

Generous Christianity
1 Corinthians 16:1-2
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Mark Powell in his book, [Giving to God](#), tells the story, maybe the fable, of the ancient war-like Gauls living then in what is now France and Belgium.

When the Romans Empire conquered that part of the world, Christian missionaries followed to convert the Gauls.

Many Gauls became Christians but the story is told that when a Gaul was baptized he would hold one of his arms out of the water.

The missionaries soon learned why.

When the next battle broke out the Gaul would grab his club or sword saying this arm was not baptized and he would enter into vicious battle against his enemy. Mark Allen Powell *Giving to God*, xi,xii

That sounds like too many Christians.

When they are baptized they hold their wallet, their money, out of the water, as if it is uninfluenced by their commitment to Christ.

Last Sunday I spoke of God's redeeming goal for his creation.

Today I want to talk more specifically about the place of our money in that redeeming work of God.

We understand that money is only one part of our lives.

Our lives entail not only money but also our time, abilities and desires among other things.

But most of us know there is probably **nothing else that demonstrates who we really are better than how we use money.**

Matthew 6:21 "For where you treasure is there will your heart be also."

I have a question for you who are Christians, who claim to be Christ-followers: “If you could know how God wants you to use the money he entrusts to you, would you want to know?”

I’ve heard for years there are people who get instantly defensive when the preacher talks about money.

Why is the subject of money so threatening?

Could it be because money is so powerful in our lives?

There is something about money that affects us at the core of our being.

Somehow it defines us - we consider ourselves as worth more or less based on our money.

Philip Yancey writing in Christianity Today several years ago said, some time while I was growing up I learned “about the inherent power of money - an irrational, almost magical power...

- Money can make a table mysteriously appear in a crowded restaurant.
- (Money) can allow an insignificant and even ugly man to purchase the companionship of a beautiful woman” and it can get an otherwise average person in to see the most powerful people on earth.
- "I came to realize that much of my personal struggle with money had been misdirected simply because I failed to recognize its nature (it’s power).

“It holds me in a pythonic grip. It attracts me to fantasies it can never fulfill. It produces unexplainable, irrational behavior that later causes me puzzlement and shame. It is a force with a personality. It is in truth, a god, and Jesus called it that.... and I need spiritual deliverance from money's power.”

“And I came to understand,” writes Yancey, “that the battle of money in my life is not fought in the halls of congress, but “the true battle with money is a spiritual battle fought in my heart.” (C.T. Dec 14, 1984)

Whether we are rich or poor,
 whether we are students with very little income,
 under employed with a lot of debt
 or fully employed with more than adequate income –
 money is a god with a power that must be broken.

There are a lot of ways of describing a true Christian but certainly one way is to say that a Christian is one who turns from being self-centered to being truly concerned about the needs of others.

Self-confidence and self-absorption turn to faith in God and a focus on others.

Jesus knew that nothing in life is more indicative of that change in us than the way we use money.

Nothing will break the power of the god of money faster and more permanently than giving our money away.

Nothing is more contrary to self-centeredness and self-absorption than generosity.

Nothing can free us to live in the joy of serving others faster than the giving of our money.

Earlier I asked, “If you **could** know how God wants you to use the money he entrusts to you, would you **want** to know?”

Assuming that, even though it frightens us, we WOULD want to know how God wants us to use money, we must start with some basic biblical principles.

The issue of the use of money is rooted in the doctrines of creation and redemption. T.A. Kantonen *A Theology of Christian Stewardship*

I'll try to be clear but I need you to work with me here.
If we miss this, I think we miss the whole thing.

What is the fundamental doctrine of creation?

The Shorter Catechism asks, "What is Creation?"

The answer, "Creation is God's making everything out of nothing but his powerful word."

Genesis 1:1 "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."

In Haggai 2:8, speaking of all the wealth of the nations of the world, we read, "the silver and the gold are mine, declares the Lord Almighty"

Even the breath, the health, the abilities, the time, and the resources we trade to get money is from Him.

In Deuteronomy 8:18 God says, "Remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth" -

In I Corinthians 4:7 the Apostle Paul asks the rhetorical question, "What do you have that you did not receive?"

Would anyone want to seriously argue that God is **not** the owner of all we possess?

What is one fundamental principle of creation?

God owns it all!

What is an obvious corollary to that principle of ownership?

It is the issue of AUTHORITY.

Who has the authority to decide how the money is to be used?

Clearly, God, as the owner, has the authority.

We understand that concept even in our own "free" country.

If the government didn't recognize what we call property rights and if the government didn't protect property rights by laws and punishments of those who try to take another's property, we would have nothing. (Kantonen, 9ff)

That simply reflects the greater issue of God's sovereign ownership of all things and his allowing us to use some of what belongs to him.

It is God's government of the world that allows us anything.

The struggle of the ages has been man's desire to usurp that ownership and authority.

It is called rebellion and it started with Satan, continued with Adam and Eve and continues to this day in the hearts of all of us.

But as we saw last week, God is in the business of redeeming his creation – of recalling all creation back into a relationship with its rightful and grace-giving owner – God himself.

The last word in this cosmic drama is declared in Revelation 11:15 "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever." (Kantonen)

But there is another principle in the doctrine of creation that affects our understanding of money.

That is the principle of "stewardship" or "management."

Author Randy Alcorn, who has written one of the finest little books on stewardship, entitled *The Treasure Principle*, says he carries a little card in his wallet that reads, "God owns every treasure, I'm his investment manager." P 56

This steward, the manager, is neither the lord of creation (as we sometimes assume) nor is he the slave of creation (under some power of fate). (Kantonen,35)

But we have been created for a unique position and privilege.

Listen to it from Psalm 8:4-6 “What is man that you are mindful of him? ...
⁵ You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. ⁶ You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet...” Genesis 1:28 “God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”

One man wrote, “We own nothing but manage everything.” (Powell, *Giving to God*, 29)

This truth puts us exactly where we need to be – we are not God, but we have been given an awesome privilege and responsibility by God.

We have a high calling not to become God but to carry out God’s work.

The implications are great – His purposes have become our purposes.
 We manage the resources the way he would manage them.

If we accept the creation principles of ownership and stewardship, the only question left is "How does God want me to use his money?"

On other occasions I have tried to show you from the Bible how God expects his children to use some of the resources he entrusts to them to meet their own needs and the needs of their families.

Today we focus mostly on how God expects us to use His money to meet the needs of others - that is, "How to give it away".

In this message I want you to hear, from the Bible, the answers to four basic questions:

Who should give?

Why should they give?

When should they give?

and How much should they give?

Please look in your Bible, with me, at I Corinthians 16:1-3 “Now about the collection for God’s people: Do what I told the Galatian churches to do. :² On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made. :³ Then, when I arrive, I will give letters of introduction to the men you approve and send them with your gift to Jerusalem.”

If you look at the first verse you will see that this instruction is clearly about giving money. 1 Corinthians 16:1-2 “Now about the collection for God's people...”

The first question I want us to answer from this passage is "WHO is to give?"

The answer is in verse 2: "On the first day of the week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money...

There are no exceptions among God's people.

Everyone of us has been entrusted with some of God's money to be given away for his purposes.

God does not give this command only to the wealthy but to everyone who is God's child.

In American churches today, and ours is no exception, approximately 40% of those who attend regularly, and apparently claim to be Christians, give little or nothing to the work of God's kingdom.

And the rationalizations are many:

I don't earn enough money to give any away.

I don't even have a job.

I only get an allowance.

I'm on a fixed income.

I'm in debt.

I remember well, years ago, trying to rationalize not giving by continually reminding myself that I had debts that had to be paid first.

All I was doing was using my past irresponsible self-centeredness as an excuse for my present irresponsible self-centeredness.

The issue is not paying debts OR giving.

The issue is doing both.

There are lots of reasons Christians use for not giving, which we will look at later, but in the scriptures no such exceptions are made.

Later when Paul was writing to these same Corinthian Christians he said, 2 Corinthians 8:7 "But just as you excel in everything--in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us--see that you also excel in this grace of giving.

Who should give? It's pretty straight-forward "Each one of us" is instructed to give money."

The SECOND question I wish for the Scripture to answer is "Why should we give money?"

Ron Blue in his book, Living Generously suggests there are several reasons why people **don't** give more generously:

- Spiritual problems – We don't understand the biblical principle of "God's ownership" of all OR we selfishly reject that principle.
- Financial problems – we have spent so unwisely in the past that we are incapable of giving the way we wish we could now.
- Limited vision – we don't see the possibilities of what God can do with our resources, meager as they may seem to us.

We don't think we **can** give – we are so unaware of what resources we have, how we currently spend our money,

what debt we actually have and
 what could change to free money up,
 that we quickly dismiss the idea of giving more generously.
 Many of assume we just can't give.

But it is very revealing that those who make less give a higher percentage of their income to charity.

Those who make under \$10,000 give 2.7%

Those who make \$30-39,000 give 2.0%

Those who make \$50 – 60,000 give 1.1%

It starts going up again with those who make over \$60,000 but even those who make from \$75-100,000 give only 2%, which is a lower percentage than those who make less than \$10,000.

Giving is not truly an issue of ability but of choices.

But there is yet another reason why some **don't** give money away:

We don't plan to give –

we make plans for most other things in life, but we **don't** sit down and make a plan for how we can give.

But why **should** we give?

I've already answered that question in part:

Since God is the owner and he has the authority to determine its use, we should give simply because we are told to use his money in that way.

BUT God appeals to us first on a totally different basis.

Earlier I reminded you that the issue of the use of money is rooted in the doctrines of creation and redemption.

We have already seen how the doctrine of creation affects giving but now we see how the doctrine of redemption affects it.

1 John 4:19 "We love because he first loved us."

God appeals to us on the basis of GRACE.

Grace is the motivation - it is the "why".

Our giving is a response to grace:

Jesus said in Matthew 10:9 "Freely you have received,
freely give."

There are many different kinds of appeals made to people to give:

There is an appeal to **duty**:

Like public radio station KCFR's appeals.

If you're one of beneficiaries of the radio's ministries than
you ought to pay your fair share.

There is an appeal to **fear**:

Some suggesting that if you don't give you won't be blessed by
God.

If things are going well you had better give to insure they
continue to go well and if things aren't going well, you'd
better give so they will.

There is an appeal to **pride**:

Some suggesting that surely we can do better or more than
some smaller churches.

Our buildings need to be the best in the city or our
programs the greatest.

But duty, fear and pride are poor motivators.

If the motivation for treating your wife or husband with love is for fear of
retaliation if you don't,

or to earn their favor to get what you want,

or to prove you are a better person than someone who doesn't give like you do then YOU DON'T HAVE A LOVE RELATIONSHIP.

A love relationship distinguishes between the gift and the giver.

If you are **only** grateful for the gifts, you will simply trade not give.
You will give primarily to get.

But the Bible points to the Giver.

The actions of the Savior are the indications of his love for you.
It is not just that he does good for you but that he loves you.

He calls you to a relationship not built on your ability to give but on his love for you. It is **all grace**.

For God showed his love for us in that while we were still sinners,
Christ died for us.

He has redeemed us, forgiven us, and lavished his love on us.

Yes, we ought to be grateful for all that and gratitude should be expressed in giving, loving and obedience BUT GRATITUDE won't motivate; gratitude is not a motivation, it is a response.

THE MOTIVE IS GOD'S LOVE FOR YOU.

I can appeal to your sense of duty to give,
I can try to make you feel guilty about not giving,
I can show you pictures of people that need your money,
BUT those will only generate short-lived responses.

BUT if I tell you again and again the story of your life,

- how God saved you when you were headed for eternal death and he forgave you;
- how God adopted you into his family and made you one of his own;

- how God has been there for you through the hardest times in your life;

When I remind you of His love for you -

THEN that word of grace motivates.

Grace begets grace – the grace of giving!

Why do we give? **Because we've been infected with GRACE.**

The third question is "When should we give?"

Look again at I Corinthians 16:2 "On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income..."

There is no reason to think that workers in New Testament times received a weekly paycheck.

They may have been paid daily, monthly or even annually when the crops were sold.

But Paul instructs them to give weekly.

I think there is reason for that.

It does encourage regular giving but more importantly it gives us the opportunity every week to break the back of greed and choose generosity.

And most importantly, it becomes a part of our weekly worship.

Giving is an act of worship.

Giving money in worship is intended for God's people to be able to express their gratitude to God for His love.

Imagine - God lets us use His money to express our gratitude.

In 1 Chronicles 29:14 David prayed, "But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this?"

Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand.”

That’s why we don’t offer automatic withdrawals from your checking account, it why we don’t just put an offering box in the back of the worship center and it is why our offerings are a specific part of our worship services.

The next time an offering plate passes - use it as a time of personal worship not just as a method to get your money to the financial secretary.

The last question to answer is "How much does God want me to give?"

Look again at 1Corinthians 16:2 " On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money **in keeping with his income**...”

Notice the issue here is not "why" you give but "how much" you give.

The Bible teaches proportional giving.

Proportional giving was taught in the Old Testament as well.

God wants us to begin giving **his** money away by deciding what portion of his money we will give away.

My own experience has been to start at some percentage.

What the percentage should be is between you and God.

And then let that percentage grow each year or let it grow as your income increases.

The Apostle Paul revisits the subject of giving when he writes in 2 Corinthians 8 that others gave out of their severe trials and extreme poverty.

Not even poverty stood in the way of their giving.

It is not the amount but the sacrifice that is honoring to God.

And so the question is not "do I have **much** to give" but "**what will I give of what I do have**".

In other messages on giving I have tried to demonstrate the NT principle that, "Generosity is not measured by how much one gives but by how much one has left."

Don't let Satan rob you of the joy of contributing to the work of the Kingdom of God by telling you that you don't have enough.

In 2 Corinthians 8:12 Paul writes, "the gift is acceptable according to what one **has**, not according to what he does not have."

God doesn't ask a man or a woman to give what they don't have -

He asks, "What will you do with what I have given you?"

Somewhere in my reading I came across an idea that I have modified:

It is the "Do, Could, Would" approach to how much to give.

First of all answer the question, "how much **do** I give already?"

If I am already giving something, it is probably reasonable to assume I can continue giving at least that amount.

The second question is, "What **could** I give if I changed my lifestyle?"

This doesn't require any increased income.

If I changed my eating out, my entertainment, my hobbies – what could I give.

That's a hard question because this kind of giving means giving up something. That is when giving becomes a sacrifice.

The third question is, "What **would** I give, **if** I had it?"

This is only a fair question after I have honestly answered the first

two questions.

I know of people, like John Wesley, who have determined that if God raises their income they will not raise their standard of living but will raise their standard of giving.

Ron Blue in his book, Living Generously writes, "Instead of asking yourself how much money you need and then trying to figure out how much you can give out of whatever's left over, flip-flop your perspective. Start by asking yourself how generous you want to be." (p122)

Someone might say, "All that is well and good, but how much of God's money does God want me to give away?"

In 2 Corinthians 8:8 Paul says, "I am not commanding you..."

I do not find a command in the New Testament about the percentage of God's money we should give away.

Fred Smith wrote: "10% giving is used as a technique to help the rich get out of giving" what they should.

How many Christians think they have given God his part when they finally give 10% of their money (and usually after taxes, health insurance and life insurance are deducted)?

But God has given us no specific percentage quota for us to meet.

C.S. Lewis wrote, "I do not believe we can settle how much we ought to give. I am afraid the only safe rule is to give more than we can spare."

God wants our offerings to be freely offered and freely given.

He does **not** want payment for gifts we have received.

He does **not** want prepayment for gifts we want.

He wants us to give as we have been given to.

He wants us to give out of grace.