

Concerning the Collection.

(I Corinthians 16:1-2, II Corinthians 8 and 9).

Possibly, of all subjects with regard to our worship on the first day of the week, this one is one of those that we often have the most trouble with. A proper understanding of the texts will give us a clearer appreciation as to the place of giving in our worship with God.

Some words by the apostle Paul should help us to understand more about this. *"Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come" (KJV)*

This idea of a **"collection"** is not just a suggestion or some good advice, but an **"order"** that an inspired apostle of Jesus Christ gave both to the churches of Galatia and to the church at Corinth and by inference, to the church today. Paul provides instruction so that we may have more precise information on the subject. This activity finds its expression in our corporate assembly on the first day of the week.

Of our first passage (I Corinthians 16:1-3) we will find that giving here is about meeting church needs. Giving is to be periodic ("On the first day of every week), personal ("each one of you"), planned ("as he may prosper"), preventive (no collections when I come), and purposeful (take your gift to Jerusalem).

The back ground of this passage is about the taking up of a collection for the poor saints in Jerusalem by the gentile congregations, as suggested by the meeting in (Galatians 2:10).ⁱ

The background of the (II Corinthians 8-9) is about Paul admonishing the Corinthians to complete what they had started, and promised, with regard to giving for the relief of the saints in Jerusalem. Now, let's ask some questions here.

When is the collection to be taken?

"Upon the first day of the week." Why specify the first day of the week? We know that this is the day upon which early Christians met for worship, as they gathered together to break bread (Acts 20:7). Later writers identify it as **"the Lord's day"** (Revelation 1:10). Why God chose this day for this special purpose is not revealed, but it may have something to do with the fact that Jesus rose on the first day of the week (Mark 16:9). But since God specified that the collection was to be **"upon the first day of the week,"** it is the only day that is authorized for a collection by the church. The actual Greek in this (verse two) literally says,

"On the first day of every week," or **"On every Sunday,"** or as Hodge states, **"the collection was to be made every Sunday."**

Who should participate in his collection?

"Let every one of you." To whom was this statement directed? "Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints" (1 Corinthians 1:2). Those directed to engage in this collection are identified as "the church" and

"saints." The church consists of those who have been saved (Acts 2:47). Saints are those who have been separated from sin (Ephesians 2:19). Basically, the church is made up of those who are saints, Christians, the called of God.

What exactly is the collection?

It is an activity in which each member can "*lay by him*" or put aside his contribution to the Lord. The New King James Version says "*lay something aside.*" It is a gathering together of money for a purpose. According to the New Testament, congregations were and are authorized to use their collected funds for three purposes.

The first is to support gospel preaching and preachers (2 Corinthians 11:8, Philippians 4:15-16).

The second is to provide whatever is necessary for the edification of the saints.

(1 Corinthians 14:26, Ephesians 4:11-16).

The third is benevolence for needy saints (Acts 11:27-30, Romans 15:26-28).

How did they obtain the funds for these things? It is to be noted that this, (I Corinthians 16) is the only passage which shows how the money is to be collected.

Where is the collection to be put?

"In store." The New King James Version says, "*Storing up.*" This term implies putting something into a place where goods or precious things are collected and laid up, a storeroom, or treasury. The Jews had a treasury at the temple into which people could put their gifts (Mark 12:41). Even Jesus and His disciples, as they went about their work, had a "bag" into which they put their money for buying what they needed (John 12:6, 13:29). The early disciples brought their money to a common place, after which it was no longer under their individual control (Acts 4:34-37, 5:1-4). This authorizes a church to have a treasury, out of which whatever scriptural needs it has (benevolence, evangelism, or edification) are to be taken.

How is this collection to be given by each individual?

"As God hath prospered him," or in keeping with his income. The expression, "as he may prosper" is one word in Greek (*euodotai*). 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).

Everything we have is from God, the source of every good and perfect gift (James 1:17). In fact, giving actually begins with God. He has asked that a certain part of that be returned to Him for the work of the church, but He has not specified an amount or percentage. In the Old Testament, He commanded the children of Israel to give a tithe, which is a tenth (Deuteronomy 12:6-11). However, in the New Testament, tithing is not authorized. The collection is to be a free-will offering in proportion to our prosperity. (The "Free Will" is true, if kept in context. We also have "free will" to attend services or not. Does that mean

we're being faithful and rendering acceptable service when we choose not to attend? What we have free will about, **when it comes to giving** is our assessment of how much we have prospered, and we all have, and how much of that prosperity we will contribute directly to our work as the congregation of the Lord's people). "Every man according as he purposes in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Corinthians 9:6-7). This means that when I give I give not ***grudgingly*** (Greek: 'not of grief'), as if I were sorry to part with my gift or money, but give cheerfully. This implies an attitude, does it not?

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." (W Jackson)

Why should the collection be taken?

"That there be no gatherings when I come." The word translated "gatherings" is a plural form of the same word translated "collection." God has ordained that elders should oversee the work of the local church (1 Peter 5:1-3). This would include making decisions on what to do with the funds collected. These decisions would still have to be made by the brethren during times before elders are appointed (Acts 14:23). When a need arises, Paul is saying that if the money is collected and put in store, then no one will need to go around to people's houses and gather the money. Rather, it will already be together to draw upon in meeting the need. The only way to do this was on the first day of every week when the saints met for worship. (Allan's ETSPM notes.)

"The collection" is a subject about which some do not like preached. However, it is certainly a biblical subject and therefore teaching the whole counsel of God demands that it be addressed. Furthermore, there is definitely a benefit to hearing and practicing what the Bible says on this topic because the Lord Himself said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). Those who claim to be God's redeemed should be eager to support the church by giving of their means into the church treasury.

Conclusion:

Brethren, God has given us, as Christians, the things that we need both physically and spiritually. In the shadow of this we must be and should be givers of ourselves and our financial means. Why? That the lord's work here in New Plymouth can, and will continue to succeed. Let every one of us always strive to have the right attitude of heart and mind as we give to God that which we have prospered each week. I remember that one said to me once, *"Allan, ultimately it is the giving of our lives to Him that will keep us in His light."*

In the masters service,

Allan Fowell.
