

Eastwood Baptist (16/12/'18) **MONEY, TIME AND RELATIONSHIPS** (1 Corinthians 16)

Introduction For 9.30 people this sermon concludes my series on 1 Corinthians, whereas for 11am people this is a stand-alone sermon. But for both groups a sermon on 1 Corinthians is probably not one which fills you with anticipation. This chapter doesn't address any great theological themes, but consists of miscellaneous personal and practical notes. Yet this chapter reminds us that Paul did not write textbooks of theology, but pastoral letters which related profound theological insight to specific life situations. And this in turn reminds us of something even more important: Christian doctrine is of no value when it is divorced from the practicalities of life. Healthy Christian belief is just like 1 Corinthians 16 – it is intensely personal and practical. In fact, this chapter covers three important areas of life: money, time and relationships.

Money (1 Corinthians 16:1-4) Paul begins his closing remarks with an exhortation concerning money, specifically “the collection for God’s people”. We know from the Book of Acts and other letters by Paul that this was a collection for the needy Christians of Jerusalem. Paul exhorts the Corinthians to give. But more than that: he exhorts them to give thoughtfully and systematically. **Read 16:2.** It is not inappropriate that this verse has often appeared on envelopes used as a means of helping people to set aside money for weekly church offerings. The collection for the poor of Jerusalem was not exactly the same as weekly church offerings, but it is a relevant precedent for such regular giving. And it is even more appropriate that we are hearing these words at a time when we are thinking about our Christmas offering, through which we give to help poor people overseas. Our conscientious giving of money for the work of God’s church is a part of Christian discipleship. *Only* a part, certainly, but a *significant* part nonetheless, and a part which is often an indicator of the sincerity of our commitment to Christ. Think of two contrasting people in the Gospels, and Jesus’ comments on them. I am thinking of a man whom we usually call “the rich young ruler”, and of the widow who put two small coins in one of the temple offering containers. Jesus grieved over the first, whose money and possessions held him back from following Jesus. And he warmly commended the second, whose small but generous offering, given out of her poverty, proclaimed the reality of her love for God. Examples like these, along with Paul’s words to the Corinthians, challenge us to ask ourselves what our attitudes to money say about the sincerity of our Christian discipleship. Do we think of our money and possessions as held in trust from our generous God? Does such thinking show up in our giving to God’s work? And does it show up generally in the place of money and possessions in our lives?

Time (1 Corinthians 16:5-9) The subject of Time arises in the second paragraph of Chapter 16 – **read vv.5-9.** It seems to me that what Paul has to say here about his plans exemplifies a beautiful balance in two areas. First, there is a balance between what is sometimes termed task-orientation and person-orientation, between a focus on getting the job done and giving time to people for their own sake. Paul makes it very clear that he wants to spend time with the Corinthians, not just a flying visit but a lengthy stay. But he is also keen to give sufficient time to his work for God in Ephesus. This is an important balance, and most of us have to learn not to lean too much in one direction or the other. The second area of balance is

between planning and openness. Paul doesn't just float along waiting to see what turns up – clearly he is giving careful thought to the future. But he is not locked in to his own ideas about the future. Note the “perhaps” in v.6, and “if the Lord permits” in v.7, and his seizing of opportunity in vv.8-9. We need to use our time for God as well as our money, and this requires some measure of planning, especially if our lives are busy. But we also need to recognise that our plans must always be provisional, and to be ready to respond positively if the Holy Spirit tells us to change our plans. We need to ask ourselves every now and then about how we use our time – is it the way God wants us to?

Relationships (1 Corinthians 16:10-20) Most of the rest of the chapter is about particular people: about Timothy and Apollos, about Stephanas and his household, about Fortunatus and Achaicus, about Aquila and Priscilla and the church which meets at their house. Paul was *interested* in people. He was not the kind of evangelist who was concerned merely with numbers of converts, or the kind of church leader who was concerned only with the life of the group and not with individuals. In particular, Paul obviously appreciated those men and women who worked with him in Christian service. He mentions these people often in his letters, and usually includes a word of commendation. In this chapter he speaks first of Timothy, and speaks warmly of him, then speaks of a number of others – **read 16:15-18a**. So when he immediately goes on to urge his readers to give recognition to those who deserve it he has already set an example. **Read 16:18b**. And Paul does more than give recognition. He also demonstrates a lively concern for Timothy's needs **read 16:10-11**. What we know about Timothy suggests that he would have greatly appreciated such support. Even more striking are his words about Apollos – **read 16:12**. Paul is responsive to the desire of some of the Corinthians to see Apollos again, and no doubt to be taught by him. This might not at first seem remarkable, but it does when we remember that there were people at Corinth who considered themselves disciples of Apollos, and probably compared Paul unfavourably with him. There is great generosity in Paul's encouraging Apollos to visit Corinth. It is in relationships above all that a genuinely Christlike spirit makes itself evident, in love which is expressed in personal interest and practical concern, and in generosity toward rivals. Think of the Christians who have made the greatest impact on your life, and I am confident that this will be true of these people.

Conclusion (1 Corinthians 16:21-24) How can we best sum up the message of this chapter? One way is to look at Paul's own conclusion – **read 16:21-24**. Paul takes the pen from his secretary, probably in part to authenticate the letter as genuinely from him. But it also gives particular emphasis to these closing words. At the heart of them is a reference to “the grace of the Lord Jesus”, a reminder of the Lord's undeserved favour, awareness of which should govern the way they live their lives. The word “Lord” occurs three times, hinting that the right response to grace is to honour Jesus as Lord. Then there is love. Paul both insists that they must love their Lord, and expresses his love for them. Christians have every reason both to love Jesus and to love one another. Another way to sum up the chapter is to go back to my headings. Paul tells us to honour Jesus as Lord by the way we use our money, by the way we use our time, and by the way we relate to other people. Let us honour Jesus Christ as Lord by the way we live, not only how we address major crises and great issues but in all the little details of life.