

XXIII. Timeless Truth for Timely Topics in Biblical Perspective

What Does the Bible Say?

“Christian Stewardship”

I Corinthians 16:1–11

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November 1, 2015 – Morning sermon

Let’s start by looking at I Corinthians 16. In reality I Corinthians is actually II Corinthians and II Corinthians in reality is III Corinthians. Have I thoroughly confused you? I’ll try and straighten it out for you as we go through our study. This is God’s Word, the truth. I Corinthians 16:1–4 says *[1] Now concerning the collection for the saints: as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do. [2] On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come. [3] And when I arrive, I will send those whom you accredit by letter to carry your gift to Jerusalem. [4] If it seems advisable that I should go also, they will accompany me.*

The grass withers, the flower fades, God’s Word abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

This is our annual every member commitment Sunday and this has been going on long before I arrived here. I am very grateful for our elders and deacons and our founding pastor who put this into place early on. I’m very grateful for a lot of reasons of which I will try and draw out for you in this study. We have two seasons of the year to focus on the Lord to ask Him what it is He is getting to us and how does it get through us for the work of the Kingdom. This is the one where we look at the matter of our giving of our tithe and worship to the Lord, our regular giving and then at our World’s Mission Conference we ask the Lord what it is beyond the tithe that He would give to us as an offering that would be a hundred percent committed to world missions. The commitment card is not just dealing with the matter of finances but it also deals with the commitment of your time and talents.

The stewardship of life will affect your stewardship of financial resources. Kevin DeYoung said he has tried to live his life with margins and that’s stewardship of life, trying to be thoughtful of how you live your life under the claims of Christ. Then he said he just loved giving – giving the tithes and the offerings. He was taught early on to do that. He has a wonderful testimony on this.

There is a second side of that. Not only does my stewardship of life position me to be a good steward of my resources but because of how Satan will use the love of money to distract me from my love of Christ and my stewardship of resources affects my stewardship of life. The way I handle the financial resources God gives to me sets the pattern for how I handle my life and the way I steward my life directly affects the stewardship of my resources.

Sometimes it is a bit more difficult to set this matter of stewardship of time but let me set this up for you. An unassailable fact is that if I spend ten dollars I can earn another ten dollars. I am making decisions of what I’m going to do this day and when this day is done I don’t get it back. My day is not renewable. I was born into this world with a finite number of sun rises and sun sets. I don’t manage time for time manages itself a lot better than I do. I need to manage myself knowing how I spend my time. Time is a nonrenewable resource for once I’ve spent that day it’s a done deal.

Have I been a good steward of my time, talents, resources and spiritual gifts? I Peter 4:10 says *[10] As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s*

varied grace. You have physical talents and gifts as well. A couple in our church wrote a song and as they were developing it they sent it to me and asked me to check it out theologically. I have been playing that song in my car for about two months just singing it over and over again. Here is a couple using a spiritual gift and a natural talent, marrying the two together and has blessed the church with something for us to use to worship God Biblically. All of you have a spiritual gift and special talents.

In this season of the year you can work through how you're going to use your physical and mental talents and spiritual gifts as a good steward. I don't want to lose it, I want to use it. How am I going to steward my time in life? What I do there will affect my resources and what I do with my resources affects what I do there. Financial stewardship affects life stewardship and life stewardship positions financial stewardship.

I am grateful for our elders who have put certain policies in place so that this church is a good steward. Because of your generosity I was reminded of your faithfulness in giving beyond what was budgeted last year. When this one church left a certain denomination to join the PCA they were taxed \$300,000 and us along with nine other churches were able to step up and help them pay this. They were faithful to do what they needed to do but the reason we were able to help them is because your giving went beyond what we were already able to do. Fifty cents of every dollar leaves this church for evangelism, discipleship, church planting and church revitalization, local, regional, national and world missions. We are a place that wants to give for the work of the Kingdom and I'm grateful for the membership that embraces stewardship as a way of life including their finances.

When there are resources given throughout the year beyond what the budget is, ministries are able to do special ministries because of it like what our church did two weeks ago when we were able to pay for an entire school (Woodlawn High School) to see the movie Woodlawn and use it to share the Gospel. I could go on and on with various things we have been able to do above and beyond as a church. That is the moment we are in. What is stewardship of my life, resources, time, talents and treasure which effects my time and my talents?

It is a moment to say God You have put Your church here to expand Your Kingdom and Briarwood is committed for God's glory to equipping Christians to worship God and reach Birmingham to reach the world for Christ. We want to be thoughtful, intentional and engaged together so that I'm not running a lone ranger Christian life. I'm working in the context of the Lord's church to extend His Kingdom throughout the world. This is our moment to pray through it, consecrate it, and think through it and ask the Lord to use it and multiply it before Him. It's also a time to learn of some stewardship.

That's why I love this text in I Corinthians 16. This text was written by Paul from Ephesus. In I Corinthians 5:9 we find he wrote a letter to the Corinthians earlier and in this letter he has already given them direction on this project of taking up an offering to minister in Jerusalem and he also mentions a couple of other things he mentions in I Corinthians 5 that he had already written to them about. Then he'll write a second letter to the Corinthians called I Corinthians and then he'll write a third letter called II Corinthians. I'm sure you're fully confused but that is what Paul has done.

In I Corinthians 5 through the end of this book he is answering seven questions by addressing these seven issues. The first four chapters are very rich in content and then he gets to addressing these seven issues from questions they had sent to him. You will know when Paul is answering or addressing one of these seven issues when he starts out 'now concerning...' and now you get to the seventh issues in I Corinthians 16:1 as it starts [1] *Now concerning the*

collection for the saints: as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do. He had also written this to some other churches like Galatia and a number of churches were coming together to give this offering.

What was this offering designed to do? It was designed to help the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem who were under persecution. In fact James, the half-brother of Jesus is about to get killed. The Gentiles all the way to Europe are taking up an offering to help the persecuted Christians. In a couple of weeks I will be talking about what the Bible says about how to minister to the persecuted church and how as a church we will minister to the persecuted church with the resources God has granted to us. Here Paul is saying the Gospel went all the way from the Jew to the Gentile and he wants the Gentiles to take up an offering to send back to their Jewish Christian brothers and sisters who are now suffering for the faith and under persecution.

When he does this there are some things about this financial stewardship embedded in the text that are so rich. In the text he told them to bring it on the first day of the week and that is Hebrew language meaning first day, what we call Sunday. Within about 30 years they won't call it first day of the week for it will be called the Lord's Day by the time the book of Revelation is written. Why are they doing that? The Old Covenant Sabbath used for evangelism is when they would go to the synagogue to tell them about Jesus but the church – Jewish and Gentile Christians – would gather on the first day of the week for worship. They did this because Jesus had been raised on the first day. Two, it was because Jesus had assembled the church on the day of His resurrection to worship in the Upper Room. One week later He assembled them to worship and in His 40 days He again did this as well. So the early church gathered on the first day of the week commemorating the model that Christ had done at the resurrection of Christ, to worship the Lord. That is why it became known as the Christian Sabbath – the day of rest and worship in commemoration of Christ's resurrection and anticipation of His Second Coming.

Paul said when you come together on that Day bring the offering. Why? It is because the offering is an act of worship. When I was in Charlotte and we did a church plant the man heading the church plant finally decided to have the first worship service and he called me to tell them that. He also said "During that first worship time we are not going to take up an offering." I said "Why not?" He said "I want them to know we're there for them and not their money." I said "You have revealed to me not their wrong view of the offering but yours." When we take up an offering we are worshipping the Lord for we worship the Lord with our tithe and offerings. He commands it. I told him "I don't think you're more spiritual than the Lord. He commands it because it is something that you can actually participate in."

Stewardship gives you direction and resources for worship. Paul says when you bring you also have something in the storehouse. What is a storehouse? The Old Testament talks about the temple being the storehouse for mission and ministry. What is the temple in the New Covenant? It is the gathering of God's people. The resources become stored not to keep there but to then dispense for mission and ministry to fulfill the Great Commission. So they are brought to the storehouse in order to be delivered for the work of the Gospel in word and deed. Jesus says to lay up or store up for yourselves treasures in heaven and that is when I give I am actually giving and that impacts the glories of heaven because of how it is used for the work of the Kingdom. This text is so rich but then it is so helpful.

Paul gives a personal example in this text. I don't know whether he planned on doing this or not but he is calling them to financial stewardship. He says to give the tithe and this is implied when he says give according to your ability. The tithe is ten percent. If you make one hundred dollars you tithe ten dollars. The tithe in Christian stewardship is like training wheels.

It is what gets us started. It's foundational. Then he tells us to give beyond out of our own poverty. In other words he is talking about sacrificial giving and offerings. This particular offering he is asking them to give will be used for the persecuted church in Jerusalem that is beyond their title and bring all of that in worship before the Lord.

Then Paul informs us about stewardship by revealing to us in a snapshot of personal stewardship in his own life. So what does Paul do with life stewardship? Let's see how Paul informs us of this in I Corinthians 16:5–11 which says [5] *I will visit you after passing through Macedonia, for I intend to pass through Macedonia, [6] and perhaps I will stay with you or even spend the winter, so that you may help me on my journey, wherever I go. [7] For I do not want to see you now just in passing. I hope to spend some time with you, if the Lord permits. [8] But I will stay in Ephesus until Pentecost, [9] for a wide door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.*

[10] When Timothy comes, see that you put him at ease among you, for he is doing the work of the Lord, as I am. [11] So let no one despise him. Help him on his way in peace, that he may return to me, for I am expecting him with the brothers.

What is Paul revealing to us about stewardship in his life? I will give you three things from the text. One, stewardship of life which sets the table for financial stewardship and informs life stewardship is that you need to live your life intentionally. You are made in God's image so live your life intentionally, plan your life for Christ. He reveals this with those series of verbs. He says "I will visit you, I intend to pass through you, I will later stay with you throughout the winter, I will spend time with you, I will stay in Ephesus for the present in order to take advantage of effective ministry through this wide open door." He lived his life intentionally. Plan your life for Christ, framed by His Word.

Proverbs 16:9 says [9] *The heart of man plans his way, but the LORD establishes his steps.* You are made in God's image. It is not a sign of spirituality to wake up in the morning to say 'I'll just do whatever God opens the door to do.' No, God exists with purpose. He made you in His image to live with purpose. Live intentionally. Paul will end up spending three years in Ephesus in order to spend 18 months in Corinth. I will do this. I hope to do this. I am committed to doing this. In other words Paul lived his life intentionally. Stewardship of life and finances are intentional, not serendipity.

Secondly, stewardship is living dependently. We need to be committed to living dependently. Personally living an intentional life is not a declaration of personal independence. We are not lone ranger rogue Christians. We live in the context of the church of Jesus Christ with full dependence upon the Lord. He is living his life intentionally and now he displays the bigger perspective by saying 'if the Lord permits.' If you had lived in the south in the 1800s you would have learned to write a letter and you would make statements of what you were going to do. At the end of your statement you would have written 'd.v.' which stands for deo volento and that means God willing. Here is what I intend to do but I am not dependent upon myself. Put no confidence in the flesh for I am dependent upon the Lord. We plan our way and watch how God directs your way. Plan your life for Christ. Live your plan for Christ and then watch Christ edit your plan each day and it will be good. He will even edit it the way He does Paul's, with adversaries and adversity.

Paul is interdependent with the Lord's people. Notice what he says in I Corinthians 16:5–6, [5] *I will visit you after passing through Macedonia, for I intend to pass through Macedonia, [6] and perhaps I will stay with you or even spend the winter, so that you may help me on my journey, wherever I go.* He is going to stay in Ephesus to help them. I'm coming to

spend time to help you so that you can help me. We don't live this life alone. We live our life dependent upon God and interdependent in our relationship with each other. We build one another. Love one another, devoted to one another. Forgive one another. Pray for one another. We encourage one another. That is how God designed us to live. Living intentionally is not independence but we live with utter dependence upon the love in interdependence with God's people. What can we do together for the Lord with stewardship of life and resources?

Thirdly, live strategically. Notice how he is going to use his time. He will use it wisely. His time in Corinth ended up to be more than just the winter for it was about a year and a half. He makes use of his time. He makes the most of his time. He redeemed the time and secured the time. I will stay with you when it's the right time. I will use my gifts when God opens the door. I am going to delay right now because the present opportunity that God has opened up. The Lord has opened a wide door of effective ministry. So when the Lord opens the door I'm going to walk through it. I am moving but I am always ready to live strategically so when God opens a door I'm ready to walk through it in dependence upon the Lord and interdependence with the Lord's people. He would strategically use his gifts and talents interdependently with the church, God's people being utterly dependent upon the Lord and making decisions while relying upon the Lord.

Here is the takeaway. Truth-directed stewardship whether it is financial or life stewardship, here are five things from the text to think about in this matter. One, it is an act of worship that secures resources for worship. So stewardship is an act of worship and it secures resources for worship so that I can participate in worship. I have learned a lot about stewardship from the Bible. Stewardship is engaged in worship particularly in gathered worship on the Lord's Day. My uncle Lonny also taught me about stewardship. I would attend church with him on Sunday night's and we'd listen to a burgeoning young preacher whose name was Billy Graham. When the offering plate would come around my uncle would put something in it and I knew he tithed that morning. I asked him why he put something in that evening and he said "Son I want you to learn something. Shall I appear before the Lord empty-handed? I want to participate and not just receive tonight." He had always planned it out. So stewardship not only allows me to worship but it secures resources for the engagement of resources.

Secondly, stewardship is learned and assists others to learn. So I not only learn it from the Word of God but I also learn it from other people. My uncle, granddaddy, daddy and momma all taught me. My wife taught me about stewardship. Growing up we lived in some pretty challenging situations but my mother was always tithing. When I was at Christ Covenant in Charlotte my mother came to church when we were having a building campaign. I was preaching a sermon on stewardship and made the comment that the tithe is on the gross pay. Afterward my mother wanted to talk with me about the sermon and she said "Son are you sure the tithe is supposed to be on the gross because I always thought it was the net." I explained to her why I thought it was on the gross and then she looked at me and said "Son you've convinced me but I have some good news and bad news. The good news is that my tithe just went up." I said, "What's the bad news?" She said "Well my tithe just went up but I think my building fund just went down a little bit." We are constantly learning from others. Testimonies are so helpful here in this regard.

Thirdly, it is a declaration of intention but not a declaration of independence. When we make our commitments we make them in dependence upon the Lord, not upon ourselves. We are intentional about our stewardship but it's always in dependence upon God's provision in our

life. One of my heroes said it this way; man proposes and that's good – God disposes and that's glorious.

Fourthly, stewardship is a bold declaration of love and humility. That is what our giving is. Lord, everything I have You gave to me. Thank You for guiding me as to how I can give back in worship and praise. I give because I love You and am grateful to You. What is the mother sin that we all want to avoid according to the book of Proverbs? It is pride. Let me give you some encouragement. The weed of pride will never grow if our life is a garden of gratefulness. So we give in our gratefulness and praise to the Lord.

Fifthly and finally is that stewardship is prayerful, planned and strategic. I am grateful for the strategic thinking of our officers as to how the resources can be used for the Kingdom. For God's glory Briarwood is committed to equipping Christians to worship God and reach Birmingham to reach the world for Christ. I am so grateful for this strategic giving and the privilege to be engaged in it.

I would like to close with a word of testimony from my wife and me. We are really excited about this. A couple of years ago we entered into a building campaign for coming generations. The elders told me that I needed to tell everyone what we were going to give. I told them I don't do that. They said that Frank Barker did it. King David did it. I thought I'm about to get persuaded here. My wife and I prayed about it and made a commitment. We said we weren't going to touch the tithe or faith promise (our giving to missions) but we will give this. I'm not going to repeat the number but one of the elders met me at the back of the church and said 'are you crazy?' I said that was what we were led to do. My testimony is that last week we were able to put the last envelope for coming generations in the plate for that children's worship center, the barn and all that was getting done.

This is not a building campaign I'm promoting here but my wife and I rejoiced in the fact that our faith promise and our tithe we're never touched and God found a way to make that happen. God had to do that because we didn't know how it was going to get done and He made the way to do that. The training wheels stayed in place. I want you to have testimonies but you can't have a testimony until you trust Him. Trust Him. Be a good steward. All that is required of a steward is to be faithful. Let's pray.

Prayer:

I know most of you have already prepared your commitment cards and have them ready but I want you to just pray over it right now. Just like the Lord multiplied fishes and loaves from a little boy pray that the Lord will multiple your giving and as He joins it with everyone else's we will see churches planted and revitalized. We will see missionaries sent locally, regionally, nationally and internationally. Our worship will be honoring to the Lord. Our small groups will see evangelism. Your time, talents and the treasures He has entrusted to you, prayerfully consecrate it to Him. God, I want to thank You again for our elders and their wisdom on the stewardship policies of the church, our deacons and their diligence, the staff and their integrity. I want to thank You for Your people here, their generosity and their faithfulness. O God, our God I want to give You praise so we now commit this and in so doing commit ourselves to serve You intentionally, dependently, interdependently and strategically for Christ's sake, Amen.

Power Point

LESSONS ON CHRISTIAN STEWARDSHIP FROM THE LIFE OF PAUL

- I. Living intentionally
- II. Living dependently
- III. Living strategically

LIFE TAKEAWAYS

Truth-directed stewardship in life and of life

- An act of worship that secures resources for worship
- It is learned and assists others to learn
- A declaration of intention but not independence
- A bold declaration of love and humility
- It is prayerful, planned and strategic