

The Collection for the Saints

(1 Corinthians 16:1-4)

Introduction

➤ At Skyline, we are committed to preaching through the Bible verse-by-verse (expository preaching) for the purpose of explaining the meaning of the Bible (deriving the meaning from the text of Scripture, not imposing a meaning upon the text of Scripture). To do this, we must start at the beginning of a book and study our way through it as it was written (the Bible is not a randomized collection of spiritual sayings that can mean whatever the reader wants).

This perspective and discipline are important for many reasons. One of these reasons is that it forces us to study passages of Scripture that we would otherwise avoid. This is certainly true of the passage before us this morning. As I mentioned when I preached on 1 Corinthians 9:1-14, I am preaching today's sermon simply because it is the next passage in our study of the book of "1 Corinthians" (not because I want an increase in my salary, or my own private jet, or because "all the church wants is your money"). This church is very generous and faithful in its giving.

➤ As most of you are aware, we have been studying the apostle Paul's divinely inspired letter to the Corinthian church for some time now (taking the worm's-eye view rather than the bird's-eye view). This morning, we begin the final chapter of the book of "1 Corinthians." Throughout this book, we have seen the apostle instruct, encourage, warn, and rebuke the Corinthian Christians. While Paul referred to them as "*sanctified*" and "*saints*" (1:2), as his "*beloved children*" (4:14), and as those who were "*in Christ Jesus*" (1:30), these Corinthian believers were certainly not perfect. The church was rife with discord and division, selfishness and greediness, immorality and worldliness.

This, of course, negatively affected their perspective on money and their practice of giving (see 1 Cor. 11:18-22). Compared to the church in Jerusalem, which was destitute and persecuted, the church in Corinth was much more affluent. The apostle Paul, in his desire to raise money for the Jerusalem church, gave instructions to the Corinthians church regarding their giving.

1 Cor 16:1-4 ~ "Now concerning the collection for the saints: as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do. ²On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come. ³And when I arrive, I will send those whom you accredit by letter to carry your gift to Jerusalem. ⁴If it seems advisable that I should go also, they will accompany me."

➤ Paul is still addressing questions and concerns raised by the Corinthian Christians (e.g., "*Now concerning the matters about which you wrote*" (1 Cor. 7:2; see 1 Cor. 1:11; 7:25; 8:1; 12:1). The beginning of chapter sixteen – on giving – is yet another topic which Paul addressed in this letter (e.g., unity, purity, singleness/marriage/remarriage, Christian freedoms, submission/authority, the Lord's Supper, spiritual gifts, and the resurrection). The next topic is on giving ("tithes/offerings") to the church.

To preach on money – or, more specifically, on giving – is undoubtedly to step on a sensitive subject. This is because we are all too easily influenced by and dependent upon finances. Money, in and of itself, is neither bad nor evil but the love or worship of money certainly is (see 1 Tim. 6:10). Money is not merely a personal issue, it is first and foremost a spiritual issue! And money can serve as a great barometer of our true spiritual perspectives, priorities, and maturity.

✓ Illust: "Whether men are wealthy or poor – or somewhere in between – their attitude toward material possessions is one of the most reliable marks of their spiritual condition. ... Sixteen of the thirty-eight parables of Jesus deal with money. One out of ten verses in the New Testament deals with that subject. Scripture offers about five hundred verses on prayer, fewer than five hundred on faith, and over two thousand on money. The believer's attitude toward money and possessions is determinative"

(John MacArthur; *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Matthew*; 6:25-34).

✓ Illust: J. H. Jowett (an influential British Protestant preacher; 1864 – 1923) once said, “The real measure of our wealth is how much we would be worth if we lost all our money.”

Matt 6:21, 24 ~ “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. ... ²⁴No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.”

1 Tim 6:6-10 ~ “But godliness with contentment is great gain, ⁷for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. ⁸But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. ⁹But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. ¹⁰For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.”

Mark 10:23 ~ “And Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, ‘How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!’”

Luke 12:15 ~ “And he said to them, ‘Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.’”

➤ 1 Corinthians 16:1-4, is a short passage that is loaded with biblical truths and practical applications concerning money and giving. To help us better understand this portion of Scripture, I have divided the passage with two major headings and outlined several pragmatic subpoints.

I. Concerning the collecting of the offering (vs.1-2)

➤ The first two verses represent the first major heading, as Paul addresses the church’s “*collection*” (*logeia*; vs.1, 2) of the offering – or, more exactly, “the act of collecting” the offering.

1 Cor 16:1-2 ~ “Now concerning the collection for the saints: as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do. ²On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come.”

➤ From these verses we can identify both the purpose and the principles of giving.

A. The purpose of giving (vs.1)

➤ In 1 Corinthians 16:1, Paul was specifically referring to money collected (raised) by the Gentile churches in order to support the (mother) church in Jerusalem: “*Now concerning the collection for the saints: as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do*” (vs.1). It is important to notice that this money was for Christians and from Christians (“*for the saints*” [*hagios*] ... “*directed the churches*” [*ekklēsia*]) – from a church and to a church. In other words, church money is God’s money to be used for God’s people and for God’s work.

✓ Illust: “Because the Christians in Jerusalem had been persecuted for many years, their economic plight was made even more serious. Many of them were put out of their own homes, stripped of possessions, prevented from getting any but the most menial of jobs, and even imprisoned (Acts 8:1-3; 1Thess.2:14). Though most of the believers in Jerusalem were Jews, few, if any, of them benefited from the welfare distributions of the synagogues. Because many of the early Jewish converts to Christianity were pilgrims (cf. Acts 2:5), it is likely that some of them chose to stay in Jerusalem in order to be a part of the Christian fellowship there. Despite the fact that believers shared everything they had with those in need, even to the point of ‘selling their property and possessions’ (Acts 2:44-45; 4:34), their resources obviously did not last indefinitely” (John MacArthur; *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: 1 Corinthians*; 16:1).

➤ Giving financial relief to the church in Jerusalem was just one way in which churches were to utilize their offerings. In the Bible, we can find at least three reasons (uses) for the collection of the offering in church.

1. For the church's ministry needs

As already mentioned, the apostle commanded the churches to raise money to help other churches as well as other church ministries, including Paul as a missionary. But it is important to note that this was not “extra” or “leftover” money in the church. We can readily see in Scripture that this offering was sacrificial and substantial.

2 Cor 8:1-5 ~ “We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia [a region in northern Greece; the churches at Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea], ²for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. ³For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, ⁴begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints – ⁵and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us.”

2 Cor 9:12-15 ~ “For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God. ¹³By their approval of this service, they will glorify God because of your submission that comes from your confession of the gospel of Christ, and the generosity of your contribution for them and for all others, ¹⁴while they long for you and pray for you, because of the surpassing grace of God upon you. ¹⁵Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!”

Phil 4:14-20 ~ “Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble. ¹⁵And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only. ¹⁶Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again. ¹⁷Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit. ¹⁸I have received full payment, and more. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. ¹⁹And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. ²⁰To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen.”

2. For Christians, in the church, who are poor or in need

We also see in Scripture that the church collected money to help other Christians who were poor or in need financial help – to those in the church and in other churches. This is definitely not socialism or any socialistic program (which is a government mandated distribution of wealth), but a voluntary (heart-felt and Spirit-led) action from those within the church to help those who were in need.

Acts 2:44-45 ~ “And all who believed were together and had all things in common. ⁴⁵And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need.”

Acts 4:32-35 ~ “Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common. ³³And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. ³⁴There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold ³⁵and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.”

2 Cor 8:13-14 ~ “For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened, but that as a matter of fairness ¹⁴your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need, that there may be fairness.”

Gal 6:10 ~ “So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.”

1 John 3:17-18 ~ “But if anyone has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him? ¹⁸Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.”

3. For Christian pastors, preachers, teachers, and leaders

A third purpose in giving financially to the church is to support the spiritual leaders in the church who are actively shepherding, preaching/teaching, and leading. This is to compensate them for the hours they work in service to the church. Clearly, church leaders should not be in ministry “for the money.” But equally clear is that those in the church, who are benefitting from the ministry of these spiritual leaders, should financially support those spiritual leaders who serving them – especially those who teach and preach (which involves a great many hours of study and preparation).

1 Cor 9:13-14 ~ “Do you not know that those who are employed in the temple service get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in the sacrificial offerings? ¹⁴In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel.”

Gal 6:6 ~ “Let the one who is taught the word share all good things with the one who teaches.”

1 Tim 5:17-18 ~ “Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. ¹⁸For the Scripture says, ‘You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain,’ and, ‘The laborer deserves his wages.’”

- The Christians first financial obligation of the church is to support the work of God through the people of God. The “*collection*” (vs.1, 2) is to be from the church and for the church (and ministries). Ultimately, the purpose of giving is to use God’s money, according to God’s will, for God’s glory.

B. The principles of giving (vs.2)

- One of the first things we must understand about our money (in addition to our lives and all our material possessions) is that it all belongs to God (see Deut.8:18; Ps.24:1; Job 41:11; 1Cor.6:19-20;). Everything we have belongs to God. The Bible states that we are merely stewards/managers of God’s resources. And, one day, we will all stand before God to give an account Him as to how we managed that which He entrusted to us. Did we waste or squander it? Did we spend it on ungodly or unspiritual things? Or did we use it according to His Word and for His glory?

✓ Illust: There is an old story of a grandma who looked after her grandson on the weekends. Each Sunday morning she would give her grandson two nickels – one for the offering plate at church, and one for ice cream on the way back home. One Sunday, the young grandson was skipping across a bridge on his way to church when he accidentally dropped one of the nickels into the river below. He paused for a moment and said, “Oops, there goes God’s nickel.” Why is it always “God’s nickel” that gets lost or sacrificed?

Mal 3:8-11 ~ “Will man rob God? Yet you are robbing me. But you say, ‘How have we robbed you?’ In your tithes and contributions. ⁹You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me, the whole nation of you. ¹⁰Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put

me to the test, says the Lord of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need.”

➤ 1 Corinthians 16:2 is loaded with pragmatic, universal, principles that should govern our giving. These principles can be group into four categories – answering four questions, that the Corinthians probably had, concerning the Christian’s regular giving to the church.

1. When / How often?

First, we see that our giving should be done regularly and faithfully. While not to be taken legalistically, Paul instructed these Christians to bring their offerings to the church *“On the first day of every week”* (vs.2). The heart of this teaching is that our giving should not be sporadic or inconsistent – giving occasionally only when we have “excess”, or think about it, when we feel the need. Weekly giving is a regular recognition that God has blessed us, a regularly reminder of how God provides for us, and a regular expression that God is our greatest treasure.

Notice that *“the first day of every week”* (vs.2) would be Sunday (see Matt.28:1; Acts 20:7), which indicates that our giving should be a regular part of our weekly church attendance and corporate worship. We should view the giving of our offerings as a part of our worship service; as an act of worship.

Heb 10:24-25 ~ “And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, ²⁵not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.”

2. Who?

Secondly, we find that giving is a universal command: *“each of you”* (vs.2) – a command for every believer, not just those who are wealthy or those who are generous. Every believer should be financially contributing to the ministry of the church. There should be no “freeloaders” in the church, those who always take but never give. All Christians are to participate in *“the collection for the saints”* (vs.1).

The Bible teaches that every Christian is responsible to give their portion – not equal amounts but equal sacrifice. This is illustrated in the concept of the “tithe”, where each person was responsible to give a tenth of their gross income. The “tithe” is not to be a legalistic offering, but a minimum standard of giving that is proportionate to all people (where the sacrifice of our giving starts, not stops). People often think that “tithing” is an Old Testament concept and therefore not binding on New Testament Christians. The truth is, both the Old and New Testaments teach that believers should give more than ten-percent of their income to the Lord (see Acts 2:44-45; 4:34-35; 2Cor.8:3).

Luke 21:1-4 ~ “Jesus looked up and saw the rich [*plousios*] putting their gifts into the offering box, ²and he saw a poor [*penichros*] widow put in two small copper coins [*duo lepton*; a Jewish bronze or copper coin worth about 1/128 of a denarius (which was a day’s wage for a laborer)]. ³And he said, ‘Truly, I tell you, this poor [*ptōchos*; poor, needy] widow has put in more than all of them. ⁴For they all contributed out of their abundance [*perisseuō*; excess], but she out of her poverty [*hysterēma*; lacking] put in all she had to live on.”

Every Christian should be generously giving to the work of the Lord; not equal amounts, but equal sacrifice.

3. What / how?

A Christian’s giving is between them and the Lord (which is one reason why the pastors at Skyline never look at an individual’s giving). This means that no one should regulate or

mandate another Christian's giving, and that the Christian should not give insincerely or obligatorily.

2 Cor 9:6-7 ~ “The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. ⁷Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”

Acts 5:1-11 ~ “But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, ²and with his wife's knowledge he kept back for himself some of the proceeds and brought only a part of it and laid it at the apostles' feet. ³But Peter said, ‘Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land? ⁴While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to man but to God.’ ⁵When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and breathed his last. And great fear came upon all who heard of it. ...”

⁷After an interval of about three hours his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. ⁸And Peter said to her, ‘Tell me whether you sold the land for so much.’ And she said, ‘Yes, for so much.’ ⁹But Peter said to her, ‘How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Behold, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out.’ ¹⁰Immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last. When the young men came in they found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. ¹¹And great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of these things.”

The guiding principle concerning what or how to give is actually quite simple: *“put something aside and store it up”* (vs.2). A Christian's offering should be voluntary and intentional. We must not give God the “leftovers”, nor should we randomly give only when we feel like it. The Christian's offering to the church should be prayerfully, and intentionally, allocated and dedicated for that purpose – “set it aside and save it.” The phrase *“store it up”* (vs.2) refers to collecting or treasuring something (*thēsaurizō*; from which our English word thesaurus is derived). The practical point being that the money we set aside as an offering to the Lord, should not be used to pay bills or to go on vacation.

Matt 6:19-21 ~ “Do not lay up [*thēsaurizō*] for yourselves treasures [*thēsauros*] on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, ²⁰but lay up [*thēsaurizō*] for yourselves treasures [*thēsauros*] in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹For where your treasure [*thēsauros*] is, there your heart will be also.”

Luke 12:15-21 ~ “And [Jesus] said to them, ‘Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.’ ¹⁶And he told them a parable, saying, ‘The land of a rich man produced plentifully, ¹⁷and he thought to himself, ‘What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?’ ¹⁸And he said, ‘I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. ¹⁹And I will say to my soul, ‘Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.’ ²⁰But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’ ²¹So is the one who lays up treasure [*thēsaurizō*] for himself and is not rich toward God.”

Notice, again, that one's giving is in proportion to their income: *“as he may prosper”* (vs.2; *“to the extent God has blessed you”* [NET] *“in keeping with his income”* [NIV]). This phrase captures one Greek word (*euodoō*), which literally means “to be helped or to prosper on the road.” It carries with it the description of someone who is prospering or succeeding along the way. Therefore, the principle that Paul is teaching is that each believer should give according to

the prosperity or success they had that week. This does not mean, however, that believers should simply give out of their profits or abundance. Rather, they are instructed to give out of (according to) all their earnings for the week.

✓ Illust: “The meaning is then that one’s giving should be in direct proportion to the way one prospers; it should be determined as a matter of principle, not something done on impulse (Leon Morris; *1 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*; 16:2).

✓ Illust: “God prospers me not to raise my standard of living, but to raise my standard of giving” (Randy Alcorn; *The Treasure Principle*; p.75).

4. Why?

As Christians, we should be giving regularly, generously (sacrificially), sincerely, faithfully, joyfully, worshipfully, and purposely. For we are called to be good stewards of the resources and abilities God has given us. Paul exhorted the Corinthian Christians to do this, saying, “*so that there will be no collecting when I come*” (vs.2). In other words, Christians should be providing for the financial needs of the church without having to be reminded, or prodded to give.

II. Concerning the sending of the offering (vs.3-4)

➤ Paul also gave simple and brief instructions concerning the sending of the offering.

1 Cor 16:3-4 ~ “And when I arrive, I will send those whom you accredit by letter to carry your gift to Jerusalem. ⁴If it seems advisable that I should go also, they will accompany me.”

➤ Paul desires to protect both the safety and integrity of the gift. This has tremendous implications for the church today. At least two practical guidelines can be derived from these verses.

A. Sent with those who are approved (vs.3)

➤ First, we see that the offering needed to be sent with approved handlers: “*And when I arrive, I will send those whom you accredit by letter to carry your gift to Jerusalem*” (vs.3). The word “accredit” (*dokimazō*; vs.3) refers to those who have been tested (examined) and approved. In other words, the offering is to be handled by “*those*” (plural) who are spiritually mature and trustworthy. This ensures the security of the money, but it also protects those who handle (“*carry*”) the money from temptation and accusation.

Once the offering has been received, the church needs to make sure that it is handled by those who have spiritual integrity and maturity. Too often, the one in charge of finances in the church is the one with the most money. But wealth is not a sign of spiritual maturity, nor is it a sign that one is approved for the job (a person could gain wealth by dishonest means). Each church must approve – based on biblical and spiritual characteristics – those who are responsible for the handling of the money in the church.

B. Sent as an offering that is approved (vs.4)

➤ Second, Paul implies that the offering itself should be appropriate: “*If it seems advisable that I should go also, they will accompany me*” (vs.4). This is a tricky verse to interpret. The key word here is “*advisable*” (*axios*) which can mean worthy, deserving, or appropriate. It could simply mean that Paul was not sure if his schedule would allow him to go to Jerusalem with those entrusted with the offering. Or, it could mean that Paul would go with them to Jerusalem if the amount of money was appropriate, or generous, enough to be worth his time. Or, which I think is the best interpretation, it could mean that Paul would go with them if the offering was large enough to necessitate him joining them.

In any case, it is clear that Paul wanted the Corinthian church to provide a generous offering to be given to the suffering church in Jerusalem.

Conclusion

- God does not need your money (God does not need anything; Acts 17:25). He is not concerned about the amount of the gift, but the heart of the giver. For the heart reveals the true attitude one has about God and about godly things. Remember, a person's giving can serve as a spiritual barometer of his/her true spiritual priorities and maturity.
- ✓ Illust: John Wesley was an extremely wealthy man. We think of John Wesley as a great man of God, of prayer, and devoted to time in the Word of God. He was up every morning for hours studying in the Greek text. We think of him as a man of some low means, but John Wesley was an extremely wealthy man. He gained his wealth from the hymns he wrote and the books he penned. At one period in his life, he gave away forty thousand pounds sterling – a fortune in his time. Yet, when John Wesley died his estate was worth twenty-eight pounds. He didn't lay up his treasure on earth. When it came in it went right back out into the lives of the people – invested in the kingdom of God.
- From time to time, it is important for us to be reminded “*where your treasure is, there your heart will be also*” (Matt.6:21), and to ask ourselves “Does my giving reflect my heart for the Lord and the Lord's work?”