

About the Collection

About the Collection (Part 1)

1 Corinthians 16:1-4

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Scripture

For the next four Sundays I would like to preach on the subject of financial stewardship. Although stewardship has to do with every facet of life, such as stewardship of the gospel, stewardship of creation, stewardship of work, stewardship of time, etc., I am going to be focusing exclusively on the stewardship of our finances.

Now some of you are saying to yourselves right now, “Oh no! I knew I shouldn’t have come to the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church today!” Or, “Oh dear! Not another sermon on money!” Or, “I don’t have any money to spare. These messages are not going to be for me!” Let me address you for a moment.

First, I want you to know that my teaching over the next four weeks is primarily intended for those of you who are Christians, and particularly for those of you who are members of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church.

If you are not a Christian, you need to know that God does not want your money; he wants your heart. If you are not a Christian, you need the new birth *before* you learn to walk the Christian life.

My comments in the next four weeks are intended to help those of you who are already Christians grow stronger in this vital area of Christian discipleship.

Second, I especially want to help those of you who are struggling in this area of Christian discipleship. You may feel a vague twinge of guilt because you are not giving much—or anything at all—to God.

Some of you may be students, and you think that because you don’t have a “real” job, you don’t have to give.

Others of you may be frankly embarrassed by your level of giving. Maybe you feel like Dennis the Menace’s father. The fam-

ily left church one Sunday and as Dennis was shaking the pastor's hand, he asked, much to the embarrassment of his father, "Pastor, what are you going to do with the quarter my father put in the offering plate this morning?"

Third, I believe that a proper understanding of the biblical stewardship of finances can be truly revolutionizing for you. Armed with a clear understanding of what Scripture teaches on this subject—and by the way, Scripture has a great deal to say about finances—you can grow significantly in your walk with God.

In the next four weeks I plan to cover topics such as why you should give, when you should give, to whom you should give, how much you should give, and so on.

By the way, most of the material for this series of messages comes from John MacArthur, whose teaching on the subject I have found particularly helpful.

I am hoping that you will take this one area of your Christian walk, learn what Scripture says about it, apply it to your life and circumstances, and be greatly blessed for the rest of your life.

So, with that in mind, let's read 1 Corinthians 16:1-4. In this text Paul gives us principles regarding financial stewardship:

¹ Now about the collection for God's people: Do what I told the Galatian churches to do. ² On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made. ³ Then, when I arrive, I will give letters of introduction to the men you approve and send them with your gift to Jerusalem. ⁴ If it seems advisable for me to go also, they will accompany me. (1 Corinthians 16:1-4)

Introduction

In this passage of Scripture Paul addresses issues "**about the collection.**" The Corinthian church had written to the apostle Paul about a great many issues, and this letter is his response to their questions and some other issues that had come to his ears. Clearly

at this point in his letter he is responding to their question about how money is to be collected in the church. Paul's teaching here is rich with information giving us principles regarding financial stewardship.

In order to understand the principles regarding financial stewardship we should know some background information **“about the collection.”**

A. *The Context of Poverty*

First, in terms of background information, let's note the context of poverty.

In the ancient world, poverty was a live issue because many people were so poor. Now we seldom see that degree of poverty in this country. There are places in the world today where poverty is like what it was in biblical times, but our society knows very little of that kind of poverty.

In ancient times, poverty was such a serious issue that society itself had taken some steps to deal with it. For example, among the Greeks there were associations known as *eranoi*. These were associations of people that banded together to provide interest-free loans for people who couldn't meet their financial needs.

The Jews did the same thing. In the synagogues there were officials who had the responsibility to determine who would receive the funds earmarked for welfare.

So it was common among the pagan Greeks, and it was common among the Jews to meet the needs of their poor.

And the church in the first century could certainly do no less if it was to defend its theology of love and compassion.

B. *The Commitment of Paul*

Second, in terms of background information, let's note the commitment of Paul.

The poverty situation resulted in a strong commitment from the apostle Paul. When Paul first began his ministry, he was called by the Lord Jesus. Later on he visited Jerusalem and received an official commission from Peter, James, and John. They sent Paul and Barnabas to the Gentiles and told them to remember the poor. In Galatians 2:9-10 Paul says: “James, Peter and John, those reputed to be pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognized the grace given to me. They agreed that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the Jews. All they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do.”

Now in 1 Corinthians 16 Paul says that the collection of money was **“for God’s people”** (16:1a). What people of God? Well, it was for God’s people in Jerusalem because in verse 3 Paul says, **“Then, when I arrive, I will give letters of introduction to the men you approve and send them with your gift to Jerusalem.”**

But why? Because there were plenty of poor people in Jerusalem. They had a real problem with poverty in Jerusalem, and so Paul was collecting money for the poor people of God in Jerusalem (cf. also Romans 15:25-27).

C. The Conditions of Jerusalem

Third, in terms of background information, let’s note the conditions of Jerusalem.

Why is it that the people of God in Jerusalem were poor? There are at least four reasons why they were so poor.

1. The poverty of Jerusalem

The first reason why the people of God in Jerusalem were poor is because of the poverty of Jerusalem itself.

Jerusalem in the time of Solomon was rich, but in the time of Jesus and Paul it was poor. It was overpopulated because it had be-

come like a religious Mecca. Numerous people came into the city and many of them stayed. Consequently, it caused a certain amount of drain on the city's resources.

To make matters worse, when feast time came, the city was literally overrun with people. As many as two million additional people could arrive in the city at a feast time. So there was always a strain on the resources in Jerusalem.

2. The persecution of the saints

The second reason why the people of God in Jerusalem were poor is because of the persecution of the saints.

The Christians in Jerusalem were poor because they were persecuted for their faith in Christ. In many cases they were not even able to get a job. No Jewish businessman wanted to support those who were confessing a crucified, rejected Messiah (cf. Acts 1-8; 1 Thessalonians 2:14).

3. The population explosion of Christians

The third reason why the people of God in Jerusalem were poor is because of the population explosion of Christians.

On the Day of Pentecost many people became believers in Jesus Christ. No doubt many of the people who received Christ in those early days were pilgrims from other cities, but after they became Christians, they stayed on in Jerusalem. They stayed because that was the location of the new church, and they lived in the homes of other Christians. Something had to be provided for them, so there was an immediate drain upon the resources of the church. Acts 2:44b says that they "had everything in common." When someone had a need, then somebody else met it.

Well, after a while this became difficult, and by the time you come to the end of Acts 4 it's evident that they had drained their resources to the point that they had to sell their properties. This couldn't go on forever because they would run out of land. So as

you see the church moving through the book of Acts, you see a continuing drain on the church's resources because of the growth of the church.

4. The paucity of food

And the fourth reason why the people of God in Jerusalem were poor is because of the paucity of food.

They were poor in Jerusalem because there was a famine in the land. In fact, the church at Antioch, which was the first church planted outside of Jerusalem, had earlier sent some gifts with Paul to those who were poor in Jerusalem (cf. Acts 11:27-30).

So these are the reasons for the poverty of God's people in Jerusalem. Now because of the need in Jerusalem, and in response to the instruction of Peter, James, and John to remember the poor, Paul spent over a year collecting money. He wrote to the Corinthians to ask them to have a part in this collection.

Paul gave the Corinthians instructions that have provided principles for the church throughout history as to how the church should best receive its funds. Paul said that he would get the whole collection together and deliver it to the church in Jerusalem. And that's precisely what he did. In Acts 24:17 he says, "After an absence of several years, I came to Jerusalem to bring my people gifts for the poor and present offerings."

Lesson

Now, with that in mind, let's begin to look at the principles **"about the collection."** Today I simply want to examine the purpose of giving.

I. The Purpose of Giving (16:1)

First, the purpose of giving.

Paul says in verse 1: **“Now about the collection for God’s people: Do what I told the Galatian churches to do.”**

What was the purpose of giving stated in this passage? It was **“for God’s people”** in Jerusalem.

It’s the same collection that Paul mentioned to the Galatians. Now he tells the Corinthians about it.

Paul’s point here is that the church is to make sure that it funds its own needs. The church should not appeal to outside sources for funding.

Notice also, that it is not one local church funding itself, but one local assembly in Corinth caring for the needs of another local assembly in Jerusalem. We see here, by the way, the *connectionalism* of Presbyterianism.

Now let’s look closer at the purpose of giving. The Bible indicates that there are basically two financial purposes of giving. Giving is necessary for two basic reasons.

A. To Support the Ministry of the Word

First, giving is necessary to support the ministry of the Word.

The ministry of the Word of God is the cornerstone ministry of the church. Without the preaching of the Word of God there is no ministry that has any real meaning. All the other ministries in the church flow from the preaching of the Word. And so the chief purpose for giving is to support the ministry of the Word of God. There are several texts of Scripture that indicate the necessity of financial support for the ministry of the Word.

In Philippians 4:15-16 Paul responds to the Philippians by thanking them for the offering they gave him: “Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only; for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid again and again when I was in need.” In other words, Paul said that they supported him.

And he had every right to that support because he was involved in the ministry of the Word.

And in 1 Corinthians 9:14 Paul says, “In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel.”

In today’s society, churches have erected buildings in which and from which the ministry of the Word of God takes place. Now, it does not have to be that way, but most churches nowadays operate out of a central facility. In addition to a facility, there are ministries that promote the teaching of God’s Word, such as Sunday school, Bible studies, children’s ministries, youth ministries, and so on. To the extent that these ministries are ministries of the Word of God, they are to be supported by the people of God.

So, giving is necessary to support the ministry of the Word.

B. To Support the Ministry of Mercy

And second, giving is necessary to support the ministry of mercy.

As Christians we are to give support to those among us who are financially needy. In other words, we give to meet the needs of people, whoever they are. There are people in our church who from time to time have their needs met as we supply what they don’t have.

Paul’s collection from the Corinthians seemed to be primarily to support those in financial need. No doubt by alleviating the financial needs of those needing help, other moneys were able to support the ministry of the Word.

Hebrews 13:16 says, “And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.”

And Jesus is quoted in Acts 20:35b as saying, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.”

It is a basic Christian truth that there is great blessing as we give to support those who have need in the church.

But we not only support those in the church. The Scripture teaches us to support those outside the church, because in Galatians 6:10 the apostle Paul says, “Therefore, as we have opportunity, *let us do good to all people*, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.” So we are to do good to all people.

A good example is the story of the Good Samaritan who went out of his way to minister to a Jew even though he came from a different culture and a different religion (Luke 10:25-37). This is indicative that there are times when God wants us to do good to those who do not belong to the family of believers.

Conclusion

So the purpose of giving then is to support “**God’s people**,” the church. Our giving to the church supports the ministry of the Word and the ministry of mercy. All giving to the church falls under one of these two categories.

But, why do we give to support “**God’s people**”? Surely we give for the glory of God and for the good of his people. Or, perhaps I could simply say that we give because God wants to use our giving to make a difference in this world.

In the movie *About Schmidt*, Jack Nicholson stars as Warren Schmidt, a man leading a life of quiet desperation. He retires from a vice president’s job at an insurance company, looks back on a meaningless life, and ahead to a meaningless retirement.

One day, while watching television, Warren sees an opportunity to give money and write letters to an underprivileged child in Tanzania. Warren responds to the appeal, and throughout the movie he faithfully sends the \$22 a month and writes poignant letters to a child named Ndugu.

On one occasion after a long road trip, Warren comes home to an empty house—a metaphor for his empty life. He reluctantly walks in with an armload of impersonal junk mail.

Warren ambles up the stairs and looks disappointedly at the disheveled state of his home office. Throughout this scene, the au-

dience hears Warren's voice-over narration of a letter he recently composed to Ndugu. He pours out his intense feeling of emptiness:

I know we're all pretty small in the scheme of things, and I guess the best you can hope for is to make some kind of difference. What difference have I made? What in the world is better because of me? I am weak, and I am a failure. There's just no getting around it. Real soon I will die. Maybe 20 years—maybe tomorrow—it doesn't matter. Once I am dead and everyone who knew me dies, it is as though I never existed. What difference has my life made to anyone? None that I can think of. Hope things are fine with you.

Yours truly, Warren Schmidt.

At the end of the narration, the depression on Warren's face gives way to wonder as he stares down at a letter from Tanzania. It is a letter from a nun who works in the orphanage where 6-year-old Ndugu lives. She tells Warren that Ndugu thinks of him every day and hopes he is happy. Enclosed is a picture drawn by Ndugu for Warren—two stick people smiling and holding hands. Warren is overcome by the realization that he has finally made a difference. He lifts his hands to his tired face and cries.

Brothers and sisters, God has called us to himself. He has given us new life in Jesus Christ. We are the recipients of his amazing grace. He has made a difference in our lives, and he wants us to make a difference in the lives of others.

It is with gratitude that we respond to the grace of God in our lives by wanting to make a difference in the lives of other people. One way we do so is to use the financial resources that God has entrusted to us to support the ministry of the Word and the ministry of mercy.

Give! Give generously to the ministry of the Word! Give generously to the ministry of mercy! And make a difference for eternity! Amen.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and **membership** in his church family,
develop them to Christlike **maturity**,
equip them for their **ministry** in the church
and life **mission** in the world,
in order to **magnify** God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

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