



1 Cor. 16:1-4

Concerning the Collection...

NKJ 1 Corinthians 16:1 Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also:

2 On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come.

3 And when I come, whomever you approve by your letters I will send to bear your gift to Jerusalem.

4 But if it is fitting that I go also, they will go with me.

It would have been interesting to be able to read both sides of the dialogue between the Apostle Paul and the Corinthian church, as it was we have Paul's reply but we have to guess at the questions they were asking him. Sometimes however, by the way he replies you can almost reconstruct their questions, for instance when as in verse 1 he starts out by saying "concerning the collection..." he is obviously answering technical questions put to him about the offering that he had requested be made for the relief of the poor Christians in Jerusalem. This collection is also mentioned in Romans 15:26, 2 Cor. 8:1, Acts 11:29 & Acts 24:17, but we should be glad they asked it because it teaches us some important principles regarding the taking up of offerings in the church generally.

Now why had Paul requested a collection for the needs of the Christians in Jerusalem, surely there were poor Christians in other locales as well? Undoubtedly that's true, but there were certain factors that made the saints in Jerusalem, which prior to 70 AD was the center of the Christian church, poorer than the other churches.

First they had suffered systematic persecution and discrimination more directly and more quickly than the Christians elsewhere. We know that Paul himself had assisted in hunting out the Christians and having them tortured, beaten, or put in jail. We also know that just as Jesus had warned in John 16:2 they were being put out of the synagogues and becoming outcasts in their own society. Their ability to trade or find work in Jewish society was probably severely hampered.

Secondly we know that they were suffering through a time of famine, so food prices in Judea were probably especially high we read in Acts 11:28 *Then one of them, named Agabus, stood up and showed by the Spirit that there was going to be a great famine throughout all the world, which also happened in the days of Claudius Caesar.*

29 Then the disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea.

Finally, we know that when the church in Jerusalem had initially, to quote Acts 2:44 & 45, *had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need.* And while this common pooling of resources showed the love of the brethren for one another after a couple of decades, the effects would have had a devastating long-term impact. All their property was gone, all their investments, everything they might have derived income from, none of the

other churches did this, and the fact that Luke records it in Acts as historical oddity shows that it was not continued. Many believe it was a mistake, Hodge for instance calls it an ***“Error which arose from an excess of zeal over knowledge.”***

So the Jerusalem saints might well starve without the systematic and ongoing assistance of their brothers and sisters in the Gentile nations, and it shows not only the wider connectionalism amongst Christians and need to support and relieve one another, it also teaches us some important principles about our own giving. In any event, we can take away three principles from these verses:

- 1) ***Contributions were to be made every Lord’s Day***
- 2) ***Everyone was to Contribute***
- 3) ***Contributions were to be in proportion to the means of the giver***

1) ***Contributions were to be made every Lord’s Day*** – The collection was to be taken up on the first day of the week, the Christian Sabbath which they were already calling the Lord’s Day, because it was of course the day on which the Lord Jesus Christ had risen from the dead. We know from texts such as Acts 20:7 that this was the day on which the Christians gathered to worship and fellowship and so it was natural that when they came together for worship, that which they had laid aside might be put into the church treasury.

Paul explicitly says that Giving was to be regular, systematic, week after week, and proportionate to their income, what Paul did not want was a sudden “panic stricken whip-round” to quote David Jackman or passing of the hat when he got there. For instance, if I told you a missionary had just arrived from overseas and we wanted to give him some cash to take away with him, we might be able to come up with a hundred dollars or perhaps even two if the deacons turned people upside down and shook them, but it wouldn’t be anywhere near as much as if week after week we set aside something for his needs. *So this was to be a continuous commitment, a spiritual discipline, not a one time haphazard thing.*

2) ***Everyone was to Contribute – v2 – “let each one lay something aside”*** – rich and poor, young and old. This too has a spiritual end in mind as Charles Hodge observes: ***“The same amount might perhaps have been raised from the rich few. But this would not have answered one important end which the apostle had in view. It was the religious effect which these gifts were to produce in promoting Christian fellowship, in evincing the truth and power of the gospel, and in calling forth gratitude and praise to God, even more than the relief of the temporal necessities of the poor, that Paul desired to see accomplished.”***

Brothers and Sisters, we learn so much as we give. In our giving we remember that we are part of the same body, and each part supplies the needs of the other. As we give, we do so as an act of worship to God. As we give, we become agents or streams by which God blesses others and we cause them to glorify God and to give thanks to Him and to pray for us. As it Paul says in 2 Cor. 9:12 ***For the administration of this service not only supplies the needs of the saints, but also is abounding through many thanksgivings to God,***

13 while, through the proof of this ministry, they glorify God for the obedience of your confession to the gospel of Christ, and for your liberal sharing with them and all men,

14 and by their prayer for you, who long for you because of the exceeding grace of God in you.

Cheerful giving is one of the few concrete ways in which the transforming work of God can be seen in our lives. We live in a world where greed is the rule and while the world may pour its contempt on the church and maintain that they are just as good if not better than God's people there is one truth they may suppress but cannot deny. Of all the different groups in the United States, evangelicals give the most to charity year after year. In this we see the life changing work of the Holy Spirit.

3) Contributions were to be in proportion to the means of the giver – I often get the question from people “should I tithe?” that is lay aside 10% of my income for the church. Well in the NT there is no specific direction to tithe, there is instead a direction to freely give ***in proportion to the manner in which the Lord has prospered you***, and that may be subject to change, some years we may have more than 10% to give, some times less, but as we have the ability, we should sacrificially give to the needs of God's people, remembering that as we do so we are laying up treasure in heaven.

The willingness of Christians to freely give is often an indication of the state of the spiritual health of a church. Now, I deliberately do not know how much any of the members and families in this church give on a regular basis, and I do not hear any dire warnings from the treasurer that the church is “sick” in this regard, but sadly, it is the case that many Christians do not even come close to giving as the Lord enables them, and ultimately they end up impoverishing not only the church, but ultimately themselves. For instance, in Malachi the Lord rebukes the people of Israel on this account, but ultimately we see how they are the ones who were denying themselves his blessing:

Mal. 3:8 "Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, 'In what way have we robbed You?' In tithes and offerings.

9 You are cursed with a curse, For you have robbed Me, Even this whole nation.

10 Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, That there may be food in My house, And try Me now in this," Says the LORD of hosts, "If I will not open for you the windows of heaven And pour out for you such blessing That there will not be room enough to receive it.

If you need a present day example - Let us say that the government did not fund operations in Afghanistan, and you had to raise the money for operations there out of donations. Hat is passed and people put in a few dollars. First, what would that do, and second, what does it say about how committed people are to the endeavor and the people involved? People generally spend much more than that on luxuries during the week. So many churches – people put in between \$5 - \$10.

Finally Paul indicates that messengers should be chosen (presumably trustworthy men) to carry the offering to Jerusalem, and if it amounted to a worthy sum, he would personally accompany the messengers. His work was simply too important to personally supervise a small donation. Note though one final thing, Paul Apostle that he is, never suggests that He go alone and that is a wise precaution, God's ministers need to set safeguards over their own hearts, we need to be very circumspect in the way we handle God's money.

So rather let us be guided by 2 Cor. 9:7 So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver. Let your giving, your gifts be a response to the gift of God, now there I don't mean the temporal gifts, the money you have, the food you eat, etc.

Romans 6:23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.