

11/16/69

"NOW ABOUT THE COLLECTION"

Text - I Corinthians 16: 1

"Now about the collection in
aid of God's people"

Richard M. Cromie, Minister
Parkwood United Presbyterian Church
November 16, 1969

The first letter to the Corinthians reveals a world with problems not unlike our own. Corinth was the wealthiest and most important city of that day, with a population about as large as Pittsburgh's is now, and it had all of the problems which we are concerned with on our exclusively modern worry lists. The immorality which was symbolized by the famous Temple of Aphrodite on the summit would have made our new morality look tame and old and timid. The great cleft between the rich and the poor would have incensed even the most reluctant of our social critics. Selfishness, lack of discipline, catapulting experiences and confused values -- everything so current in our vocabularies of complaining, the whole sorry lot of it, was present in Corinth, and among the Corinthian Christians as well.

The Bible is so honest, you see, so unbearably honest about the human predicament and what we have to do about it. And Paul was honest, too. The letter is to the church at Corinth, to a church that though it had strength and power, wasn't doing all that it should. A church that needed some specific direction into what it had to do next: how to channel its power, and where to apply it. Where to go -- who to follow -- how to get there. Look at it that way. It is not an obscure bit of Scripture, it is a letter to people, real live people, with real live possibilities, but with real live problems.

To the Church at Corinth. The earlier chapters concern some moral standards of the Christian life. What to eat and wear and do and say. How to put the theory of Christian love into practice in a non-Christian world, and at times in a less than Christian Church. Paul deals with the ethical - moral questions of his day. His subject is what we should do. Romans and Galatians deal with the doctrine, what we should believe; but most of Corinthians is ethical, what we should do. Follow the problems of Corinth. Chapter I is an appeal for harmony in the Lord. Put aside petty differences and forget your favorite grudge; deal openly with each other, for factions will get the church nowhere. Unity in the same goal is necessary before we will ever reach it. From the Christian Church he turns to Christian people.

He deals with the problems of sex and marriage, quite openly and without apology. Human relationships belong to what the gospel is all about, and we had better deal honestly with them in the church or someone will deal with them dishonestly somewhere else. He also deals with matters of legality and legal cases which one man brings against another. And on a wider level he covers the subject of what it means to be a Christian as well as free. Though he was free, he made himself a slave to the Gospel of Christ. All of that is preliminary to, and the background for the fascinating journey through the last part of the letter as Paul moves from one great height to the next.

In Chapter 11 he gives advice concerning the Communion Service. The pinnacle of sacred scripture. "For I have received of the Lord, that which also I delivered unto you, that the Lord Jesus on the same night on which he had been betrayed took bread and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said take eat, this is my body which is broken for you. This do in remembrance of me...."

The Twelfth Chapter - "Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant. To one is given the word of knowledge, to another faith, to another prophecy, individual spiritual gifts to individual men. But all these worketh through one and the same spirit... and as the body is one so also is."

And then that highest of all heights: Chapter 13. "If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging symbol, and if I have prophetic powers and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith so as to remove mountains, but have not love I am nothing. Love suffereth long and is kind, love seeketh not its own...."

Then the 14th -- some direct spiritual advice concerning honesty in worship. "Let all things be done to edify... for God is not the author of confusion, but of peace as in all the churches of the saints."

Chapter 15 concerns the problem above all problems: the resurrection from the dead. What can we know about that? "For as a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. And he will reign, for God has put all things in subjection under his feet. There is one glory of the sun, another of the moon, and another of the stars. So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable. What is raised imperishable -- sown in his honor, raised in glory, sown in weakness raised in power. Lo, I tell you a mystery -- we shall all be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye. This perishable nature must put on the imperishable. This mortal nature must put on immortality. O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting. At the end, therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord, your labor is not in vain...."

From the meaning of love to the hope of the resurrection -- he is soaring from one great peak of inspiration to the next -- the realm of a magnificent and mighty spirit. Then without any warning whatsoever, Chapter 16 begins -- "Now about the collection in aid of God's people." A magnificent and mighty faith! But we need to raise some funds.

Now what is he trying to pull? This Paul of ours. Here we are led up the highest way where our weak and timid spirits strive to keep up, and in the middle of our adoring devotion he slips in this matter of money. He rudely brings us back down to earth with this plain and blunt reminder: the next step "...now about the collection..."

Paul wasn't a psychologist, you see, he didn't know how to win friends and influence the parish... and he didn't care. The only thing he was timid about was whether he was following the vision which God had given him to see. He didn't run a very slick campaign. Faith, hope, love, but the greatest of these is love -- but now we will pass the plate. "If Christ is not raised, your faith is in vain", someday you will understand, but now dig into your pockets.

And he put it right on the line! The same straight long level line on which it belongs. Christ is Lord of Life, not of the soul alone. We are responsible for our time as well as his message.... for our money as well as his mission. Be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord, your labor is not in vain. But now we need some money. It belongs together with Paul -- no apology, some bread money.... We love the realm of the spirit, we strive for the things that matter to the soul -- but we live and love in the world where certain other things matter and where certain monies are needed.

This is our Stewardship Sunday, and the beginning of our Stewardship Week. Each member, this one time of the year, is asked to pledge his or her support for the work of this church in 1970. We are on the Frontier of the 1970's, as our

campaign materials have so ably shown, and the challenges to our congregation are enormous. (And may I interject a word of gratitude to the persons whose names are printed on the enclosure in your bulletin.) This all started some six months ago by the Finance Committee and has been led along to the present with the hope, but also with the conviction, that before we perform our mission here and throughout the world -- we had to clear away the financial difficulties. I hope you have read or will read your proposed budget. There you will see that the Parkwood Dollar has a long, long way to go.

I hope you read the budget, for there you see in financial outline the kind of commitments which the Parkwood of the 1970's is interested in making. You noticed, no doubt, that we have budgeted for a full-time Assistant Minister in Christian Education. We simply cannot do a proper job in our work with our young people without a person who will bring an expertise and experience in working with the young, one who can help all of us to sort out some of the difficulties which we face these days. Almost 500 young people are on our Church School roll; another 500 in the surrounding community, and another 500 to come in the next ten years. And, so we budgeted an item to cover that. A sizeable item! But one without which we cannot minister to our youth.

We unified the budget this year. A very small percentage of this congregation has been supporting the Building Fund program, and the gratitude of all the rest of us should be publicly stated to all of them. Mortgage and loan payments amount to \$25,200 per year, or over \$2,000 per month. Before we ever start to do anything else, we need \$500 every Sunday morning just to pay the mortgage. Now think of it along the guidelines Paul lays down. All that we want in ministry, direction to young, care for aged, visitation to the sick, counselling with the troubled -- but first we gotta pay the mortgage.

The building needs expanded already. Those in Church School realize how crowded we are. A class meets in the kitchen. Two groups use the choir room almost simultaneously. Take a look at the scale model in the Narthex as you go out. It shows the long range plans: enlargement of the offices and Church School rooms, a chapel on the side. We need a new organ. We have no recreational equipment for parish hall. The lounge should be furnished. The landscaping completed, and the parking areas paved. We need the help of all.

So you don't believe in pledging -- well, like we used to say, "it's a free country". But the church depends on you, on your willingness to give. The government doesn't. You read about it in the paper how much you'll pay in taxes. Your hospital bill goes up whether you like it or not. The supermarket doesn't ask you what you would like to pay for your groceries. But, the church asks you: "what will you give to help the ministry of your church?" Our church pledges to salaries, to utility companies, to banks!

And we pledge to our young people, too. We tell them "We'll care for your moral and spiritual needs and guidance. We will provide a ministry -- a place where you can ask your questions and meet others you will like." And what can we say if we do not meet the budget: "Sorry, Kids, we'd like to do it, but we don't have the money. We would like to plan, but we don't know yet how much we can do. Go play somewhere else!!"

We all pledge in other places. We pledge to the finance company for our car, Savings & Loan for a house, the department stores, the utility companies. To everything we value, for everything we have a priority, we are willing to sign on

the line how much we will pay. The church asks no more than do the rest, but no less.

The Parkwood Dollar has a long way to go. If you followed the budget, you will have noted that \$14,250 goes to Mission programs -- local, national and world-wide. When we give here, a Pittsburgh Seminary student will be helped, a neighborhood ministry in McKeesport will have a nursery to care for infants, Camp Crestview and Camp Fairfield will continue to operate (over 40 of our young people went this year). The Homes for aged in Oakmont and Washington will continue to provide care and love and a home for the aged. Through our Synod of Pennsylvania, church related colleges like Grove City, Waynesburg, Westminster, etc. receive help. Rural areas and needy people receive help. Through our General Assembly a hospital will continue to operate in Korea; an Indian peasant will receive a call from his doctor. Missionary pilots will fly through and over the jungles of Brazil. Refugees in the Middle East will receive aid. You are there because you give here.

In London a young businessman died leaving a wife and four children. Friends and family gathered with their expressions of sympathy. "I wish there was something I could do. Our deepest thoughts are with you. We are so sorry for you. God bless you." And that was nice. And so it continued until one man started to pass the hat and put in \$100 and said: "I'm sorry \$100 worth, how sorry are you?" "I'm pleased and proud to be able to help \$100 worth, how proud are you?" My good wishes and deepest thoughts are with you, but so is my money. Well, how sorry are we for the problems of the world? We all wonder these days what we can do about the problems of the world. Helpless and lost as one concerned soul.

There was a man,
Though some did call him mad;
The more he cast away,
The more he had.

Bunyan

One thing we can do is to help with the mission program of our church. In that regard I want to mention the Pittsburgh Presbytery THRUST Fund -- an item which we budgeted \$1,500. This money is for a special fund the Presbytery is setting up to help in underprivileged areas of Pittsburgh. Most of it will go to black communities, and we should be proud of our ability to help. Let me relate a story from Presbytery. A black minister told of the conflict in ghettos as to who youth will follow. There are only two choices -- those who are for the American dream and those against. Those in church or those out of it. The long and short of it is that unless we help the responsible Christian leaders, irresponsible non-Christian leaders will prevail. For you know yourself how much money the militants have. No one knows where they are getting it, but the extremists seem to be able to get anything they want -- you know that's true. While the man who is preaching the gospel of Christ and is trying to reconcile the gospel of love with the hate in the world, gets nothing because he doesn't cause any trouble. Well, this fund is to help them and others who work in the troubled areas of our city.

Paul says, "Every Sunday each of you is to put aside and keep by him a sum in proportion to his gains." Paul doesn't demand any amount -- that's up to you. Some can give extra, others cannot. As God has prospered. In proportion to the gains. If His church is essential to you, if you want it to prevail, then every Sunday put aside what you are able. The least expensive church in the world is the one which isn't doing anything!

And if you think the church costs a lot of money -- its only because it is alive and doing things, trying to solve the problems of the world. Trying to speak the name of Christ where others have been silent. Trying to show what Christian love is all about, where others have forgotten what it is supposed to be.

If you think the church is too involved in controversial issues -- remember that the least controversial church of all would be the one which isn't doing anything. The Christian church in some parts of the alien world costs very little money because there's very little going on. The Chairman of our campaign said: "We want people to care as much for the church as we do for ourselves; as much for the ministry and mission of the church of Jesus Christ as we do for our own."

Dr. Halford Luccock once pointed out the story of the tribe of ancient Frank warriors in the dark depths of the middle ages. Some were converted, and were about to be baptised. But they were not sure that they wanted to have the hands which held the sword sanctified. They would be immersed all the way except the hand above the right wrist, "this hand has never been baptised!!" That hand was reserved for the sword. In our day that same hand signs the checks. (Just in case the left-handers feel left out, I am sure some warriors held out the left.) And we reserve it just as surely for ourselves.

We are at a privileged time here at Parkwood. Remember Moses, when he stood and looked down into the Promised Land? He never got there, but others made it because of what he did. Well, you and I are like that. Others prepared our way. Our gratitude to them all. But the 1970's promise endless opportunity to expand the ministry and mission of our church. Our response begins today.