

A HEART FOR MISSIONS
1 Corinthians 16:1-12
July 23, 2006 – Grace Covenant Baptist Church

On February 6, 1812, believers from a number of denominations converged on Salem Tabernacle in Salem, Massachusetts. The occasion was the ordination of five Congregationalists to the work of missions in the Far East. The most famous of these men was Adoniram Judson. Perhaps lesser known but much his equal was his friend, Luther Rice. These men set sail on separate ships for India on February 18, 1812. On the journey, Judson, knowing that he was to meet William Carey, a man of Baptist convictions, began to study the issue of baptism in the Greek New Testament. In looking for ways to refute the Baptist Carey, Judson became convinced of immersion and upon arriving in Calcutta announced his desire, along with his wife Ann, to be baptized by Carey.

Rice, on a separate ship penned up with a group of English Baptists on the way to India, also entered into lively discussions on the issue of baptism. When arriving in India and hearing that the Judson's had changed their views on baptism, Rice was still not convinced of immersion. Shortly thereafter, he was plagued by a long bout with hepatitis. During this time, Rice also turned to the pages of the original Greek and became convinced of the immersionist view and was baptized by William Ward in Calcutta on November 1, 1812. Little did he know the difference this would make both in his life and the future of all American Baptists in the work of missions.

Judson and Rice now faced a dilemma. They would no longer be able to depend on support from Congregational churches at home, nor would their consciences allow them to ask for it. One of them would have to return to America, sever ties with the Congregationalists, and approach the Baptists asking for support, which was anything but certain. Rice was selected because he was not married. So he boarded a ship and headed home, returning in September 1813.

The heart of Rice's work, a work that would keep him from ever returning to the Far East, was to raise support for the work of missions in the Far East from American Baptists. Rice immediately began to unite these brethren in the cause of missions and financial support. Finding his travels to be too slow in going from church to church, Rice petitioned the Triennial Convention in Philadelphia to consider forming geographic entities of churches that could all meet together on occasion as well as pool their resources for the work of missions. Hence, in large part do to the efforts of Luther Rice, American Baptist churches formed the first associations of like-minded churches to raise support for missionaries. These associations carried over into Southern Baptist life and remain today.

However, the idea of like-minded churches joining together in the work of missions and support did not originate with Luther Rice. As a matter of fact, Rice's efforts appear to come straight from the methods of the first foreign missionary, the Apostle Paul. In our text this morning we see that Paul establishes that *a church should have a heart for the work of missions at home and abroad by supporting individuals and other churches of like-mindedness.*

I. A Supportive Heart (16:1-4)

In verse 1 Paul addresses the fourth of five questions the Corinthians had in a letter they had sent to him previously. Each of these questions is introduced by the phrase, "Now

concerning...” Having previously addressed the questions on marriage (7:1-24), singleness (7:25-40), Christian liberty (chaps. 8-10), and spiritual gifts (chaps. 11-14), Paul now turns to the question of **“the collection for the saints”** (16:1-12). Notice he does not say, “the collection of the saints” but **“the collection for the saints.”** This collection was not for the benefit of the local congregation, or a tithe, but one that was taken up for those in other places, in this case the church at Jerusalem. Paul indicates this in exhorting the Corinthians to participate in what he had **“directed the churches of Galatia.”** It is in his letter to the Galatians that we read of Paul’s eagerness to remember the poor in Jerusalem (Gal. 2:10). Then, in 2 Corinthians 8-9, Paul exhorts the Corinthians to give with the generosity and the joy of the Macedonians. We know that the Corinthians heeded this exhortation from Romans 15:25-27:

Romans 15:25-27 – “But now, I am going to Jerusalem serving the saints.²⁶ For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem.²⁷ Yes, they were pleased *to do so*, and they are indebted to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in their spiritual things, they are indebted to minister to them also in material things.”

So we see from Paul’s letters his desire to meet the needs of those in Jerusalem who had been hard hit by famines and persecutions from unconverted Jews. His basis for doing so was the request of the church council in Jerusalem (Gal. 2:10) but even more because of the indebtedness that Gentiles had to the Jews, both spiritual and material. So this collection was not a tithe that is required of all believers to sustain the work of the local congregation, but a collection over and above that tithe for the work and support of missions, in this case a benevolent offering for the poor in Jerusalem who Paul would go to after his visit to Corinth (vv. 3-4). As Tom Schreiner aptly notes, “We must clarify at the outset that this collection was not to sustain the weekly ministries of churches, nor was it intended to support elders or overseers in local congregations. The collection was a contribution to poor believers in Jerusalem from Gentile Christians” (*Paul: The Apostle of God’s Glory*, 443).

There are two things we see regarding this collection.

1. A regular collection (v. 2a)

Paul writes, **“On the first day of every week each one of you is to put aside and save.”** Paul suggests a simple way for this collection to be handled. They could gather the funds when they met together corporately, which we see was **“on the first day of every week,”** on the Lord’s Day. As Leon Morris notes, “This is the first piece of evidence to show that Christians observed that day, though there is no reason to doubt that it was their custom from the very first day” (*1 Corinthians*, 232). This was something that was to be done by **“each one.”** All professing believers at Corinth were to participate in this regular, systematic giving for the poor in Jerusalem. We must remember that this collection was not any easier for those at Corinth than a similar request is for us today. They too faced the social demands of society and some were barely able to make ends meet. Paul wrote in 1:26 that there were “not many mighty, not many noble” in the church. They probably faced economic turmoil and persecution for their faith. Yet, Paul calls on all of them to contribute to this collection.

Paul emphasizes that the purpose of the collection being regular was **“so that no collections be made when I come.”** Paul wanted the collections to be ongoing prior to his announced visit to them, whenever that would occur, so that the collection would not be made in haste. Each one was to set aside weekly a contribution that Paul would collect when he arrived. This collection, along with **“letters to carry your gift to Jerusalem,”** would be delivered by whoever the

Corinthians approved, hopefully along with Paul, which brings us to the second thing we see regarding this offering. Not only was it to be a regular collection but it should be...

2. A generous collection (v. 2b)

“Each one,” Paul writes, was to give “**as he may prosper.**” Paul expected everyone to give in keeping with his income. Paul always taught proportional giving, whether it be tithing or, in this case, a special offering. He does not state a particular amount or a specific percentage. Each was to give out of the bounty that God had provided them as the Lord led with cheer and gladness (2 Cor. 9). The Lord loves a cheerful giver, not one who gives grudgingly. So each one was to give in proportion to their income. This is the principle that Paul sets forth both as it relates to a tithe and to these special offerings.

In a book about Brother Bryan entitled *Religion and Shoes*, the story is told of one of his men who he heard had stopped tithing. He went to him and said, “Brother Jones, I understand that you have stopped tithing.” He said, “That’s true.” Bro. Bryan asked, “Why?” Bro. Jones responded, “When I first started tithing, I wasn’t making much and a tenth didn’t amount to much, but the Lord blessed me as I tithed and now a tenth is a lot of money.” Bro. Bryan said, “I understand. Let us pray.” He prayed, “Dear Lord, would you please reduce this brother’s income to the point where he can afford to tithe again” [quoted by Frank Barker, Jr., *I Corinthians*, 6].

What we see from this is that it is not the amount that is important, but the attitude that one has in giving. We are not to give out of some legalistic understanding, but with a cheerful heart understanding that we are seeking to bless others as the Lord has blessed us. This is why Paul added the caveat in v. 4 that he would go along with the others to deliver the collection “**if it is fitting for me to go also.**” If the offering amounted to a worthy sum, then Paul would have no problem accompanying them. But if the offering were an embarrassment, then it would be better for Paul to refrain. It was up to the Corinthians to show their generosity.

II. A Sympathetic Heart (16:5-12)

Our burden for supporting missions is born out of and understanding of what a missionary must endure. The work of the ministry can be trying at times. But Paul gives four principles that all who are engaged in the work of missions would do well to remember. As you think of the missionaries we support as churches today, you can begin to cultivate a giving and prayerful heart for both missionaries and mission endeavors in these principles.

1. Strategy (v. 5)

Paul had a clearly defined plan in place, “**But I will come to you after I go through Macedonia, for I am going through Macedonia.**” Paul clearly understood God’s will for where he was to go, when he was to go, and what he was to do when he got there. Paul’s reference here of “**going through Macedonia**” would be to his second trip through Macedonia on his third missionary journey. It is in this same region that we get a glimpse of how Paul was able to discern God’s will for his place of work. In Acts 16 we come upon Paul and others in the midst of his second missionary journey. We read that their ministry had great success in Lystra, Iconium, and in other cities (vv. 1-4). Then suddenly while passing through other regions, they “were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word” (v. 6) and while hoping to go into Bithynia, “the Spirit of Jesus did not permit them” (v. 7). At Troas, Paul had a vision in the night

of a man standing and appealing to him, “Come over to Macedonia and help us” (v. 8). How did Paul and the others interpret this vision? They concluded, “God has called us to preach the gospel to them” (v. 9). The Spirit’s restraint coupled with this vision from the Lord helped Paul to clearly discern God’s will. While he would have gone one way, God sent him in another.

The same is true for missionaries today. They must have a clear sense of God’s will in their calling as to when and where to go as well as what they are to do when they get there. But God’s will in the work of missions does not only concern them, but us as well. Roger Ellsworth makes a keen observation.

In light of such remarkable guidance, we must ask ourselves why God would exercise his will so strongly in the mission work of Paul if *the whole mission enterprise* is not his will. And if mission work is the will of God, how do we justify the low priority we so often give it? If it is God’s will, shouldn’t it be ours? [*Strengthening Christ’s Church*, 262, emphasis mine]

The church in America today should take a long, hard, honest look at Ellsworth’s questions here. Many churches today give lip service to the work of missions and even send great amounts of money to the field. And yet, more money is earmarked for frivolous programs and unnecessary accoutrements. Millions are spent on gymnasiums and youth and children’s “wings” while a pittance comparatively is given to send and support missionaries. Again, hear Ellsworth’s question, “If it is God’s will, shouldn’t it be ours?”

2. Flexibility (vv. 6-7)

We read of Paul’s desires in v. 6. His hopes were to “**perhaps stay with you**” for he did not “**wish to see you now just in passing.**” But the one thing that kept Paul from making a time commitment is in v. 7. “**I hope to remain with you for some time, if the Lord permits.**” Unlike his clear discernment of God’s will at present in Macedonia, he did not have that clear sense as yet concerning Corinth. So he had begun to strategize and make long range plans understanding that these plans, his plans at this point, could change according to God.

I always tell a group that I lead on a mission trip that the key to a good mission trip and the success of a mission team is *flexibility*. We must plan ahead before a trip. A fail to plan is a plan to fail. However, no matter how well we plan, we must be open to God’s changing our plans. We saw it with Paul in Acts 16 and I hear of it in almost every report I receive from missionaries on the field. We planned for this, our plans were frustrated by God for His purposes, and so we took an entirely different direction.

3. Commitment (v. 8-9)

Paul also understood when he was to leave. Not only did he know when and where to go and what to do when he arrived, but he also clearly discerned God’s will in completing the work. This did not always come easy for Paul. Corinth is a testimony to this. In Acts 18 we find Paul afraid and discouraged while at Corinth. The persecution at Corinth was great and Paul, being resisted and blasphemed, determined to leave. But God was not through at Corinth, nor was He ready for Paul to leave. He again comes to Paul in a vision by night saying, “Do not be afraid any longer, but go on speaking and do not be silent; for I am with you, and no man will attack you in order to harm you, for I have many people in this city” (Acts 18:9-10). So Paul settled in Corinth for a year and a half until the work that God had called him to there was completed (v. 11).

It was this commitment of Paul to remain where he was no matter how tough it got that kept him from coming to Corinth at this time. **“But I will remain in Ephesus until Pentecost; ⁹ for a wide door for effective *service* has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.”** Even though there was opposition, Paul had not yet been released from his work at Ephesus. Though the opposition was great, the effectiveness was greater.

The call of a missionary is a call to a commitment to see the job through to completion. I am sure that there were times when William Carey and Adoniram Judson felt like throwing in the towel. Family members were dying, persecution was great, and there were no conversions. They must have felt as if their efforts were all for naught. But they persevered and after seven years there was the first convert, and then others.

We too must remember the commitment that missionaries have made for the cause of missions. Sometimes we as their sending churches might have to remind them, in an assuring way, of their commitment. We can only do this as we understand the work of missions.

4. Teamwork (vv. 10-12)

Paul interjects two others who were doing the work of missions, Timothy and Apollos. Timothy was considerably younger than Paul and much more inexperienced. Knowing the Corinthians pride about their relationship to leaders in the church (1 Cor. 1:12), Paul was concerned about the reception they would give to Timothy. Many would not want to receive him. Paul reminds them that Timothy carried on the work of the ministry just as he did (v. 10). Therefore, he had a right to be accepted by the people for his work’s sake. Paul encourages the Corinthians to take care of Timothy and those traveling with him so that they might return peacefully to Paul.

Apollos, on the other hand, was well known by the Corinthians. He had been with them and labored with them. Paul describes him as **“our brother”** suggesting that while some at Corinth divided themselves into Paul and Apollos sects, there was no division between them. Paul had strongly urged Apollos to go to Corinth again but Apollos had other convictions (v. 12). Paul respected his decision, trusting that Apollos would come if and when the opportunity presented itself. Paul showed great sensitivity to the working of the Lord in Apollos’ ministry.

Teamwork on the mission field is crucial. Personality conflicts and varying levels of spiritual maturity exist just as they do in the church, but these are often magnified because the missionary is more isolated. Paul remembered both Timothy and Apollos even though they were separated from one another. Paul encourages the Corinthians to be understanding towards both individuals for the sake of the work.

Conclusion

1. A supportive heart 2. A sympathetic heart

Giving; praying; planting; going