

**Video: We Give!** Giving is such an important aspect of our Christian lives. Last week, we looked at why we give from Paul's second letter to the Corinthians.

Paul was collecting money for poor believers in Jerusalem and the Corinthians had promised to contribute towards this. So Paul wrote to encourage them to follow through on their promise to give generously and eagerly, especially in response to "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich." 2 Corinthians 8:9.

But giving carries with it a risk. If it is administered well, it can have such a positive impact on people, on communities and on God's kingdom. But if it is mishandled – either through greed, negligence or naivety – then it can have a destroy our work and our reputation in this world.

And so in this letter, Paul gave some practical details about how this gift would be administered. 2 Corinthians 8:16-9:5: "I thank God, who put into the heart of Titus the same concern I have for you. <sup>17</sup> For Titus not only welcomed our appeal, but he is coming to you with much enthusiasm and on his own initiative. <sup>18</sup> And we are sending along with him the brother who is praised by all the churches for his service to the gospel. <sup>19</sup> What is more, he was chosen by the churches to accompany us as we carry the offering, which we administer in order to honour the Lord himself and to show our eagerness to help. <sup>20</sup> We want to avoid any criticism of the way we administer this liberal gift. <sup>21</sup> For we are taking pains to do what is right, not only in the eyes of the Lord but also in the eyes of men.

<sup>22</sup> In addition, we are sending with them our brother who has often proved to us in many ways that he is zealous, and now even more so because of his great confidence in you. <sup>23</sup> As for Titus, he is my partner and fellow-worker among you; as for our brothers, they are representatives of the churches and an honour to Christ. <sup>24</sup> Therefore show these men the proof of your love and the reason for our pride in you, so that the churches can see it.

<sup>9</sup> There is no need for me to write to you about this service to the saints. <sup>2</sup> For I know your eagerness to help, and I have been boasting about it to the Macedonians, telling them that since last year you in Achaia were ready to give; and your enthusiasm has stirred most of them to action. <sup>3</sup> But I am sending the brothers in order that our boasting about you in this matter should not prove hollow, but that you may be ready, as I said you would be. <sup>4</sup> For if any Macedonians come with me and find you unprepared, we—not to say anything about you—would be ashamed of having been so confident. <sup>5</sup> So I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to visit you in advance and finish the arrangements for the generous gift you had promised. Then it will be ready as a generous gift, not as one grudgingly given."

### 1. Give As a Church Community

Paul believed that Christian churches should be involved in collecting and distributing money.

#### a) To Christian Workers

For example, he taught that churches should financially support those who are devoting their time and energy to working among them:

- He wrote to Timothy: "The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honour, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching." 1 Timothy 5:17
- And in his earlier letter to the Corinthians, he wrote: "The Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel." 1 Corinthians 9:14

Not that Paul always took advantage of this. In fact, one of the criticisms that some in this church attacked Paul with was that he hadn't accepted their money! As we'll see later, Paul had reasons for doing this, but he still believed in this biblical principle.

#### b) To Christian Mission

Paul also believed that churches should also support God's work in other parts of the world. Paul's letter to the Philippians is in many ways a thank you letter for their support in his missionary work. "I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now." Philippians 1:4–5

In our church here, we try and put these principles into practice by giving Maggie a little bit of support for her work as well as giving our ministry offering to people like Mick & Bernie in Gorey or Joanna who shares the gospel with kids through CEF, or organisations like the Radio Bible Class or UCB.

#### c) To People In Need

But it was a third kind of giving that Paul focussed on here – not the support of their own workers or mission elsewhere, but giving to people suffering in poverty – his "contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem." Romans 15:26. He

believed that this should also be part of the ministry of the church.

Today we can give directly through many different charities and organisations, and there is nothing wrong with that at all. However, it is still a clear biblical principle that we as a church community should be involved in collecting and distributing money to people in desperate need. [“Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.”](#) James 1:27

That’s why we work to support the Christmas Shoebox Appeal each December and through our giving we support the ministry of organisations like Barnabas or Tearfund.

## 2. Handle Money Carefully

But as we do this, we need to be careful. Paul wrote here: [“We are taking pains to do what is right.”](#) 2 Corinthians 8:21 He was going to great lengths to make sure that he collected and distributed this money properly.

### a) Money is dangerous

That’s because he knew the potential that money had for good and for bad. He wrote to Timothy: [“The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.”](#) 1 Timothy 6:10 And there is plenty of evidence for this.

A few years ago the Irish charity sector was hit with a number of scandals, including the top-up scandal, when it came out that public funds were being used to bolster executive salaries and prop up staff pensions. As a result people’s trust in all charities was seriously impacted, and at the time some of the country’s leading charities claimed that donations fell as much as 40%.

And unfortunately churches have not been immune to these sorts of issues:

- In 2011 in Virginia in the US, a Mr Tae Lee was arrested for embezzling more than \$700,000 from the missionary chapter of his church.
- Also in 2011, a trio of thieves stole nearly \$600,000, from St. Isidore’s Catholic Church in California.
- A year earlier a Texan woman called Louanne Aponte stole more than \$1 million from her church and non-profit childcare services.
- And the fraudulent behaviour of those in charge of the Baptist Foundation of Arizona, a church-affiliated charity, led to bankruptcy in 1999 and the loss of over \$500 million of its investors’ funds!

And shockingly these aren’t isolated incidents. According to a report from the Centre for the Study of Global Christianity, it is estimated that of the total amount of money given by Christians in this world to churches and para-church organizations, 6% will be stolen. That equates to more than \$50 billion every year – more than all the money given to worldwide mission. And even that’s not the full story as accounting fraud experts estimate that 95% of fraud within churches goes undetected or unreported.

The full impact of this is not just felt in lost revenue, or even in the loss of the help and support that this money could have given – but even more so on the destructive impact these situations can have on God’s people and God’s reputation in our world.

So no wonder Paul was careful in how he handled this gift. So what practical steps did Paul put in place to ensure he did what was right?

## 3. Be Organised

First of all Paul wrote this because he wanted them to [“be ready, as I said you would be.”](#) 2 Corinthians 9:3. He had been telling the Christians in Macedonia all about the Corinthians’ desire to be involved in this collection. So he really didn’t want to turn up and find they had nothing put aside for this appeal. In that case they would feel obliged to give, just to save face.

### a) Give Regularly

Instead, he wanted them to do what he had suggested in his first letter: [“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.”](#) 1 Corinthians 16:2

Paul wanted this church to get themselves organised about their giving. Each Sunday, when they met together to worship the Lord, he wanted them to contribute to this collection, so that when he arrived, it would be all prepared and [“Then it will be ready as a generous gift, not as one grudgingly given.”](#) 2 Corinthians 9:5

Sometimes we have an idea that generous and freewill giving needs to be an instant and immediate response to a need. But Paul here reminds us that it is good to be organised – personally and together as a church.

So whether we do it through the box at the back of church or through standing order, it is good for us to get into the habit of giving, of sharing the resources that God has so graciously given to us. Not because we have to, or are expected to, or because we feel guilty if we don't. But as a response to and reflection of the grace that we have received.

#### 4. Be Transparent

Secondly, Paul was willing to be open and transparent about this fund. He wanted to do what was right **“not only in the eyes of the Lord but also in the eyes of men.”** 2 Corinthians 8:21

##### a) Before God

Of course what mattered most was what God thought about his handling of this money. His first and foremost desire was that he would work in such a way that would follow God's will, reflect God's standards, express God's heart and ultimately bring glory to God's name.

In handling money, Paul's priority was the same as in every other aspect of his life. As he wrote in 2 Corinthians 5:9, **“So we make it our goal to please him.”** And in our church we want to please the Lord, not just with our songs of praise and worship, but with everything that we do, even in our handling of finances.

##### b) Before People

But at the same time, Paul was keen to do what was right **“also in the eyes of men.”** 2 Corinthians 8:21

This doesn't mean that Paul was encouraging us to show off when we give or distribute our funds. Jesus taught that **“When you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets... But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing.”** Matthew 6:2–3

So in our personal giving we should as far as possible give privately, just between us and God. That will protect our motives and help us to give genuinely out of love for God and for other people.

But it does mean that we should be willing to at some level open up our giving and handling of money, be transparent, to invite some level of scrutiny from others, to let them see that we are acting with integrity and honesty and genuine love.

Paul said, **“We want to avoid any criticism of the way we administer this liberal gift.”** 2 Corinthians 8:20 Paul didn't want people to think he was pocketing the proceeds, or that there was some underhand dealings going on. Of course he couldn't completely stop this. People can make up any accusation they want. But he wanted to do everything he could to prevent people from getting the wrong idea.

This wasn't so much self-preservation. Paul wasn't just looking for an easier life. He knew that criticism, opposition and persecution comes to everyone who lives for Christ.

But he didn't want his handling of money to give ammunition to God's enemies to turn something that had the potential for so much good into something that would cause division, or discredit God's name or even dissuade people from turning to Christ. As he said in 1 Corinthians 9:12: **“We put up with anything rather than hinder the gospel of Christ.”**

So we should welcome the scrutiny of others into our handling of money in church. It is why we publish our accounts each year and present them at our members' meeting.

It is why we were happy to register with the Charities Regulatory Authority, providing them with the information they request. We want to be up front and open about how we collect and distribute money because we are doing what we can to do what is right in the eyes of the Lord and in the eyes of people.

#### 5. Be Accountable

And to ensure this, Paul set up a system of accountability. Although Paul was at the forefront of this collection, it was his vision and his passion, he didn't think that he should do this on his own. In fact he worked hard to ensure he wasn't the only person handling this money. He'd written before to tell them: **“I will give letters of introduction to the men you approve and send them with your gift to Jerusalem.”** 1 Corinthians 16:3

##### a) Don't Got It Alone

In this section he spoke about three men that he was sending “to visit you in advance and finish the arrangements for the generous gift you had promised.” 2 Corinthians 9:5 They would organise the Corinthians and make sure everything was ready for Paul when he arrived.

One of them was also “chosen by the churches to accompany us as we carry the offering.” 2 Corinthians 8:19

In the end Paul was accompanied by seven representatives of the churches as he took this gift to Jerusalem: “Sopater son of Pyrrhus from Berea, Aristarchus and Secundus from Thessalonica, Gaius from Derbe, Timothy also, and Tychicus and Trophimus from the province of Asia.” Acts 20:4 Paul made himself accountable to these men, so that their churches would have complete confidence in the proper handling of their gifts.

#### a) Work With Trustworthy People

The importance of this can also be seen in the kind of people Paul chose for this role. Out of the three he sent to the Corinthians, the first was Titus, whom he called “My partner and fellow-worker among you.” 2 Corinthians 8:23.

Paul emphasised here Titus’ heart of love the Corinthians, thanking God for putting into his heart, “the same concern I have for you.” 2 Corinthians 8:16. He also wrote of his own passion for this collection as “he is coming to you with much enthusiasm and on his own initiative.” 2 Corinthians 8:17

Secondly there was “the brother who is praised by all the churches for his service to the gospel.” 2 Corinthians 8:18 He was chosen by the Macedonian churches because of his effective and committed involvement in sharing the gospel!

Thirdly, there was the one Paul called “our brother who has often proved to us in many ways that he is zealous.” 2 Corinthians 8:22 He was a man of commitment and dedication.

These were the men who had been chosen for this role – men with a proven track record of passion for God and the gospel, of compassion, enthusiasm and faithfulness. And that demonstrates the importance of their role, and is a reminder of the care we should exercise in choosing people to administer our finances in church.

This principle of shared accountability in our handling of money is really important in helping us do everything right in the eyes of the Lord and of people. It is why we have two people count the money in our offering box, why we have two signatures on every cheque or payment we make, and why we are delighted to have six trustees who carefully oversee the handling of money in our church.

#### Conclusion

So these are Paul’s practical guidelines: As we collect and distribute money, we need to do this carefully, organising our giving with transparency and accountability.

But maybe this all sounds a bit too structured and controlled. Maybe it sounds a bit too business-like or even a bit emotionless. We might wonder if we really need to think about all of these issues in our church?

But it is important to remind ourselves why Paul did all of this. Why did Paul go to such lengths to administer this gift properly? Well his answer is that he did it “in order to honour the Lord himself and to show our eagerness to help.” 2 Corinthians 8:19 Paul’s motivation in this was love: Love for God and for those in desperate need.

And this is what should motivate us too. We should be willing to do all we can to give generously and administer our money carefully because we love those people who are in material or spiritual need and because we love the Lord and want to honour him in everything that we do.

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