

## **1 COR 16.2 & JOHN 12.3: HOW SHOULD WE GIVE?**

*[Chelmsford 13 March 2011]*

Listen again to Paul's instructions found in 1 Cor 16.2: "**Now concerning... the money to be raised.... You must do what I told the churches in Galatia to do. Every Sunday each of you must put aside some money, in proportion to what you have earned, and save it up, so that there will be no need to collect money when I come**".

The background here is that Paul was engaged in a major fund-raising project to help the church in Jerusalem. Although the situation in which we find ourselves is very different from that faced by the Corinthians, the instructions he gives for Christian giving remain highly relevant:

### **1. CHRISTIAN GIVING IS NO OPTIONAL EXTRA**

Giving is an essential part of Christian discipleship. Paul expected the Corinthians - as indeed the other churches he had planted - to give- indeed to give generously

This comes out in two ways:

1. The word used by Paul for '**the money to be raised**' (*logeia*) was often used in connection with **taxation**. I.e. Paul is saying "*now concerning the church tax*". Taxes are never optional!
2. Paul doesn't ask the Corinthians to make a contribution to the collection, he actually commands them to give. He says: "**You must do what I told the churches in Galatia to do**" [literally: '*You must follow the orders I gave to the churches in Galatia*'!]. Paul does not say: "*if you feel led, then please give*". He says "*you give as I have told you too!*"

### **2. CHRISTIAN GIVING DOES NOT OFFER THE LEFT-OVERS**

**"EVERY SUNDAY each one of you must put money aside"**.

Literally: "**on the first day of the week**".

Why "**the first day**"? For a very practical reason: the first day of the week was **pay-day**. I.e. Paul was saying, the moment you are paid, put some money aside for God.

Such a direction makes good sense. It is much easier to give just when we have been paid, than to wait until the end of the week/month to see how much we have to spare. My experience - and I guess yours too - is that if I wait until the end of the month, then there would be precious little left to give. Few of us have "spare cash".

No, Paul says, put aside some money on the day you are paid.

### 3. CHRISTIAN GIVING REFLECTS THE LORDSHIP OF JESUS

There is a theological reason, and not just a practical reason, for Paul commanding us to give on the first day of every week: *The first day of the week is the day when God raised from the dead.*

That's why we have our services on a Sunday, and not on a Saturday.

We celebrate that Jesus, laid in a tomb on a Friday evening, rose from the dead on Sunday, the first day of the week.

Now in early Christian thinking the Lordship of Jesus and the resurrection from the dead were synonymous: For instance, Paul wrote to the Romans: "**If you confess that Jesus is Lord and believe that God raised him from death, you will be saved**" (Rom 10.9). For those first Christians Jesus, the Risen Lord, was not just Lord of the powers of sin & death, but Lord of their lives.

That same Lord Jesus is *Lord of our lives*. As Lord he makes a claim on all that we possess - including our cheque books & bank accounts.

To worship Jesus as the Risen Lord without any financial acknowledgement is a sham. As part of our worship of the risen Lord we are called to set money aside. The resurrection, which we celebrate Sunday by Sunday, should affect how we give! Indeed, it is not simply the resurrection of Jesus - with the Table spread before our eyes, surely the death of Jesus too affects how we give!

### 4. CHRISTIAN GIVING INVOLVES US ALL

**"Each of you is to put aside some money"**

Not just those of us doing very nicely, thank you - but all of us.

It involves those on a pension - it involves even YP receiving just pocket money.

God has a claim on us all, however high/low our income may appear to be. In the words of a ditty:

*It's not what you do with a million  
If riches be your lot;  
But what are you doing today  
With the one pound fifty you've got*

John Rockefeller: *'If I hadn't learnt to tithe my first dollar, I would never have tithed my first million'!*

### 5. CHRISTIAN GIVING VARIES FROM PERSON TO PERSON

**"Each of you must put aside some money IN PROPORTION TO WHAT YOU HAVE EARNED"**

Unlike golf/tennis club, there are no set subs in the church.

Paul advocates proportionate giving: i.e. giving a percentage of our income.

This in turn means that we shall need to regular review our giving - and in particular, we need to review our giving when our income increases, as indeed when it decreases.

Paul doesn't spell out exactly what he means by proportionate giving.

In so far as he was a Jew, Paul probably had **tithing** in mind: i.e. giving a tenth of one's income to God.

Although we are people of the new covenant, and not the old, nonetheless there is a lot to be said for Christians seeking to give a minimum of 10% of their income to God.

However, the reality is that for some people 10% is not enough.

It has often been pointed out that **Jesus** never advocated tithing – he was far more radical: he **advocated extravagant and sacrificial giving**

A true measure of our giving is not how much we give, but by how much we have left after we have given.

The Anglican evangelist David Watson used to tell the story of a woman who once asked her husband, "*Can you give me a little money?*", to which her husband replied, "*Yes dear, how little?*" - Watson commented: "*That is so often the attitude of church members today: 'How little can I give with a clear conscience?'*"

## 6. CHRISTIAN GIVING IS OUR RESPONSE TO GOD'S GIVING

At this point let me turn to our other Scripture – John 12 – the story of Mary, who was so grateful to Jesus for bringing back to life her brother Lazarus, that she gave over £23,000 to Jesus

John tells us that while Jesus and Lazarus were sitting at table, "**Mary took half a litre of a very expensive perfume, made of pure nard, poured it on Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair**" (12.3). "**Half a litre of expensive perfume**" - the mind boggles! No wonder John says "**the sweet smell of the perfume filled the whole house**". The pong must have been terrific.

But this perfume was no ordinary perfume - it was so **expensive** that it would have made Chanel no 7 seem like cheap toilet water.

We are told that it was "**made of pure nard**" (12.3) - nard was a plant native to North India - the perfume would have travelled quite a way.

Because of this it was valued at "**300 silver coins**" (12.5), literally 300 'denarii':

If you bear in mind that a denarius was the normal pay for a day's work, and that the working week was then six days, the sum represented **a year's wages for a fully employed man**. Hence my suggestion of £23,000 – according to Google the average annual UK salary

Mary gave extravagantly – she gave unreasonably – but then, love never counts the cost – love is always unreasonably

This morning as we come to eat bread and wine, we will be reminded yet again that **in Jesus God has loved us extravagantly**. "**God so loved the world that he gave his only Son**" (3.16) - can you think of a love more extravagant than that?

***What does our giving say about our love for Jesus?***