

# Christian Stewardship

By Paris Reidhead\*

Christian Stewardship. Our Text is found, 1st Corinthians 15:58 through 16:2. 16:3 pardon me. "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord. (The stewardship of life, time, and strength) Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come. And when I come, whomsoever ye shall approve by your letters, them will I send to bring your liberality unto Jerusalem."

The stewardship of life in its fluid form; life is made up of time; time is sold for money, and therefore when you bring your money you are bringing your fluid life that through the channels that have been established it can flow in this form more easily. It is so difficult to escort you to the Baliem Valley, but your life in form of money can flow with such ease.

Now go back to the first word of the Text...Therefore, or better still wherefore. Whenever you find a 'wherefore' or a 'therefore' in the Scripture, take time to find out what it is there for. And this is exceedingly important.

Some say it refers to the resurrection that's just been dealt with at such great length, the verses of this 15th chapter, and it does; but we must work our way back to Chapter 1 and verse 9. Will you turn to it please if your Bible is open to 1 Corinthians 1:9?

Paul has established the premise; now he proceeds to refer back to the premise. "God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord." "God is faithful by whom ye were called unto the fellowship." This verse is important because it reveals the calling and the function of the Church. She is called into fellowship. *Koinonia* is the Greek word that means the business enterprise, the fellowship in love, the fellowship in purpose, the fellowship in ministry, the fellowship in Jesus Christ. She is called unto fellowship with Him in His enterprises and God has called her the Church thus. Do you realize the implication of this? The Church is not an organization that exists to devise activities by which she may please God. The Church is a fellowship, a business enterprise called by God into Jesus Christ whereby the family business may be pursued and completed.

I suppose there is no greater joy in all the world than a father that is in an enterprise than the day when he instructs the sign painter to go outside and add those two noble words, and son. And he is to be complimented because somehow he has instilled in his son a sense of the importance of the nobility and significance of the work to the place where the son has said, "I want to be in fellowship with the family enterprise."

And you were called of God out of death into life, out of darkness into light. You were called out of vanity and futility into the fellowship of the family enterprise. All other enterprises are means to an end. The only importance of your employment whether you labor for someone or are the owner of the business is that it might be a means whereby you can pay expenses and invest your time in areas that you could never personally visit, and in ways you never could serve. But the enterprise in which you are engaged here is to be thought of always as a means and never as an end. It is this fellowship, this enterprise into which you have been called by God into Jesus Christ that is the end of all ends, for this is the family business of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, which is to bring out of every kindred and tribe, tongue and nation and people those who will be to the praise of the glory and His grace, a bride of the Bridegroom and children for the Father.

Now Paul has written this entire 1 Corinthians letter. We have been in 1 Corinthians since the Sunday after the Missionary Convention last October. Next Lord's Day with the final message on this letter, Watch, Stand Fast in the Faith, we will have completed these months of assiduous, diligent study of this important letter. It's impossible for me to review even in the simplest form what we've considered. There was a corrective part to the Epistle, verses 1 through 9; and then there was the instructive part showing the secrets of success and power. With both in view, Paul says, "Wherefore. All the correction that's been given, all the rebuke that's been administered, all the entreaty that's been offered, all of the appeal and the instruction

that has been given, Wherefore.” Everything that has been said about the failure of the Church because of her carnalities, and everything that’s been said about the secret of the power of the Church through the spiritualities come to focus now in this one verse.

Now let’s put Chapter 1:9 and 15:58 together. “God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Wherefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmovable, always bounding in the work of the Lord forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord. Wherefore because God is faithful, and because God calls us into this fellowship, be ye faithful, be ye stedfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord.”

There are two things that we need to see here. First, God has called the church into fellowship with Jesus Christ who will be faithful. You’ll never be able to accuse God’s Son of unfaithfulness. On the basis of this committal of God to faithful dealing with His own, we are now exhorted to be faithful, “Be ye faithful, be ye stedfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord.” Now we have here in this 58th Verse, the Apostle’s concluding appeal to the church at Corinth and to us.

Notice his appeal. First it is for fellowship in Christ. “Therefore, my beloved brethren.” Do you remember the first problem we encountered back there early in the epistle? “One saith I am of Paul, and another I am of Apollos, and another I am of Cephas, and still another I am of Christ.” (I Cor. 1:12) And what is the answer that is given? It isn’t that Paul is wrong and Cephas is right, and Apollos is to be exterminated at all. He says, Brethren. They’ve all come in the same Door, over the same Threshold; the Door is Christ, and the Threshold is repentance and faith. My beloved brethren. Do you see that we are called into a fellowship in the family? Families don’t always have the smoothest time, but they remain families. Children may find some occasion to differ with each other. I think I can stretch my memory to recall an occasion in our own home when there was a little difficulty. But they still remain members of the family. And if you have been born of God, the One who gave you life in the miracle of the new birth has given to you a love for the other members of the family. Do you see that? Do you understand that? He has given you a love. You didn’t have to work it up. You didn’t have to squeeze it out of the tube of your commitment. It says, “Love of God shed abroad in your heart by the Holy Ghost.” (Rom. 5:5) And if you love God, then you love those that are born of God. It’s just that way. Someone said in testimony of regeneration, said, I know that I’m saved because the things once I loved I now hate, the things that once I hated, I now love, and the people that once I couldn’t stand now I delight in. (Well I like that. I think it’s true. “Therefore my beloved brethren.”)

Then it’s a fellowship in steadfastness, to be steadfast in service. You know, steadfastness, faithfulness, what a tremendous virtue this is. Our brethren that knew Dr. Simpson<sup>1</sup>, Brother Pastor who is with the Lord, and our Brother Negris who is the last deacon that was ordained by Dr. Simpson, heard that dear man say to them, “Oh whatever else you do, be faithful, be faithful. This is so important! He that sendeth by an unfaithful servant is as one who has his foot out of joint.” Have you ever walked on a sprained ankle? Oh it’s so hard, it’s so hard to walk on a foot out of joint. It’s so hard to have unfaithful servants. A while ago, some months ago, we were here on a Wednesday evening, my wife and I. It was late. I’d been counseling with people. It got to be 11 o’clock before we left the church. I pulled up where the car was parked and my wife was about to get out and I said, “Dear, we forgot to bring the bulletin to the printer.” Well there was only one thing to do, 11:30, Montclair, and the bulletin was back on the desk. Only one thing to do, go home and go to bed? No. Because years before dear Pastor Fettle from Russia had put his long finger up against his nose and taken it down and whipped me with it until I’ll never recover from the scars of love made, and he said, “If it’s entrusted to you, do it whatever the cost.” So we came back, and at one o’clock we had the bulletin at the printers. It’s just something that seems to me to be part and parcel of our whole relationship to Jesus Christ. This matter, that if it’s your responsibility do it, whatever the cost, whatever the responsibility, whatever the price it may exact.

From Pilgrim’s Progress, remember after Faithful had been slain in Vanity Fair where they put him in a cage, and they pricked him with spears and beat him with sticks and daubed him with dirt and finally dealt him that blow whereby he went immediately from Vanity Fair into the Celestial City, and as Christian goes on his way he eulogizes Faithful thus, “Well Faithful,

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<sup>1</sup> Albert Benjamin Simpson (1843-1919) founder of The Christian and Missionary Alliance

thou hast faithfully professed unto Thy Lord with Whom thou shalt be blessed, when faithless ones with all their vain delight are crying out unto their hellish plight. Sing faithful sing and let thy name survive, for though they kill thee thou are yet alive. Let us be faithful, even unto death.”

Then we have another appeal and entreaty here from the Apostle *for fellowship in Christ, for steadfastness in service, and for immutability in belief*. Oh that we should be steady, not driven and tossed about to and from by every wind of doctrine whereby cunning men lie in wait to deceive. “Be steadfast, unmovable, unmovable.”

President Garfield was speaking of the secret of Charles Haddon Spurgeon’s<sup>2</sup> power, and he said actually there was no secret about it. Spurgeon simply believed God’s word with all his heart, and all his might, and when a man comes to believe that as firmly as in Spurgeon does, as firmly as Spurgeon believed even in his own existence, the objections and the guesses of infidels and critics are not more to him than the hooting of the owls in the darkness of the forest at night. Nothing at all. “Be unmovable.” You know what you’ve been taught; you know from whom you’ve learned it, and when heresy is abroad in the land, don’t let it influence you. “And when men heap to themselves teachers because they want their ears scratched,” don’t go after them. (II Tim. 4:3) “Be steadfast, be unmovable.”

And then, what was Paul’s plan. His appeal was that we should be steadfast, we should be unmovable. But what was the Apostle’s plan — “Always abounding in the work of the Lord. Always abounding in the work of the Lord.” Now this involves first the thought of confederation and cooperation. Someone said about the church in general, he said, the trouble with the church is we have so many chiefs and not enough Indians. I understand that this is a problem that doesn’t only affect the church. But it’s cooperation, it’s cooperation in the sense in which we are joined one to another, and everyone is serving others and absolutely dependent upon the others. What member of your body is sufficient unto itself? You say, my brain. Ah yes, your brain, well and good. But where are the instruments to carry out the edicts of the brain? Are they not your feet, your hands, your lips? My feet, they stand alone. Yes, but who is it that tells them where to go, and when to go. And thus the church is a confederation, a body of individuals, each of whom would in their unregenerate state want to be independent operators, doing their own will according to their own plan, to be seen and known of men, but the grace of God has saved us from this selfish commitment to our own pleasure and place as the reason for our being. And now we are called into a *Koinonia*, a fellowship of which Christ is the head. We see this illustrated in the church in Acts, the 2nd chapter, verse 44, “All that were together, all that believed were together and had all things in common.” Now this doesn’t necessarily mean simply that they had their place of stay and clothes to cover them and food to eat in common, that was true, but just as in your body you have feet with which to walk and hands to work and lips and tongue with which to speak, so it was that each was dependent upon the other. And whatever Peter might be, whatever the Apostles were under God, it was necessary for there to be deacons in order that there could be the ministry to the Body of Christ that the Apostles could be released for prayer. And in that sense the Apostles were dependent upon the deacons and we are each dependent upon the other. We are laborers together with God. Every one of us has his place. Everyone is important. There are only two ways by which you can find your place. The one is carnally, to make it, to insist upon it, to secure it. That’s the wrong way because it brings no blessing and bodes no good. The second is quite different, where you bring yourself in total abandonment to the head of the church and He sovereignly relates you to His purpose. Oh the Body of Christ is rent every time anyone takes the bit in his teeth and says, I’ll go this way, but when each becomes the servant to the other and each submits, looking upon the things of others, esteeming others higher than himself, then the Body of Christ can move. What would happen if your members each were contesting for prominence? Your body would be ruptured and torn, injured.

Abraham Lincoln illustrated this. Someone came to him and said, “You know General McClellan is getting too much honor. Why he’s got his publicity corp, and they think that General McClellan is bigger than the whole Union Army.” Abraham Lincoln looked at him and said, “Friend, if General McClellan will go on winning battles for us, I’ll become his stable boy, and hold his horse.” There was the principle. This is the important thing, that they should be together as a confederacy, as bound together by one head.

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<sup>2</sup> Charles Haddon (C.H.) Spurgeon (1834-1892) British Particular Baptist Preacher

Notice, this is continuous service. "Always abounding in the work of the Lord." And then this plan also involved increasing service, "Always abounding in the work of the Lord." How wonderful it is to realize that this is what the Lord has planned for you. But then notice His promise. His appeal, then his plan, and now his promise. "For as much as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord." You say, well I don't get credit. Nobody recognizes me. All right. Let's establish the principle. He said, "Let not your right hand know what your left hand does. When you do alms, don't do it so that you can be seen," because if you be seen you'll be applauded, you'll be approved; and when you are applauded, then you have received your reward and there's nothing more for the Lord to bring. (Matt. 6:3,4) Just as God can't punish the same crime twice, so God can't reward the same service twice. And that's why He said, "Alms should be done in secret;" your ministry should be performed not to be seen of men because if that happens everything that you have ever done for which you have asked the recognition of men, you realize this you have forever abandoned your right to heavenly recognition. This is the principle, immutable in the Scripture. You can't have reward both from God and from men. And thus the principle is, Do it as unto the Lord, as unto the Lord, not to be seen, not to be known, not to be applauded, but to be done as unto the Lord. For your labor is not in vain in the Lord. He sees. He sees why you do what you do. He sees exactly what you are doing. It's not unnoticed by God. And it's not unfruitful. God has promised that if you do it in His power for His glory, it will be to His praise. But let me say this, that everything that I do, or you do merely in the energy of our flesh will be burned up in the judgment because He has said, "No flesh shall glory in His sight." (I Cor. 1:29) Therefore it has to be done by the Spirit. And then of course, the Lord Jesus is coming and His reward is with Him. Remember that the praise of man cancels Christ's reward. This is so important, "as much as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord."

Now we've had, having looked briefly at the Apostle's concluding appeal. Let us see in closing, the Apostles concluding instruction. We find it here in this 16th Chapter, where he says that he has given to the church the privilege of sharing in the needs of others. "Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye, upon the first day of the week let everyone of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come."

Now there's a divine law of giving set forth here. I personally believe that tithe continues to be the basic unit of stewardship. On your income tax every year, you are allowed to deduct 30% for benevolent giving. Now the reason for it is that Rabbinical scholars and Jewish lawyers have proven to fiscal authority in Washington that if earnest Jewish people were to give everything that the Old Testament demands it will be at least 30%, and if they are thus to have it less than that is to penalize obedience to God. For this reason you are allowed the 30% deduction.

I believe the tithe is the basic unit. Some say its law. But it ante dates the giving of the law by centuries. Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek. Moses, of course, put it into the form of an edict, but the Lord Jesus Christ also approved it. So we can say this regarding the tithe: Abraham commenced it; Moses commanded it; and the Lord Jesus Christ commended it. Now I think it's an excellent place to begin, but I think it's a dreadful place to stop. Personally, I think the norm ought to be as God blesses, and He's looking for people He can bless, is the first tithe to the local ministry, and the second tithe to the ends of the earth. You say, "Oh that's far too much." Well I believe God is looking for people He can bless. I'd like to take time to tell you about Cristy Boss, that dear fellow out in Iowa that had a little two-pump gravel drive station. He went to a Missionary Convention and by faith, the Spirit of God spoke to Him by faith to take on the support of a Missionary himself. And he called Mr. Harold Street in, and asked him if he wouldn't give him, wouldn't do something, Cristy Boss said, "I could take care of a Missionary for one year. I've got his support saved in the bank in my savings account." Mr. Street said, "It's got to be by faith. 'Without faith it's impossible to please God.' (Heb. 11:6) Give that money you have saved to send your missionary and trust the Lord." Well, at the end of the year, Cristy wrote in and said, "It's so wonderful, I want another missionary." And the second year he wrote in and said, "I want another missionary." And then the fourth year he built a station. And the eighth year he built a station. And God was looking for people He can bless. You can't out give the Lord.

We find that elsewhere Paul establishes the divine law of giving on this basis, "As God has prospered you." So that it goes clear beyond any sense of a rigid tithe. Now the divine method of giving is set forth here: "Upon the first day of the week, let everyone of you lay by in store." I personally believe that this was to be laid by, entrusted to the faithful men of the congregation who were appointed by the people who were given letters of commendation as we find it here. They were to be

laid by so that it wouldn't be a personal matter. You know, there is such a danger often with the personal matter, because it breaks down the thought of the Body and the Body life. There is so much to be said for this, the systematic giving on the first day of the week. It's to be given regularly, not waiting for a caprice or an urgent appeal or some emotional stimulation, for spiritual giving is to be an act of worship.

Then we've just mentioned the Divine standard for giving. "As God hath prospered you." Everything is from God, everything is for God. He is the Lord of all. Now there is a reason for this, that there should be no gatherings when I come. Giving should not need special excitement. It should be conscientious, deliberate and guided by the Holy Spirit.

Now a word about the administration of the gifts of God's people. Notice if you will here in the 3rd verse. "Whomsoever ye shall approve by your letters them will I send to bring your liberality unto Jerusalem." People themselves had the privilege of choosing their administrators. And of course the people had the right to expect the utmost care in the administration. Now let us notice the divine motive for giving. In 2nd Corinthians, Chapter 8, verse 9. "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich yet for your own sakes He became poor that ye through His poverty might be made rich." There it is, the glory of Jesus Christ.

And what is the deep source of Christian giving? It's our own personal abandonment to the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul writing of the church says, in Macedonia, "This they did not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God."

The record has it that in India during the occupation by the British, a British officer had located a heathen idol that was to be smashed to pieces. The priests gathered around it and protested even to the point where they said, "You'll have to kill us to take it" At last the order was fulfilled. And, lo, as the club fell upon the idol and broke it, from the midst of the idol, from out of the fragments of the shattered idol a great flood of golden coins rolled out upon the floor. What is it? It is this, if you will slay the idol of self, interest, ambition, desire, the treasures will be enough for all of God's work at home and abroad.

Several years ago, 1950, on a Sunday morning in Georgia, a message concerning missions was given. I noticed a man sitting on the back to my right in a wheel chair. He pushed the chair up as others had gone to the door, tears streaming down his cheek, and took my hand and he held it, and he looked at me and he said, "Brother Reidhead, God has spoken to my heart today." He said, "I was saved in this church when I was a boy of 12 and when I was 14 God called me to the Mission field, and when I finished high school I didn't want to go to the Mission Field; I decided I'd go to Georgia Tech and be an engineer. They drafted me after I graduated from Georgia Tech. In Italy, fighting with the engineers a Nazi bomb exploded. Three days later I regained consciousness in a field hospital. The doctor looked at me. He didn't know I was conscious, and I heard him say, 'He'll live but he'll never walk again. We can't understand why he's alive.'" He said, "They took me first to the hospital at home and I was so bitter." Then he said, "I met my wife who was a nurse, and she loved me and brought some joy into my life. I came back home and I've been wanting to serve the Lord." He said, "I've been tithing to the Church and I'm going to keep on. But today I realized that God didn't want me in Italy with a gun; He wanted me in Africa with the Gospel. But I can never go." But he said, "As long as I live, as God is my help I'm going to send the second tithe to keep George Birch on the Mission Field in my place. And as long as I had anything to do with it, every month I got a receipt, a copy of the receipt from this friend—\$28.37, the second tenth of his total disability allowance from the Federal Government." The idol of self had been broken. He couldn't go, but he could send. And as I look at you today, the only thing that I can possibly say to you, Are you as this noble company at Macedonia and this they did, not as we hoped, but they first gave their own selves unto the Lord. If you do that, then out of that wounded, broken idol of self will flow all that God has purposed for His work at home and His work abroad.

And this I say Brethren, "Be ye stedfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, for as much as ye know that your labor, (your sacrifice, your giving) is not in vain in the Lord."

Shall we stand for prayer.

Before Thee we stand, our Father, eternity bound men and women, many of us to look back over years squandered, wasted in sin, and we see that the devil is a cruel taskmaster that takes not a tithe but the whole, and leaves often so little for family and

children, and other needs. And now, our Father, we have come to Christ and many who have come to Him have known all the blessings that grace can bring have found it hard to give that portion which our Lord has claimed as His. Oh grant, Lord, that as we stand in Thy presence the blow of Thy Love shall fall upon the idol of self and there shall be that smashing of our ambitions, of our plans and our purposes, that out of our wounded hearts shall flow in time and in life and in money that which will be to the eternal praise of the glory of His grace. May we be good stewards. Imbed upon our minds this truth, and emblaze it upon our consciousness this fact, that in that day we will stand before Him; oh might it be that we shall hear Him say as He said of that dear woman who broke the box of alabaster, "Ye have done what you could." In that hour when we see Him, everything that we might have done but wouldn't will be as the greatest of sin. May we live in the light of that hour, "being steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in Thy work," knowing that every service shall receive a just recompense of reward. Our service is not in vain in Thee. Go Thou with us as we part. We shall stand one day before the Judgment Seat of Christ. May it be to receive a "Well done, good and faithful servant." (Matt. 25:21) May we be faithful stewards of life and time and strength and money, all for His praise. May the grace, mercy and peace of God the Father, Son, Holy Spirit, be and abide with us now and ever more. Amen.

\* Reference such as: Delivered at The Gospel Tabernacle Church, New York City on Sunday Morning, July 31, 1960 by Paris W. Reidhead, Pastor.

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