

The Assembly of the Saints
Lesson 5 – What is the place and purpose of the contribution?
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Introduction: We must be reminded of the foundation every Christian builds on.

- A. We building on the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Jesus Christ being the chief cornerstone. **(Eph 2:20)**
 - 1. Some think it is unspiritual to teach on externals and that they are of little importance. They say only motives and the heart are important
 - 2. We find the scriptures teach that we are to submit to Christ in all things. When an apostle gives instructions we must respond with reverential obedience.
- B. The things we do together are of special importance. **(Phil 4:15-17)**
 - 1. We must be especially careful in matters that every Christian must participate in to be solidly founded on the apostles' doctrine. **(Acts 2:42)**
 - 2. We must take all of the instructions given in the New Testament and stay within what has been revealed. Much of the teaching is given by example in epistles where specific situations are addressed at a given church.
 - 3. When we simply stay within these instructions we can accomplish God's purposes with God's wisdom. In this God will be glorified! **(1 Pt 4:11)**

I. Paul as an apostle commanded some churches to have a weekly contribution

- A. Paul gave this command to both Corinth and the churches of Galatia. **(1 Cor 16:1-4)**
 - 1. **order** - *διατάσσω* - strictly *arrange carefully, make precise arrangement*; hence *order, direct, command* (MT 11.1); middle with the same sense (AC 24.23); passive *be ordered* or *ordained* (GA 3.19) – **Freiberg Lexicon**
 - 2. Since this was not a universal command, does it apply to us today?
- B. There are several elements of Paul's instructions.
 - 1. The contribution was for the needy saints in Jerusalem because of a specific, temporary need. **(2 Cor 8:12-15)**
 - 2. The day of the week was specified.
 - 3. The individual was to give as "he may prosper."
 - 4. The contribution would be taken to Jerusalem when Paul came.
- C. Did members simply keep their money at home or did they give when they came together?
 - 1. Paul said "that there be no collections when I come." If this was done at home then there must be another collection! See notes.
 - 2. In the Old Testament there were collections made and a storehouse to keep what was given. **(1 Chron 26:20, 22; Josh 6:24)**
 - 3. Jesus and the Apostles had a common treasury. **(Jn 12:6; 13:29)**
 - 4. When the Apostles were at Jerusalem the money was laid at the apostles feet thus it was a treasury from which future needs would be met. **(Acts 4:34-35; Acts 5:1-2)**
- D. Did the church have contributions only when special needs arose?
 - 1. You should never have a contribution when there is no need.

2. Should a church ever be without a need for a contribution? (**Phil 4:15-16**)
3. Was this the first time that Cornith had a contribution?
(**1 Cor 9:11-15; 2 Cor 11:8**)

II. Does Paul's command have any application to us today?

- A. What do we find when we take all that God has revealed about local churches and how they raised money?
 1. We know that freewill collections were directed by the Apostles.
 2. We have more specific instructions in a specific collection in 1 Corinthians 16.
 3. There are items that are specific to that collection. The specific purpose and the specific way the money was to be transported.
 4. The requirement of every first day of the week is consistent with the practices of other churches. (**Acts 20:7; 1 Cor 1:2; 7:17**)
- B. When we understand the nature of the New Testament and that it is a complete instruction given to God's people, then the application of it is clear. (**Jude 3**)
 1. Taking all that is revealed and carefully staying within that is right.
 2. On what basis can we work together? (**1 Cor 1:10; 4:6**)
 3. Sadly, money issues can drive other doctrinal issues. (**2 Pt 2:14-15**)

III. How should local churches use the contribution?

- A. Take all the verses that address local churches and see how they used the contribution.
 1. They had contributions to help needy saints. (**Acts 2:44-45; 4:34-35**)
 2. They supported teachers who spread the gospel and taught brethren.
(**2 Cor 11:8; 1 Cor 9:9-14; 1 Tim 5:17**)
 3. Things necessary to accomplish these things can be bought by the local church.
(**Acts 6:1-2; Heb 10:25**)
- B. Churches must be careful in what teaches they use and support. (**Gal 2:9; 2 Jn 9-11**)
 1. Discernment is required by our Lord! (**Mt 7:15; 1 Tim 1:3; 4:6, 13, 16**)
 2. Some have supported men who did great damage. (**2 Tim 2:16-18**)
- C. Churches must not use the contribution for entertainment and carnal purposes.
 1. There were many who sought Jesus because they wanted food. Jesus did not yield to them and rebuked them. (**Jn 6:44-45; 26-27**)
 2. We must never become angry when men ask for Bible authority for how the local church uses the contribution. Every member must be seeking God's will on this!

Questions

1. Did Paul command all churches to have a contribution in 1 Cor 16? How then can we apply this verse to churches today?
2. Did Paul require a weekly contribution in the assembly?
3. On what day and how often were they to have a contribution?
4. What spiritual fruit can come when the contribution is properly used?
5. What dangers can come when the contribution is improperly used?
6. Do you know how the money is being spent where you attend?

Additional Notes

"Every one was to lay by himself, i.e. most commentators say, at home, par' heauto. Compare pros heauton in **Luke 24:12**; see also **John 20:10**. The direction then is that every one should, on the first day of the week, lay aside at home whatever he was able to give, thus treasuring up his contribution. To this interpretation it may be objected that the whole expression is thus obscure and awkward. 'Let every one at home place, treasuring up what he has to give.' The words do not mean to lay by at home, but to lay by himself. The direction is nothing more definite than, let him place by himself, i.e. let him take to himself what he means to give. What he was to do with it, or where he was to deposit it, is not expressed. The word thesaurizon means putting into the treasury or hoarding up, and is perfectly consistent with the assumption that the place of deposit was some common treasury, and not every man's own house. If Paul directed this money to be laid up at home, why was the first day of the week selected? It is evident that the first day must have offered some special facility for doing what is here enjoined. The only reason that can be assigned for requiring the thing to be done on the first day of the week, is that on that day the Christians were accustomed to meet, and what each one had laid aside from weekly gains could be treasured up, i.e. put into the common treasury of the church. The end which the apostle desired to accomplish could not otherwise have been effected. He wished that there might be no collections when he came. But if every man had his money laid by at home, the collection would be still to be made. The probability is, therefore, Paul intended to direct the Corinthians to make a collection every Lord's day for the poor, when they met for worship." - Charles Hodge, *An Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974 edition), pp. 363-364.

The New Testament Pattern of "Giving"

By Wayne Jackson

It is a strange phenomenon in today's church. It is recognized widely that there are rules regulating worship. This is acknowledged in virtually every area of church activity—except in one's "giving." Many know how the music portion of the worship is to be conducted (with a cappella singing). Not a few understand the proper communion elements (bread and fruit of the vine), along with the day and frequency for the observance of the supper (each Sunday). They would vigorously, and correctly, protest any presumptuous alteration of these ordinances.

But some appear to think there are no regulations for giving. With many, there is almost a "design-your-own-system" procedure, along with a flippant "it's-nobody's-business-what-I-do" disposition. If the Lord has prescribed a pattern for what we do in other acts of worship, is it reasonable to presume that he left the matter of "giving" as an entirely optional feature—or at best very ambiguous?

Paul discussed several requirements for Christian giving in **1 Corinthians 16:1-2**.

"Now concerning the collection for the saints, do the same thing that I commanded the Galatian churches; every Sunday, let each one of you lay aside by himself, if he earns anything, and put it in the treasury; so that there will be no collections when I come" (McCord's Translation).

The Background

When Paul, in the company of Barnabas and Titus, went to Jerusalem to assure the church of the validity of his apostleship, and the genuineness of the gospel he preached (**Galatians 2:1**), he was readily endorsed. James, the half brother of the Lord, along with Peter and John, extended to the apostle the "right hand of fellowship" in the noble work in which they all were involved. They did encourage Paul, however, to "remember the poor," which he was most zealous to do (**2:10**).

For the past half-dozen years, prior to the composition of 1st Corinthians, the great preacher had demonstrated his concern for the needy, and even now he was busily involved in a campaign to assist the poor among the saints at Jerusalem (cf. **Romans 15:24-25**; **2 Corinthians 8-9**; **Acts 24:17**). In the apostle's mind, there was no segregation of benevolence from evangelism; benevolence is evangelism (**Matthew 5:16**; **Galatians 6:10**)! These circumstances are the background of **1 Corinthians 16:1-4**.

Command

Note that the instruction conveyed in **1 Corinthians 16:1-2** is in the form of a “command” (“order” ASV; diatasso 16x in NT). Other texts that employ the word demonstrate the imperative nature of the language. When Jesus finished “commanding” his disciples, he departed to preach in their cities (**Matthew 11:1**). Aquila and Priscilla left Rome because Claudius Caesar had “commanded” all Jews to depart from Rome (**Acts 18:2**). The instructions that follow in this Corinthian correspondence are not optional suggestions. They constitute a pattern for the implementation of sacred duties.

As a result of something Paul later wrote to this church, some have surmised that this text is not to be viewed as a binding pattern. Regarding the same collection, the apostle would write: “I speak not by way of commandment, but as proving through the earnestness of others the sincerity also of your love” (**2 Corinthians 8:8**).

Regarding this seeming discrepancy one may observe: (a) the matter of supporting the cause of God in its various needs is unquestionably a sacred obligation. (b) The specific objects of reception, involved in rendering that responsibility, is a matter of judgment. (c) The general procedure for carrying out financial obligations is prescribed. (d) It is better to motivate by love than by coercion, when at all possible. Professor Hodge of Princeton Theological Seminary once observed:

This [“order”] is the language of authority. For although these contributions were voluntary, and were required to be made cheerfully, **2 Corinthians 9:7**, yet they were a duty, and therefore both the collection itself, and the mode in which it should be accomplished, were proper subjects for apostolic direction (362).

Frequency

The frequency of contributing is “every Sunday”; the Greek literally says: “the first day of every week” (cf. **Matthew 27:15; Luke 2:41**). It is a mystery as to why the force of the distributive preposition, kata (every), was not made evident in the KJV/ASV translations (see Danker, et al., 512).

One should budget his finances, therefore, so as to be able to give each Lord’s day. If one is ill, or away, thus unable to contribute at his local congregation, he should make provisions to leave his contribution behind, or else make it up when he returns. One is obligated to contribute as consistently as he has income. It is not right for a few to bear virtually the full expenses of a local work, while others “ride free.”

Individually

For each family income there must be a gift. If the husband/father is the sole wage earner, he obviously will be the only source for a gift. If the mother/wife has a separate income, she must contribute from that as well. When Christian teens have a job, they must give from their income. If they receive an allowance, a portion of that belongs to the Lord. If older folks are on social security, they are not exempt from this act of worship. “Each one” means “every one” who has income—rich or poor, young or old, male or female.

Treasury

The next portion of the passage is the most controversial. Is the Christian obligated to contribute into the “treasury” of the local church? What does the phrase “lay by him in store” mean?

The expression “by him” (par heatou) is commonly assumed to suggest, “save up at home.” The Seventh-day Adventists have long contended for this view in an effort to negate the first-century evidence for Sunday worship (Canright, 207-08). But the evidence does not support that view. The phrase “by him” most likely means, “let him take to himself what he means to give” (Hodge, 365). Or the words may be considered as a neuter form, “by itself” (McGarvey, 161), or “to put something aside” (Danker, 268). James MacKnight rendered the full phrase: “lay by itself putting it into the appointed treasury” (208).

The phrase “in store” derives from thesaurizon—an imperative mood (a command), present tense (repetitious action), participle. The verbal action depicts consistently depositing something in a “treasury” (thesaurus). Each Christian has an obligation to help sustain the local church treasury, regardless of the extra missionary and/or benevolent work to which he may contribute otherwise as an individual.

Some, in an attempt to negate church responsibility, dispute that the early church had “treasuries” at this point in time. “It is improbable that at that time there was any Church treasury, and not until much later was money collected during public worship” (Robertson / Plummer 384). And so, as noted above, a common allegation is that the “storing up” was what the individual did at his home. This is pure speculation and quite contrary to the explicit testimony of the passage, namely that these Christians (and others, e.g., those in Galatia) were to give “every first day of the week.” Moreover, common sense dictates that the monies collected had to be deposited somewhere.

Leon Morris noted that since “Paul expressly deprecates the collecting of the money when he arrives (which would be necessary if they all had it laid by at home) it is perhaps better to think of it as being stored in the church treasury” (238). See a similar discussion in: Shore, VII.353.

The modern translations (e.g., Wuest), and commentary assertions (e.g., Fee, 813), that the phrase signifies, “put aside at home,” are entirely unwarranted. There is no “at home” in the text—either stated or implied (contra Thayer, 168). Appeals to texts in classical literature are irrelevant to this context. This “at home” business is the very circumstance Paul was endeavoring to prevent—that no collections be made when I come.” Another scholar responds:

Some have interpreted the words *par heauto* (literally ‘by himself’) to mean ‘at home.’ But then why mention doing it on Sunday, when they could just as well do it regularly at home at other times? The meaning must rather be that the Christians were to bring their offerings to church on Sunday, since that was the day they assembled for worship (**Acts 20:7; Rev. 1:10**). It is significant that the early church father, Justin Martyr (second century A.D.) testified that contributions to the church were received on that day (Apology I, 67.6) (Mare, 293).

Another writer also has observed that since the “laying by” was to “be done on the day of their religious assembly, and so that there should be no trouble or time lost in collecting it when he [Paul] came, it is rather to be inferred that on each Sunday it was to be deposited in the treasury of the church” (Sadler, 299).

The celebrated historian, Mosheim, in describing the Lord’s day worship of the first-century church, stated that: “Every Christian, who was in an opulent condition, and indeed every one, according to their circumstances, brought with them their gifts, and offered them, as it were, unto the Lord” (I.35-36).

Under the Old Testament regime the Hebrews were not allowed to be “free-lancers” with their “tithes.” Rather, the Lord charged: “Bring the whole tithe into the store-house [‘osar – “treasury” cf. Job 38:22], so that there may be food in my house” (Mal. 3:10). Similarly, Christians have a primary duty to the local church; they may not act as independent agents in their giving to the Lord.

The assertion of some commentators, that this injunction is not a pattern and holds no authority for today, is a reckless statement of no basis. It wholly ignores the command motif at the commencement of the passage, as well as the application of the instruction beyond Corinth (1:2; 16:1).

Proportionally

The expression, “as he may prosper” is one word in Greek (*euodotai*)—a subjunctive mood (most likely), present tense, passive voice verb. The subjunctive is the mood of possibility, the present tense reflects an action in progress, and the passive voice indicates that the subject is the recipient of action—in this case, prosperity from God. The term itself basically means “prosperous journey,” and thus suggests this idea: to whatever degree he “is prospered” by God, week-by-week, he must contribute a portion to the Lord’s work “according to his ability” (**Acts 11:29**; cf. the exceptional “beyond their power” – **2 Corinthians 8:3**).

The more one is prospered, the more he should give; the less he prospers, less is required. As Christ once expressed the principle: “to whomsoever much is given, of him much shall be required” (**Luke 12:48b**).

Still, the amount expected seems vague. Is there more precision that might be anticipated, beyond the general principle—“to the degree one is blessed”?

While we do not live under the Old Testament economy, there are many incidental truths one can learn from those documents that assist us in arriving at various elements of truth. For example, Paul appealed to the law of Moses to establish the principle that one who exerts considerable labor in a cause, is worthy of sustenance for his effort (**1 Timothy 5:17**; cf. **Deuteronomy 23:4**).

The Old Testament “Tithe”

In the earliest age of Old Testament history, the patriarchal period, there are two examples of great servants of the Lord offering gifts to the Creator from their prosperity. Abraham gave to Melchizedek, a priest of God, ten percent of the “chief spoils” he recently had taken from some pagan kings (**Genesis 14:20**; **Hebrews 7:4**). Later Jacob, after his dream of the ladder that reached from earth to heaven, with its ascending and descending angels, set up a pillar to memorialize the occasion. He pledged to give a tenth of his resources to Jehovah (**Genesis 28:22**).

Later the Mosaic law formalized the “tithe” (a tenth) as the required giving of **Israel (Leviticus 27:30-32)**. In addition they offered various sacrifices, and gave “free-will” offerings. So actually, they gave much more than the tithe (a portion being considered taxation), but ten percent appears to have been the very minimum (cf. **Malachi 3:10**).

Gospel ministers have not rendered a balanced service by merely stating: “We do not live under the law of Moses; therefore we are not required to tithe,” as if that somehow leaves us with no direction at all—and we are free to give as far below that level as we are disposed to do! Of course many are happy to accommodate themselves to a significantly smaller amount.

The Higher Ideal

One of the major designs of the book of Hebrews is to show the superiority of the new covenant of Jesus Christ, over the former covenant given through Moses. Again and again, the sacred writer uses the comparative term “better” to mark the qualitative distinction of the latter over the former.

Christ, as giver of the new covenant, is “better” than the angels, through whom the old regime came (**1:4**). We have a “better hope,” i.e., as priests ourselves (**1 Peter 2:5, 9**), a more direct access to God (**7:21**). The new covenant is a “better covenant” because of the unchangeable priesthood of our Savior (**7:22**). The ministry of Christ is a “more excellent” one; indeed it is a “better covenant” enacted upon “better promises” (**8:6**). The new covenant is one with “better sacrifices” (**9:23**)—a reference to the sacrifice of our Lord. [Note: The plural form is designed to correspond with the “sacrifices” of the Levitical system, but with a symbolic emphasis—suggesting the excellence of Christ’s offering, “perfect in all its parts” (Bengel, IV.426).]

In view of all this, how could a conscientious Bible student ever come to the conclusion that we may sacrifice less than the ancient patriarchs, or the nation of Israel—when we have far more revelation, and tremendously greater blessings, than they enjoyed?

We must give consistently, generously, and joyfully (**2 Corinthians 9:7**).

How could any informed Christian possibly contend that he, as a beneficiary of the new covenant, and as a part of the body of Jesus Christ, could love less, thus give less, than the Jew who professes to honor God, but knows not our Savior?

There is little doubt that if all Christians gave as much as 10% of their incomes, our contributions would soar far above what they now are!

Here is a mathematical challenge to your faith. Multiply your present contribution by ten, and ask God to bless you with an income in that amount. And perhaps hope he doesn’t!