

If you have been to Barcelona you may well have seen the Sagrada Familia, the church begun by Gaudi in 1882 but which has not yet been completed. I understand that they hope to complete it in 2026 though I am not sure how realistic this is. It has been a long time unfinished! However it is a different matter with what is known as Szkieletor (Skeleton) in Krakow, Poland. This was begun in 1975 built up to 92 metres and stopped permanently in 1981 because it is seen as too expensive to finish and too expensive to demolish! So it stands unfinished, a folly to all who see it and shame for those who planned it.

It brings to mind what is known as Drake's prayer after some words of Francis Drake, which goes like this: "O Lord God, when thou givest to thy servants to endeavour any great matter, grant us also to know that it is not the beginning, but the continuing of the same unto the end, until it be thoroughly finished, which yieldeth the true glory; through him who for the finishing of thy work laid down his life, our Redeemer, Jesus Christ."

It is not the beginning, but the continuing of the same unto the end ... which yields the true glory. In a sense that sums up Paul's message to these Christians in Corinth in chaps 8-9.

Paul's message to them was about an ending.

Look with me at 9:5, "So I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to visit you in advance and finish the arrangements for the generous gift you had promised."

The church in Corinth had promised a generous gift to help the Christians in Jerusalem. A start had been made but it seems it had all slowed up. So Paul wanted an ending.

Now that may seem a small matter but Paul had used their promise to encourage the Macedonian church to give, 9:2, "For I know your eagerness to help, and I have been boasting about it to the Macedonians, telling them that since last year you in Achaia were ready to give; and your enthusiasm has stirred most of them to action."

Paul was concerned that they complete the gift so that neither he nor they would lose face.

It is not the beginning, but the continuing of the same unto the end ... which yields the true glory.

Here we see that principle applied to Christian giving as Paul was encouraging these Christians to complete what they had started on, but it could just as easily be applied to any area of the Christian life.

Is there an area in your Christian life that you feel is running into the sand?

It may be that you know you haven't really begun as a Christian. Perhaps sometime back you began seriously looking at Jesus and his claims. Perhaps with enthusiasm you talked with a friend but now, while you may still come to church, the search for truth and faith has ground to a halt. If so let me

encourage you to continue on that path to faith. Continue to talk, to ask questions because it is not the beginning but the ending that yields glory.

Or it may be to do with our witness as Christians. Perhaps a year ago you were eager to see your contact people be drawn towards Jesus but since you have gone off the boil in your prayer for them or your witness to them or inviting them to events. Let's get back on it and continue as witnesses to Jesus. There is no guarantee our contact people will come to faith but let's persevere in this.

Or it could be that you are involved in an area of service. You took it up with great enthusiasm but now it just seems like hard work. Friend continue in God's strength the task he has called you to. It may even be being a Christian. It may well be that you are finding the Christian life hard, Bible reading, prayer, worship, service all seem hard work. Being a Christian at work or at home seems hard. In this as in so many things it is easy to make the start. I wonder how many of us when we told someone we had become a Christian did we hear the response "it is just a phase he/she is going through"? People expected us not to continue with this Christian thing. However, by the grace of God, we are but sometimes we find it hard.

Sometime back my friend Matthew Sleeman, whom many of you will have heard preach here, gave me a book, "A resilient life". The book uses the familiar metaphor of a race for the Christian life and speaks about "going the distance" and "finishing strong".

Friend if you are here today or listening to this on download and are struggling in the Christian race then let me encourage you to keep on running for, as we saw a couple of years back in our series at the time of the Olympics, the goal and prize is infinitely worth more than any cost to us in terms of effort.

However if we are to end well in any area of the Christian life and in our Christian life as a whole then we need God's strength and vision to persevere.

In Heb 12:1 we read "let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us."

It is not the beginning, but the continuing of the same unto the end ... which yields the true glory. So in whatever area this speaks to you let me encourage you to continue to the end.

However, here it is this specific of fulfilling a commitment to give that Paul was concerned with. He wanted them to complete their giving so to encourage them:

1. He sent 8:16-24

Paul sent Titus and with him two others to help them , v18. These men were clearly men of good repute and they were sent to Corinth to help, encourage and stimulate the church to fulfil its promise. They were to be a bit of help and provide a bit of impetus and council as to bringing this collection that the Corinthian church had started to a conclusion.

Do you know Andrew Franklin? Andrew is our Stewardship Promoter. I and the Church Council encourage Andrew to be in contact with the church as a whole and with individual Christians to help us think through our Christian giving. It is a bit like these men were helping the Corinthians. If you are not sure how giving works, why you should give to God's work, when you should give or increase your giving then speak to Andrew. He is there to encourage us to continue and complete our giving.

2. He wrote 9:1-5

I know that in v1 Paul writes "There is no need for me to write to you." but he did anyway. It mattered! He wrote:

- a. To explain why he was sending Titus and the others
- b. to encourage them to godly action in terms of fulfilling a promise made as in 9:3, and
- c. to remind them of what Christian giving is about as we see in the rest of our passage for today.

3. He reminded 9:6-15

V6, "Remember this". Paul reminded them of the God given reasons which had prompted them to promise this gift in the first place and through that to encourage them to continue and complete that task. As we read it today it teaches us about this area of our Christian discipleship.

What Paul was trying to do here is not to pressure these Christians to give but to encourage them. So as we see the flow from v5-7 we see he speaks in v5 of the 'generous' or better 'free' or willing gift and that flows on through v6 with the idea of generous giving which needs, v7, to be thought through but which is given willingly not under compulsion.

In these verses we see the heart of Christian giving.

To Paul, as God speaks through him, giving should be thought through, generous and willing.

Let's just stop and before we ask why ask is that how my giving is, thought through, generous and willing?

Each of us should think and pray about what God would have us give to his work be it here at Christ Church or elsewhere. Do you do that? Have you sat down with God and "decided in your heart" what to give? It is in God's word and while this was written to the Corinthians I think it applies to us today. If you haven't then let me encourage you to do this to think through your giving, and not just once and think that it is, but at least every year as things change and move on in our lives.

Then let me ask is your giving generous? Paul's point here is clear that God gives generously and as God's people our giving should reflect our nature as his people.

Finally is our giving willing, v7 "not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver".

Are we giving with glad and grateful hearts to our God who has given so much to us?

A few years back there was some correspondence in the letters page of the Times about church attendance. Inevitably the old chestnut of "there are more people in church on Sunday than go to

football matches” was brought up. Someone wrote back, “I’d be interested to see how attendances would compare if churches started charging £800 for a season ticket.” To this the reply came back “£800 represents only £15 a week over a full year and a great many regular church attenders voluntarily (and I might add cheerfully) give that and much more. (GIVING 12)

Paul’s message is that our giving should be thought through, generous and willing. How does this part of our Christian discipleship look? As Billy Graham said, ‘Our cheque books have more to do with our Christian discipleship than our hymn books.’

Friends I have to say that I am so grateful that many of you here have thought through your giving, you are generous and give cheerfully and because of that we as a church are able to continue God’s work. But let me encourage us to continue in this that each year our giving may be complete for the work of Christ here at Christ Church and beyond.

In reminding them of these truths Paul encourages them and us in this giving by

a. the nature of God 9:8-11.

Why does God love a cheerful giver v7? Because that is God’s nature.

Look at v8, “And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.”

See the generosity of God, whose grace abounds to his people. (CHANGE) He makes all grace abound so that in all things at all times you have all you need. The generosity of God and all so that v11 we may in turn be generous to others, “You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion.”

That is the point Paul is making here. That God is generous and gives all we need that we may be generous to others.

We have to be careful not to misunderstand these words either in using them to suggest what is known as a prosperity gospel that God’s purpose is to make us rich or with the selfish attitude that if I give God will give to me.

Friends so often we focus the Bible on ourselves when it is all about God. What God is saying here is I am generous and give you all you need so that you can be generous to others. We give cheerfully because God has cheerfully given and for no other reason.

However Paul also encourages them in their giving by reminding them of

b. the results of giving 9:12-15

the most obvious result is that their generous, willing gifts will, v12, supply the needs of others.

On this Christian Aid Sunday that is very applicable in the physical realm. As we give, be it through Christian Aid or Tear Fund or another aid agency, we help meet the physical needs of others. But then through our regular giving here at Christ Church our giving, while it helps meet some physical

needs, also meets spiritual needs be it through our children's work, our youth work, the ministry I am involved with or whatever. Generous giving helps meet the needs of others.

Then also giving results in praise of God. I have to say that I am not great at writing thank you letters so there may well be a number of people here who think, "I did this and he didn't even write to thank me". If that is the case I am sorry. As a church we do try to thank people for their giving. However, as Paul points out here the praise belongs to God. If I pass on to others what God has given to me then it is right that it is God who is praised and not me.

Paul knew that when this gift finally did get to Jerusalem there would be great praise offered to God. I know that the same happens in Papua New Guinea and in Chandigarh India when gifts from here arrive there. V13, "Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, others will praise God." There is a great truth here that God's name is praised through what he leads us to give. But also I know that another result of giving as Paul says in v14 is prayer for the givers. The Duncalfes in Papua New Guinea pray for us who regularly give to them.

This wonderful sense of oneness of God's people in giving and receiving, in praise and prayer brings out this final word of praise in v15, "Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!"

Through God's indescribable gift, the Lord Jesus Christ, we have received grace and been made righteous. Through him we have been blessed abundantly that we might bless others and through that the church of Christ might be united in the sharing of resources, in prayer for each other and in praise of God.

This was why Paul encouraged these Christians to complete the task of their giving and to do it generously and willingly. In so doing they would reflect the generous nature of God and through their giving supply the needs of their fellow Christians which would result in praise and prayer to God.

It is not the beginning, but the continuing of the same unto the end ... which yields the true glory. May we also in all things be those who persevere in the Christians race and may our giving in response to God amazing grace be thought through, generous and willing.

Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!