

Now Concerning the Collection

Part 1

Introduction

While Paul was journeying back to Jerusalem, he stopped in Miletus and *“sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church”* (Acts 20:17) and reminded them of the work he had done among them in preaching the gospel. He was able to confidently say that he was *“innocent of the blood of all men”* because he *“did not shrink from declaring to [them] the whole purpose (counsel, KJV) of God”* (Acts 20:26-27). This was his responsibility as a gospel preacher – to preach the word of God without holding anything back. By doing this, he was *“innocent of the blood of all men.”* Conversely, he would stand guilty before God if he failed to teach anything that was necessary and *“profitable”* (Acts 20:20).

Many preachers today fail in this regard. They *“shrink back”* from teaching on various subjects for fear that someone might be offended or that controversy might result. They do not want to be accused of being troublemakers so they keep their mouths shut on certain topics. However, gospel preachers must not choose to simply ignore certain subjects because of how others

may react to them. It is expected that some will be offended; after all, even Jesus Himself offended people and turned them away with His teaching (Matthew 15:12-14; John 6:60-66). It is inevitable that one's motives will be questioned. Even Paul had to defend his motives, saying he was *“not like many, peddling the word of God, but as from sincerity, but as from God, we speak in Christ in the sight of God”* (2 Corinthians 2:17).

The topic of giving is one such subject in which teaching is often neglected. Perhaps a preacher is afraid his brethren will question his motive for teaching on giving. They could reason, “Our contribution helps pay the preacher. He must be preaching on this subject because he wants a raise.” Maybe a preacher supposes the brethren are comfortable giving what they have always been giving and will reject the thought that maybe they could give more. These things may or may not be true about the brethren. Regardless of whether they are or not, the truth revealed in Scripture needs to be taught on the topic of giving. That is what we will examine in this study.

Now Concerning the Collection

Part 2

The Act of Giving

Before beginning a study, we must first have a clear understanding as to what is under consideration. What sort of giving are we discussing? The giving we are considering here has to do with the monetary contributions that are made by individuals to the church. We read of this when the church in Jerusalem was engaged in the act of giving – Christians were selling property and bringing the proceeds to the apostles. These funds were then distributed to needy saints (Acts 4:32-35).

Paul also spoke of giving to the Corinthians when he wrote “*concerning the collection*” (1 Corinthians 16:1) and gave them certain instructions regarding this practice. The instructions given to the Christians in Corinth were not peculiar to that congregation. The churches in the first century had a uniform teaching. Paul spoke of this when he told them of Timothy – another gospel preacher – who would come with the same message he had brought them. That message that Paul brought was the same message he preached “*everywhere in every church*” (1 Corinthians 4:17). Therefore, the instructions

concerning the collection that are found in the New Testament apply to us today, regardless of where we are or the congregation of which we are members.¹

How was the collection to be gathered? First, we can see that individuals gave directly to the church. The example of Joseph (later called Barnabas) shows us that this was what was done. He *“owned a tract of land, sold it and brought the money and laid it at the apostles’ feet”* (Acts 4:36-37). Paul told the Corinthians, *“Each one of you is to put aside and save”* (1 Corinthians 16:2). We do not find any mention of anyone acting as a sort of *“middle man,”* collecting money from others and giving that to the church. Individuals gave directly to the church.

Secondly, the New Testament gives us a specific time when this is to be done: *“On the first day of every week each one of you is to put aside and save”* (1 Corinthians 16:2). We know the church met on the first day of the week to observe the Lord’s Supper (Acts 20:7). We also know this was the only day on which this memorial was observed because Paul, despite his hurried schedule, waited in Troas seven days to be able to take the Lord’s Supper with the church in that place (Acts 20:6, 16). As was mentioned before, the churches in the first century had a uniform teaching. The first day of

¹ See related article #3 – *Church Membership* (p. 63)

the week was the day they assembled to observe the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11:33). So the church met on the first day of the week and the collection was to be taken up on the first day of the week. Since the collection is about individuals giving directly to the church, we can conclude that the collection was done when the church came together.

This is the only means we read about in the New Testament by which the church actively raised money. Yet man has devised many other ways to generate funds for the church. Some have turned to selling goods (bake sales, bazaars) or services (car washes). Others use games of chance (bingo). Some sell raffle tickets to raise money. All of these are inventions of men. We cannot read about anything like these things in the Bible. God's word authorizes just one method for the church to raise money – the collection taken up on the first day of the week consisting of contributions made by individuals. We need to respect the will of God in this matter.

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Part 3

Use of the Treasury

Some brethren question whether we even have Bible authority for a church treasury. While the term “church treasury” is not used in the New Testament, the concept certainly is. In Acts 4:32-35, aid was provided for those in need by using funds that had been pooled together. This collection of donations was, for all intents and purposes, a treasury. We clearly see that the church in Jerusalem had a treasury into which individual Christians deposited money. The apostles then used this treasury to distribute to those in need.

The concept of a church treasury is also found in Paul’s instructions to the Corinthians. Paul was coming to take money they had raised to Jerusalem to benefit needy saints (1 Corinthians 16:3). In order that the “*gift*” would be ready and that “*no collections be made when*” Paul arrived (1 Corinthians 16:2), the church was to take up a collection “*on the first day of every week.*” These funds that were collected every week were saved so they would be ready when Paul came. Where were they saved? In the church treasury. Again, the term

“church treasury” is not found in the New Testament; but as we have noticed, the concept certainly is. Congregations have Bible authority to have a treasury into which they can collect funds for safe keeping until the time when these funds are to be used.

But do we have authority to use the church treasury for just anything or are there certain things to which we must be limited? That is certainly an important question. We have authority for a treasury, but do we have the right to use that money for anything we choose? No! Ultimately, the money in the church treasury belongs to the Lord. After all, the church itself belongs to Christ. He *“purchased [it] with His own blood”* (Acts 20:28). He is the *“head over all things to the church”* (Ephesians 1:22). He possesses *“all authority”* (Matthew 28:18) – we possess none. Therefore, we must use the funds from the treasury of His church in the ways He has authorized.

To determine what we have authority to use the church treasury for, we first need to look at the works in which the church is to be engaged.

Evangelism

The church is *“the pillar and support of the truth”* (1 Timothy 3:15). As such, it is to be engaged in the preaching of the gospel. Those who preach the gospel

sacrifice their time and resources to be able to do so. Because of this, “*The Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel*” (1 Corinthians 9:14). Funds from a congregation’s treasury may be used to support men who preach the gospel among them in that location. Paul told the Corinthians that it was right to receive payment from them for his labor among them, even though he did not take advantage of this right (1 Corinthians 9:11-12). A preacher working in one location may receive support from one or more churches in other locations (2 Corinthians 11:8-9; Philippians 4:15-16). A church may also send men out to preach as the Antioch church did (Acts 13:1-3).²

In the work of evangelism, different methods may be used. When the Lord gave the command, “*Go into all the world and preach the gospel*” (Mark 16:15), the message is specified – the gospel. That is what we must preach. But the manner in which we “go” to preach is not specified. The method we use to spread the gospel is left to our own judgment, provided our decision does not violate another command or directive of Scripture. A thing must first be lawful before it can be claimed as *expedient* or helpful (1 Corinthians 10:23). In carrying out its mission to evangelize, a church may use funds from its treasury to pay a located preacher,

² See related article #4 – *How Will They Preach Unless They Are Sent?* (p. 75)

support preachers in other places, hold a gospel meeting, print bulletins, publish tracts, host a radio or television program, operate a website, and so on.

Edification

After listing different offices in the church (apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers), Paul said they were put in place “*for the equipping of the saints*” and “*to the building up of the body of Christ*” (Ephesians 4:11-12). This is the meaning of edification – equipping and building up the saints. Edification takes place as a result of the word of God being examined and taught (Acts 20:32). All the offices Paul listed in Ephesians 4:11 deal with the revelation (apostles and prophets) and proclamation (evangelists, pastors, teachers) of the word. Because of this, they were able to help equip and build up the saints. Churches need to be doing this work of edification.

How is the work of edification carried out? One way is by the saints “*assembling together*” (Hebrews 10:25). This is one way we encourage one another. The fact that a church is to assemble necessitates a *place* to assemble. Brethren cannot come together without a location in which to do so. Some question the authority for a congregation owning a building in which to meet, but the church needs a place to assemble to do the

work of edification. Some argue that we should meet in the homes of Christians. This could be done to fulfill the responsibility to assemble. But many times this is not practical. Often a congregation is too large to meet in someone's home. We also have examples of Christians in the first century meeting in places other than someone's home (Acts 5:12; 20:7-8). Since the type of location to assemble is not specified in the New Testament, this should be left to the judgment of each autonomous congregation. But a church building certainly is authorized in the instruction to assemble. "*Assembling together*" for the purpose of "*encouraging one another*" qualifies as edification. Therefore, church funds may be used for a church building.³

In addition to this, other things may be helpful for edification. This would include things that help in the teaching of the word of God, such as class books, songbooks, tracts, equipment for recording sermons, etc. These things may be paid for out of the treasury to carry out the church's work of edification.

Benevolence

Along with edification, benevolence is also a work of the church. Benevolence has to do with helping

³ See related article #5 – *Do We Have Authority for a Church Building?* (p. 82)

those who are in need. This may be done to aid those who are among the congregation (Acts 4:34-35) and those who are in other locations (Acts 11:29-30).

Every time we read of the church in the New Testament doing the work of benevolence, the beneficiaries were *always* Christians – “among them” (Acts 4:34), referring to “the congregation of those who believed” (Acts 4:32); “brethren” (Acts 11:29); “saints” (Romans 15:26, 1 Corinthians 16:1, 2 Corinthians 8:4). Nowhere do we read of the church providing aid to those who were non-Christians.

This is not to say that we, as individual Christians, cannot help those in the world who are in need. Paul told the Galatians, “While we have opportunity, let us do good to all people” (Galatians 6:10). Is this talking about help from individuals or the local church? The context clearly shows that Paul was talking about *individual* action – “the one” (Galatians 6:6), “a man” (Galatians 6:7), “the one” (Galatians 6:8). Individuals can help those who are not Christians.

The same is true in James 1:27. James gave the instruction “to visit orphans and widows in their distress.” This referred to the help in providing for their needs. Again, the context shows this is done by *individuals* – “yourselves” (James 1:22), “anyone,” “a man” (James 1:23), “himself,” “he” (James 1:24), “one” (James 1:25),

“anyone,” “himself,” “this man’s” (James 1:26), *“one-self”* (James 1:27).

Individuals may provide benevolence to all men, but the New Testament only authorizes the church to help *“saints.”* Therefore, under the category of benevolence, the church treasury may only be used to provide for Christians (and even this is limited – 1 Timothy 5:16). There is simply no authority to use the Lord’s money to aid non-Christians.⁴

The church treasury is not to be used for just anything. As we have seen, the local church is to be engaged in the works of evangelism, edification, and limited benevolence. Therefore, we are authorized to use funds from the church treasury for these works. But churches have invented all sorts of other works that require funding. They fund different forms of entertainment and recreation when the Lord never directed His church to provide these things.⁵ The more activities like these a church sponsors, the more money it needs to fund them. Perhaps that is why churches invent some of the ways to generate funds aside from the weekly collection. When we start departing from the New Testament pattern, we will inevitably continue down the path of apostasy.

⁴ See related article #6 – *The Church Is Not a Charity* (p. 85)

⁵ See related article #7 – *Gospel Preaching and Ice Cream Parties* (p. 90)

Related Articles

#1

What Should Characterize Our Giving?

“Now this I say, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Corinthians 9:6-7).

Periodically, it is good for us to evaluate what we do in our service to God in order to make sure we are doing what we should do with the right attitude to the best of our abilities. In this article, we are going to look at one aspect of our service to God – our giving on the first day of the week. This is not about examining the *total amount* that is contributed by everyone assembled in a congregation; rather, it is about individually examining *ourselves* by the standard of God’s word.

With this in mind, let us use the New Testament to help us consider the following question: *What should characterize our giving?*

We Should Give Bountifully

“Now this I say, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully” (2 Corinthians 9:6).

In his letter to Corinth, Paul spoke of *“the liberality of [their] contribution”* (2 Corinthians 9:13). This is about giving in *abundance*. However, giving bountifully is more than just giving a large amount. Jesus indicated that the widow who gave *“two small copper coins...put in more than all the contributors to the treasury; for they all put in out of their surplus, but she, out of her poverty, put in all she owned”* (Mark 12:41-44). Therefore, giving bountifully can mean giving a large amount; but it does not necessarily mean that.

Paul mentioned the principle of *sowing* and *reaping*. We give of our blessings in order to multiply blessings – if we sow bountifully we will reap bountifully. However, this is not the “health and wealth” gospel that some false teachers promote. Instead, Paul’s point was that the more we give, the more work can be done. The

more that we give, the more funds are available to engage in benevolence (2 Corinthians 9:1-12), evangelism (2 Corinthians 11:8), and every work the church is authorized to do.

We Should Give Purposefully

“Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart” (2 Corinthians 9:7).

This emphasizes the fact that it is our *choice* as to what we will give. There is no specified amount set forth in the New Testament, unlike the Old Testament tithe (Deuteronomy 14:22) which was a tenth (Leviticus 27:30, 32). With regard to the amount, our giving is more akin to the freewill offerings (Deuteronomy 23:21-23). Under the law, *if* they chose to give in this manner, they had to do just as they vowed; but if they did not vow, no sin was committed.

Of course, this does not mean we are free to choose *not* to give. Paul wrote, *“On the first day of every week each one of you is to put aside and save, as he may prosper, so that no collections be made when I come”* (1 Corinthians 16:2). Each one was to do this, but they were to do so *freely* according to what they *purposed*.

We Should Give Cheerfully

“Each one must do...not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Corinthians 9:7).

Yes, giving is a requirement (1 Corinthians 16:2); however, we are not to give *“grudgingly or under compulsion”* (2 Corinthians 9:7). In other words, when we give on the first day of the week, it should not be something we do *only because* we are told to give.

We need to recognize the great privilege it is to take part in the collection. Paul described the Macedonians as *“begging us with much urging for the favor of participation in the support of the saints”* (2 Corinthians 8:4). When we give, we are joining in *“fellowship”* (2 Corinthians 8:4, KJV) as *“fellow workers”* (3 John 8) with others.

We Should Give Gratefully

“And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed” (2 Corinthians 9:8).

We must give with the understanding that God richly blesses us. James wrote, *“Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation of shifting shadow”* (James 1:17). We should always be thankful for what He provides (Ephesians 5:20).

If we understand that God *“richly supplies us with all things to enjoy,”* we can then be *“rich in good works”* (1 Timothy 6:17-18). Giving is one of these good works (1 Corinthians 16:2).

We Should Give Sacrificially

“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich” (2 Corinthians 8:9).

In a discussion about giving, Paul cited the example of Jesus – the One who left heaven, took the form of a servant, and died on the cross (Philippians 2:5-8). We are to follow His example. The Macedonians gave in this way – giving *“beyond their ability”* because *“they first gave themselves to the Lord”* (2 Corinthians 8:1-5). The poor widow we noticed earlier is another example of this kind of sacrificial giving (Mark 12:41-44).

However, we need to understand that giving *sacrificially* does not mean giving *recklessly*. We still have a divinely-given obligation to “*provide for [our] own*” (1 Timothy 5:8). Jesus made it clear that dedicating money to the Lord did not relieve one of this responsibility (Matthew 15:4-6). Therefore, we should not give to the point that we cannot fulfill other God-given responsibilities; but what we give should be an amount that we could legitimately use for something else, thus making it a sacrifice.

We Should Give Lovingly

“Therefore openly before the churches, show them the proof of your love and of our reason for boasting about you” (2 Corinthians 8:24).

Paul encouraged these brethren to give in order to *prove* their love. In his first letter to Corinth, he wrote, “*Let all that you do be done in love*” (1 Corinthians 16:14). Our giving is a part of this.

Remember the purpose of giving is to fund the work of the church – evangelism, edification, and benevolence.¹ Each of these is rooted in love – love for

¹ For more on this topic, see *Part 3: Use of the Treasury* (p. 6)

the lost, love for our brethren, and love for the needy. Therefore, love will influence our giving.²

We Should Give Consistently

“On the first day of every week each one of you is to put aside and save, as he may prosper, so that no collections be made when I come” (1 Corinthians 16:2).

Paul said this was to be done *“on the first day of every week.”* Some believe that we should wait to give until there is a need. Of course, when it comes to the work of the church, there may not always be benevolent needs to be met; but there is *always* the need for evangelism and edification. Regardless of this, Paul specifically said we are *not* to wait and take up special, intermittent collections; we are to give *“every”* first day of the week so the funds are ready when they need to be used.

As we give consistently (every first day of the week), we are constantly mindful of God’s blessings and our responsibility to work. We can give regularly because God blesses us regularly (cf. James 1:17; 1 Timothy 6:17-18). We can also give regularly when we

² See p. 33-34 for more on how love should motivate our giving.

are working to provide for ourselves (cf. Acts 20:35; Ephesians 4:28).

Conclusion

The goal of this article is not necessarily to cause the total contribution of the readers' home congregations to increase. Application of these principles may or may not cause that to happen. Instead, the goal is to provoke each one of us to consider how we are giving.

Are we giving bountifully, purposefully, cheerfully, gratefully, sacrificially, lovingly, and consistently? We cannot judge one another on this, but we do need to examine ourselves and evaluate our giving according to what the Scriptures teach.

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