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Sermon Notes

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Giving in Light of Eternity

1 Corinthians 16:1-4

In his book *Desiring God*, John Piper addresses money and possessions in light of eternity:

In [1 Timothy 6:7, Paul] ... says 'For we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world.' There are no U-Hauls behind hearses. Suppose someone passes empty-handed through the turnstile at a big-city art museum and begins to take the pictures off the wall and carry them importantly under his arm. You come up to him and say, "What are you doing?"

He answers, "I'm becoming an art collector."

"But they're not really yours," you say, "and besides, they won't let you take any of those out of here. You'll have to go out just like you came in."

But he answers, "Sure they're mine. I've got them under my arm. People in the halls look at me as an important dealer. And I don't bother myself with thoughts about leaving. Don't be a killjoy."

We would call this man a fool! He is out of touch with reality. So is the person who spends himself to get rich in this life. We will go out just the way we came in.

Or picture 269 people entering eternity through a plane crash in the Sea of Japan. Before the crash, there are a noted politician, a millionaire corporate executive, a playboy and his playmate, and a missionary kid on the way back from visiting his grandparents. After the crash, they stand before God utterly stripped of Mastercards, checkbooks, credit lines, image clothes, how-to-succeed books, and Hilton reservations. Here the politician, the executive, the playboy, and the missionary kid, all on even ground with nothing, absolutely

nothing, in their hands, possessing only what they brought in their hearts. How absurd and tragic the lover of money will seem on that day - like a man who spends his whole life collecting train tickets and in the end is so weighed down by the collection that he misses the last train. Don't spend your precious life trying to get rich, Paul says, 'for we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of the world.'"

I. From the Eternal to the Practical

A. From 1 Corinthians 15 to 1 Corinthians 16

1. We have just finished soaring into the realms of eternity... 58 verses on the reality of our eternal glory in heaven through the resurrection of the dead

1 Corinthians 15:51-52 Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed-- ⁵² in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.

1 Corinthians 15:54 When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory."

2. These words should fill us with a radiant, buoyant hope, a hope that transcends anything we could ever face in this present world of sickness, sorrow, loss, and death
3. We are to feed our souls continually on these promises... to set our hearts on things above and things to come (Colossians 3)
4. The glorious world to which we are going cannot be captured and hemmed in by words, even the inerrant words of Holy Scripture

Revelation 21:1-4 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. ² I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their

God. ⁴ He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

5. This heavenly perspective should color the way we live every single day of our lives

B. "Your Labor in the Lord is Not in Vain"

1 Corinthians 15:58 Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

1. As a result of 57 verses of perfect doctrine on the resurrection of the body, you should live a certain way
2. You should stand firm, steadfast and immovable in your faith
3. The world will throw temptations at you, either by temporary successes or temporary failures
 - a. Temporary successes: financial windfalls, raises, winning the lottery, getting an inheritance, accumulating wealth... these things can deceive us into a worldly carnal mindset
 - b. Temporary failures: sickness, surgery, unemployment, financial reverses, losses, stock market crashes... these things can also make us worldly in our mindset, anxious, financially selfish
4. Paul wants us to WORK HARD for the kingdom... to spend ourselves—our time, our energy, our money for the Kingdom

C. Storing Up Treasure in Heaven

1. Paul is going to move seamlessly from the resurrection body to money
2. An eternal perspective on how you spend, how you save, how you give...

1 Corinthians 16:1 Now concerning the collection for the saints...

3. But there is no real division in Paul's mind: "In light of the fact that you will someday be raised from the dead into a resurrection body that will dwell eternally in the New Heaven and New Earth, how should you give to the poor among the saints in Jerusalem?"

II. Money Reveals the Soul

A. Money Reveals the Health of the Soul; Eternal Perspective Should Free Up Generosity

Randy Alcorn, *Money, Possessions, and Eternity*, said "Jesus spoke more about how we are to view and handle money and possessions than any other topic – including heaven and hell."

Matthew 6:19-24 "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰ But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. ²² "The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. ²³ But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness! ²⁴ "No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.

1. You have to make a choice when it comes to money and material possessions: they will either rule you or they will serve you as you serve God
2. And if you are generous with your money here, giving it away as the Lord leads, you will be storing up treasure in heaven, you will be rich for all eternity
3. Conversely, if you love money, it will ensnare you

B. The Love of Money is Dangerous

Mark 4:18-19 Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word; ¹⁹ but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful.

Covetousness is a sneaky sin... materialism, greed, the love of money and material possessions... say to the Lord:

Psalm 139:23-24 Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. ²⁴ See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting

III. The Context for That Offering

A. Paul's Ministry Commitment (Galatians 2)

Galatians 2:9-10 James, Peter and John... agreed that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the Jews. All they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do.

B. Poverty Then vs. Poverty Now

1. Poverty back then was pervasive and devastating... people were facing their own extinction when they ran out of resources
2. For the most part, we here in America never see that level of true poverty
3. Our land is so rich, and the governmental programs so plentiful and the gospel heritage so pervasive that poverty generally just means a lower standard of living and having to do without... not wondering if you are going to survive at all
4. That level of poverty is something you can see in Haiti or in Somalia or in Bangladesh
5. But that's what Paul was addressing... to some degree a life and death issue

C. The Poor Among the Saints in Jerusalem

1 Corinthians 16:3 Then, when I arrive, I will give letters of introduction to the men you approve and send them with your gift to Jerusalem.

Here we get to the ethnic aspect... the Jew-Gentile divide

The collection was being taken among Gentile converts to a Jewish religion... the material needs among the Jewish Christians was a prime opportunity to put the unity of the gospel on display

1. Jewish Christians were severely persecuted

John 9:22 already the Jews had decided that anyone who acknowledged that Jesus was the Christ would be put out of the synagogue.

It was the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem that condemned Jesus and handed him over to be crucified

It was the Jewish Sanhedrin that organized the first systematic persecution of Jewish Christians in Jerusalem

The Book of Acts makes it plain that there was terrible persecution of Jewish Christians throughout those early years... everywhere Paul went, it was Jewish unbelievers who led the persecution — arrests, confiscation of property, death sentences... Jerusalem was the worst place on earth for Jewish persecution of Christians

Central to that would have meant severe economic distress... if you're kicked out of the synagogue, you can no longer make a living — if you're a carpenter, no one will buy your tables and chairs; if you're a potter, no one will buy your pottery; if you're a farmer, no one will buy your harvest; if you're poor, no one will hire you to work or give you any money

D. Gentile Obligation to Jewish Christians (Romans 15)

1. Paul makes a very strong argument

Romans 15:25-27 I am on my way to Jerusalem in the service of the saints there. ²⁶ For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. ²⁷ They were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in the Jews' spiritual blessings, they owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings.

E. A Great Opportunity to Display Jew-Gentile Unity... the “barrier, dividing wall of hostility” removed, one new man (Eph. 2:13-15)

F. Paul’s Collection Was Progressing

1 Corinthians 16:1 Now about the collection for God's people: Do what I told the Galatian churches to do.

1. Also the Macedonians... 2 Cor. 8

2 Corinthians 8:1-4 And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. ² Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. ³ For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, ⁴ they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints.

2. Lots of money collected by this point

3. Now turning to the Corinthians

G. Paul’s Collection Commitment (vs. 4)

1 Corinthians 16:3-4 Then, when I arrive, I will give letters of introduction to the men you approve and send them with your gift to Jerusalem. ⁴ If it seems advisable for me to go also, they will accompany me.

Basically, Paul will go with the collection IF IT IS BIG ENOUGH... if not, he’s going to stay in Greece and continue to raise money

H. Corinthians’ Earlier Commitment

2 Corinthians 8:10-11 Last year you were the first not only to give but also to have the desire to do so. ¹¹ Now finish the work, so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it, according to your means.

I. Now is the time for ACTION (“The road to hell is paved with good intentions”; not those who say, but those who do)

IV. Timeless Practical Principles

A. Timeless: The Holy Spirit's Intentions

1. The immediate circumstances have passed away
2. But the Holy Spirit, in inspiring the Apostle Paul as he was writing, was looking across all the centuries of church history, to every generation of Christians in every nation on earth

B. For the Saints [Priority on Christians]

1 Corinthians 16:1 Now concerning the collection for the saints

1. The church must take care of its own... this is the top priority for all Christian giving
2. This is a matter of Christian witness... the church's reputation is on the line

Psalm 37:25 I was young and now I am old, yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging bread.

3. This doesn't mean that Christians should never give to non-Christian needs
 - a. The parable of the Good Samaritan shows that love for neighbor extends to any human being that is needy...
 - b. The Samaritan was from a different religion, a different nation; he saw a man beaten, bleeding, dying by the side of the road
 - c. He cared for him immediately, not hesitating because of their differences
 - d. So, for example, in disaster relief... when there is a hurricane or a flood or an earthquake, Christians have always been in the lead in meeting the needs of the suffering people in that region
4. However, in terms of PRIORITY and PATTERNS:

Galatians 6:10 Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

5. FBC Durham: we have the church's benevolence fund, to meet the needs first and foremost of the people of this church, and secondly, Christian people around the world... but we do use those moneys sometimes to meet general needs as we become aware of them

C. In Jerusalem [Local and universal church]

1 Corinthians 16:3 Then, when I arrive, I will give letters of introduction to the men you approve and send them with your gift to Jerusalem.

1. Not just a "Jew-Gentile" issue, but a "local PLUS universal church" issue
 - a. Paul is pressing the needs of Christians in Jerusalem on the hearts of the church in Corinth
 - b. This teaches us that local churches should care about all Christians all over the world... the universal church
2. Church is spoken of in two senses: local church and universal church
3. Local church: the church at Corinth... one local assembly in a particular geographical location... "know and be known"; covenant fellowship
4. Universal church: the Body of Christ as it presently exists, in heaven and on earth... the mystical communion of redeemed people, both living and dead, all over the world and up in heaven
 - a. Many Christian brothers and sisters in other parts of the world **are** hard-pressed and needy
 - b. Though we cannot see those brothers and sisters who are being persecuted by the government in North Korea and China and Iran, we are still concerned about them as though we ourselves were suffering
 - c. And when an earthquake hits Haiti or a hurricane devastates the Gulf Coast, we are concerned about brothers and sisters in that part of the world and give financially to meet that need

D. For/through Ministry Leaders

1. Paul is acting as a spiritual leader here, telling the Corinthians what they should do with their money
2. He is an apostle, and has a role to play in their financial lives
3. This is part of a larger theme of the connection between ministry leaders and Christians' financial giving patterns... in two senses: money given FOR leaders, and money given THROUGH leaders
4. Money given FOR leaders, to meet their financial needs

1 Corinthians 9:4 Don't we have the right to food and drink?

5. Money also given THROUGH leaders, disbursed as the leaders see fit

Acts 4:34-35 There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales ³⁵ and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need.

- a. Money given to ministry leaders... to help them in their mission

1 Corinthians 16:6 Perhaps I will stay with you awhile, or even spend the winter, so that you can help me on my journey, wherever I go.

So, ministry leaders are aware of the needs of their work and have the responsibility to make the churches aware of those needs... missions takes money, ministry takes money... so ministry leaders often have to raise money from the churches

E. On the First Day of Every Week

1 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

1. This was the day of worship for the Christian church
2. The money was given when the church assembled for worship
3. It is a significant part of worship to give money... and we should do it consistently and regularly

F. Saving It Up

1. Paul wanted the church to SAVE UP the resources cumulatively over weeks
2. This was a matter of efficiency as well as intentionality
3. They were planning to give, storing it up so they could give more
4. Paul wanted the giving to be a well-thought-out matter of prayer and the will

G. Each of You

1 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, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made.

1. This is a part of the healthy Christian life for every person

H. In Proportion to His Income

1. The amount given is not anywhere as significant as the level of sacrifice
2. Remember the widow's copper coins

Luke 21:3-4 [Jesus said] "I tell you the truth this poor widow has put in more than all the others. ⁴ All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on."

3. The level of sacrifice is the key... how much it pinches... each one should give IN PROPORTION TO HIS INCOME...

I. Not Mentioned Here: CHEERFULNESS

2 Corinthians 9:7 Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

V. Applications

A. To All Non-Christians: I do not ask you to give money at all

1. I don't want you to give anything

2. I want you to RECEIVE from Christ his free gift of salvation

Matthew 20:28 the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many

Isaiah 55:1 Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost.

B. FBC Members

1. This sermon is a call to search your heart concerning your giving patterns
2. Is cheerful, faith-filled giving a regular part of your Christian life or not?
3. Have you asked the Lord to search your heart and know your soul about COVETOUSNESS? We live in a very materialistic culture in which we are lied to all the time that “A man’s life does indeed consist in the number of his possessions”
4. Have you given yourself in prayer to a pattern of giving to the budget of FBC? Are you sacrificially giving to support the ministry here?
5. Do you pray about your financial support for other ministries... for the poor and needy? For people in disaster struck areas? For widows and orphans? Especially for the IMB and for unreached people groups?

C. Ask the Lord to Transform the Way you Think About MONEY!! Ask Him to develop in you an ETERNAL PERSPECTIVE!!

Randy Alcorn: “You can’t take it with you, but you can send it on ahead!”

D. If the Shoe Fits...

1. The elders have information about general giving patterns, though we do not know individuals who fit into these patterns, or what anyone specifically gave

2. But the information shows that we had 315 giving units (individuals or households) at FBC... of that, only 65% gave anything to FBC at all... as the information was processed, we were aware that some who did not give had understandable special circumstances, or had left the church by the end of the year... but almost 1 in 5 regular attenders/active members at FBC gave literally nothing at all to the church in 2020
3. Now I don't know who those people are... but God knows, and you personally know your own habits
 - a. Perhaps there may be circumstances that we don't know
 - b. Or perhaps you have forgotten the church covenant in which all members agree to contribute regularly to the life of the church financially
 - c. Perhaps you give to other Christian ministries and feel you don't need to support FBC out of your finances
 - d. But the elders believe that your priority structure should be like this: 1) your local church's operating budget; 2) benevolence needs in your own church; 3) life and death benevolence needs in your community; 4) missions, especially to unreached people groups; 5) all other Christian ministries
 - e. We ask that you prayerfully consider your giving patterns when it comes to FBC... if you are giving regularly and generously, following these biblical priorities praise God! You are storing up treasure in heaven
 - f. But if you know that your giving is not what it should be, we ask that you come before the Lord and ask him to show you how your money decisions are displeasing to him
 - g. Keep in mind, our church is in debt right now, for the More Than a Building campaign... we owe 1.9 million dollars, and are paying interest—some of you have made pledges and paid them; others of you have yet to begin paying those pledges; others have neither pledged nor given... again, I don't know specifics, just categories...

h. Again, go before the Lord and ask what he'd have you do!