to us, the believers in Jerusalem were very poor. So Paul asks the other churches to assist their poorer brethren in Jerusalem by collecting an on-going offering which will soon be delivered to those in need. A second motivation of the offering is, perhaps, that Paul sees an opportunity to promote Christian brotherhood among Jewish and Gentile believers. The Jewish Christians in Jerusalem will be helped by many Gentile brothers and sisters in Christ through this offering.

From today's text it is obvious that the Corinthians were aware of this offering and it appears they actually questioned Paul about some of its specifics when they originally wrote to him. Remember that this letter is a response to a previously written letter from the church to Paul, its founding Apostle. So this discussion on the collection begins with *Now concerning the collection for the saints*; this is a significant clue that Paul is responding to a Corinthian question regarding the offering. In his response, Paul offers a strategy for generosity which is rooted in the concept of the biblical tithe. Granted, Paul never mentions the tithe here in 1 Corinthians 16, but this discussion follows 1 Corinthians 9 where the biblical pattern of supporting God's work is identified with the tithe.

1. A STRATEGY FOR GENEROSITY

Paul has already advised the churches of Galatia regarding a strategy for collecting this offering and now he explains that plan to the Corinthians. There are at least 4 aspects to this strategy.

(1.1) Giving should be done on a regular basis (v2)

Paul designates the *first day of every week* for collecting this offering for the poor believers in Jerusalem. Since the resurrection of Jesus, the first day of each week was when the Lord's people gathered for worship and such giving was a natural part of worship. Whether they actually brought the money to the worship gathering each week or simply set it aside at home to be collected later, it was nonetheless an act of faithful obedience. Here we discern the wisdom is a consistent pattern of generosity, rather than a spastic attempt at giving.

(1.2) Giving should be planned (v2)

Their giving was not only to be done regularly, but strategically. Generosity doesn't just happen on a regular basis. Sure, there will be times for spontaneity, but the giving commanded here is to be planned. Our giving must be accompanied by the right attitude even as we plan how to give;

7Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. 8And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed (2 Corinthians 9:7-8).

(1.3) Giving should be proportional to everyone's income (v2)

We must remember that the Corinthian Church was comprised of both the wealthy and the poor. It would have been easy for Paul to single out the rich and quickly collect this offering, but he commands *each one* to give. Each one must give because there are spiritual benefits to giving and Paul wants to exclude no one from those benefits. God has promised to reward generosity. The New Testament says *he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully (2 Corinthians 9:6)*. Paul puts that same principle like this in Galatians 6:6-8, *6The one who is taught the word is to share all good things with the one who teaches him. 7Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. 8For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life*. God sees our first response when a need arises. He sees greed, or fear, or rationalizing. Not only does He see, but He responds in kind. He also sees generosity, glad-heartedness, and enthusiasm for giving, and He responds in kind. Therefore, each one is to participate so that no one misses out on the spiritual blessings which attend giving.

Each one can participate because giving is to be done in proportion to each one's income. He is to give *as he may prosper*. We can only give from what we have. God holds us accountable for what He has entrusted to us, not what He has entrusted to someone else.

(1.4) Giving should be done with wisdom (vv3-4)

God never calls us to give foolishly; we must do our best to ensure that what we give is used for its intended purpose. This is why Paul asks the church to approve one or more of its own members to deliver the offering to Jerusalem. He wants the church to know that the money arrived safely at its stated destination. If God's providence dictates, Paul may accompany these representatives from Corinth. Nevertheless, the necessary accountability has been put in place so that the people can give with confidence.

2. THE TITHE ENABLES US TO PUT THESE PRINCIPLES AT WORK ON A REGULAR BASIS

The beauty of the tithe is that it allows for regular, planned, proportional and wise giving. So let's take a moment to remind ourselves of God's plan to fund His work through His Church, the tithe.

We do not know when God first commanded a tithe, but we find it to be a central part of worship as early as Genesis 14:20 when Abraham tithes 10% of all he had to Melchizedek. We also find Jacob giving 10% of all he has to God in an act of worship [Genesis 28:19-22]. God formalized the tithe under the Mosaic Law [Leviticus 27:30-32] and here, God plainly declared that the first 10% of all Israel possessed *is holy to the LORD*. In Numbers 18:25-26, God instructed Israel to support the priestly families, the Levites, with the tithe and that is what Paul refers to in 1 Corinthians 9:13-14. *13Do you not know that those who perform sacred services eat the food of the temple, and those who attend regularly to the altar have their share from the altar? 14So also the Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel*. The support for the Lord's work in the temple was never left to the whims of the people. The tithe was formalized to ensure that work would carry on. Israel constantly failed to properly tithe, but on occasions when God sent revival,

obedience to the tithe was one result. Under the New Covenant, believers are free from all ceremonial and civil laws which governed Israel, but I have demonstrated that the tithe existed prior to the nation of Israel and the Mosaic Law. The principle of the tithe is God's perpetual plan to fund His work in this world.

When the tithe is given, it is to be used to support the work of the gospel. This happens in various forms. First of all, the tithe is a regular means of defeating greed in our hearts. The gospel is concerned with conquering sin that enslaves our hearts. Giving is the best means of overcoming greed. So there is a sanctifying effect that comes through giving. Secondly, the tithe solves practically every financial problem a church faces. Thirdly, the tithe goes toward meeting benevolence needs within a local congregation and community [Acts 6:1-2]. Fourthly, the tithe is used to pay for occasional celebrations that the body of Christ enjoys [Deuteronomy 14:22-26]. I'm sure there are other reasons to tithe, but God commands the tithe explicitly for these.

With these 4 purposes of the tithe in front of us, let's ask ourselves, "What would our church look like if we became a tithing church?" Obviously, we would be a church comprised of generous and prosperous people. The Lord works in our hearts to make us generous so that He can prosper us and in turn, we increase in generosity. Proverbs 10:22 says, *22It is the blessing of the LORD that makes rich, And He adds no sorrow to it.* As our riches increase, so must our good works. *17Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy. 18Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share (1 Timothy 6:17-18).*

Secondly, if we became a tithing people, almost every imaginable financial problem our church ever faces would be immediately solved. Let me give you an example. If you take our annual budget [\$278,029.06 in 2007-2008] and treat that as 1/10 of what every family makes [multiply that number by 10] then you should have the total annual income of our covenant members. If you then took that total number and divided it by the total number of our covenant families [96], then you should have the average income of our covenant households [our budget presently indicates that the average income for our covenant families is \$28,961.36]. Yet we know that in 2005, the average income per family in Virginia Beach was \$58,545. So a couple of things are obvious: (1) if we are in that average income category, then our budget, if based on the tithe, would be more like \$561,168 [or slightly less if we factor in that that not all the tithe of each family comes into this church, but goes to other valid causes/ministries] (2) with our annual church income just meeting our present budget, we are not a tithing church.

Thirdly, we would be a church able to meet the needs of our own congregation and other significant needs of those within the community. Benevolence has to be a part of the way we live as a church. This was foundational to the early church as they worked diligently to take care of widows within their membership [Acts 6]. *Proverbs 14:31, He who oppresses the poor taunts his Maker, But he who is gracious to the needy honors Him. Proverbs 19:17, One who is gracious to a poor man lends to the LORD, And He will repay him for his good deed. Proverbs 21:13, 13He who shuts his ear to the cry of the poor Will also cry himself and not be answered. Proverbs 28:7, 27He who gives to the poor will never want, But he who shuts his eyes will have many curses.*

Fourthly, we would be a church that excels in hospitality. Scripture says that we are to continually be *contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality (Romans 12:13)*. Hospitality describes an open life. The opposite of this is a closed-off life that is unconcerned about others.

CONCLUSION

Every dollar we make belongs to the Lord, but one-tenth is to be used to directly support the work of the gospel in our local congregation. This is the revealed will of God to His people. Furthermore, God commands us to rejoice in this kind of generosity. We know that God loves a cheerful giver.

Scripture warns us about being disgruntled regarding money. Deuteronomy 28:47-48, 47"*Because you did not serve the LORD your God with joy and a glad heart, for the abundance of all things; 48therefore you shall serve your enemies whom the LORD will send against you, in hunger, in thirst, in nakedness, and in the lack of all things; and He will put an iron yoke on your neck until He has destroyed you.* The Lord wants our tithing to be characterized by joy. Again in Deuteronomy we find, 22"*You shall surely tithe all the produce from what you sow, which comes out of the field every year. 23>You shall eat in the presence of the LORD your God, at the place where He chooses to establish His name, the tithe of your grain, your new wine, your oil, and the firstborn of your herd and your flock, so that you may learn to fear the LORD your God always. 24>If the distance is so great for you that you are not able to bring the tithe, since the place where the LORD your God chooses to set His name is too far away from you when the LORD your God blesses you, 25then you shall exchange it for money, and bind the money in your hand and go to the place which the LORD your God chooses. 26>You may spend the money for whatever your heart desires: for oxen, or sheep, or wine, or strong drink, or whatever your heart desires; and there you shall eat in the presence of the LORD your God and rejoice, you and your household. 27"Also you shall not neglect the Levite who is in your town, for he has no portion or inheritance among you (Deuteronomy 14:22-27).*

Many of us need to begin to pray that God's Holy Spirit would increase our joy concerning giving. Additionally, we need to begin making the necessary adjustments so that tithing becomes a regular part of our worship. Until that time, the Lord withholds blessings and in fact, promises curses. 8"*Will a man rob God? Yet you are robbing Me! But you say, 'How have we robbed You?' In tithes and offerings. 9>You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing Me, the whole nation of you! 10"Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in My house, and test Me now in this," says the LORD of hosts, "if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you a blessing until it overflows (Malachi 3:8-10).*