

Title: About the Collection

Text: 1 Corinthians 16.1-4

Theme: Unified giving

Series: 1 Corinthians #96

Prop Stmt Giving reflects your understanding and love of Christ and his church.

Warning: Today's sermon is about money. It's not about money in general, but is about your money. In fact, this sermon is specifically about the regular collecting of an offering by a church. If sermons on money make you uneasy, and you do not think that I ought to preach about this subject, then I will count to 3 while you slip out now.

Since you did not leave, I am assuming that you are ready for me to bring it on, so, let's go. And think of it, what a Sunday to talk about money! After all, this week has been pretty interesting in terms of financial news, has it not?

Read Text:

These opening words make it sound like that this is a topic with which the Corinthians are already familiar. This particular offering is part of a story that originated in Acts 11. Paul is a relatively recent convert to Christianity who, along with Barnabas ministered to the church and the city of Antioch for about a year. (read end of v.26-30) So, in response to this famine that affected everyone, but that had an unusually harsh affect upon Jerusalem, the rest of the believers determined to take up an offering. Jerusalem was notoriously poor in those days anyway. The city itself depended upon the generosity of Jews who lived outside of the city, but charitable contributions as a whole would more than likely not help out the believing Jews who were at odds with their countrymen and especially the leaders. The historian Josephus said that this famine occurred around A.D. 46. So, when Paul and Barnabas set out on their missionary journey, they not only established churches, they obviously gave these new believers, many of whom were Gentiles, an opportunity to participate in this offering that was for the relief of the poor in Jerusalem. Meanwhile, in the church in Jerusalem, a serious problem began to arise about if and how Gentiles should be assimilated into the church. This resulted in the calling together of a council (Acts 15). Paul mentions this in Galatians 2.10 when he says, "All they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do." It is possible that Paul collected an initial offering for the poor in Jerusalem, and is now in the process of collecting another one. So, whether it is one offering or a second offering for the same purpose really doesn't matter. What is important to note is that this offering was very important. It was very important to Paul personally because he was charged with this responsibility and he was following through with his task. But, it was more than a task that he had to do. Paul knew how important this was to the body of Christ. It is much harder to remain angry at someone when they give you a special gift for which they sacrificed a great deal. There was a growing mistrust between the church in Jerusalem (which was predominantly Jewish) and the churches in the rest of the Roman empire, which by now were predominantly Gentile. Jerusalem was the mother church. The gospel started there, and everyone not only had a sense of responsibility for the welfare of the believers there, they also wanted to express

their unity and solidarity. Political pressure was building in Jerusalem that would eventually result in a rebellion that was crushed so severely by Rome in a few short years from then, that Israel as a nation would cease to exist for almost 1,900 years. These were tense days that brought with them, much suspicion against Paul and Gentile believers. Therefore, this offering mattered to him. He had to see this through. But, it seemed to take forever to get this offering collected. It is now about A.D. 56 and Paul is in Ephesus, telling the Corinthians that when he comes, he wants them to be ready to participate in this offering. Well, he did go, but the problems he dealt with never made it possible to collect the offering. This visit is known as the painful visit because things did not go well at all. Without unity, forget taking an offering. Paul writes another letter to the Corinthian believers, they finally get things straightened out, so Paul writes a third letter, which is known as 2nd Corinthians, in which Paul reminds them that he still is going to collect that offering. He finally gets to Corinth, collects the offering, and receives word from the believers in Rome that they want him to come and visit them. Paul says that he cannot right now because he has to take this offering to Jerusalem, but because he cannot visit them and preach to them, he writes a little letter to them to study until he can get there. That little letter is the glorious deposit given to the church by the Holy Spirit known as the book of Romans. So, this offering is a big deal. Paul's hope is that it will go a long way to help in the building of relational harmony based on theological unity, in the midst of ethnic diversity. Paul is a Jew and loves the Jews. Paul is also the apostle to the Gentiles and loves the Gentiles. In Christ, these two are one. Paul knows it. He sees it. He has experienced tastes of it, and he longs for all of the believers to know it as well.

This offering is based on the fact that this church in Corinth is part of The Church. What they did affected the entire church. The problems that they were experiencing affected their ability to participate in helping other believers. We have the capacity to be an incredible encouragement to other believers. Our unity and our ongoing commitment to keep following and obeying and growing in Christ provide a wonderful harbor for people. But, we can blow the whole thing up and train-wreck lives here and discourage the believers with whom we have relationships all over this world. What you do, what we do affects the entire body. Your life affects our life, and our life affects their life. At the same time, their needs are our needs.

But this issue of money is a sensitive matter. Giving almost like nothing else reveals our heart's priorities, because giving can open us up toward bitterness when we don't get the response that we want or had hoped for. Paul finally took the offering to Jerusalem, and the very people for whom he busted himself for several years to get an offering for, end up arresting him and try to kill him. But we all know this. The collecting of offerings and the handling of money by the church is necessary and important and is presented in the Bible as a regular part of the life of a church. These four verses yield six points that we need to consider, understand and heed.

1. **Giving an offering is practical.**

“Now about the collection”

God is not afraid to talk about the issue of money, neither should we be afraid to address it. Yes, this issue is abused and there are plenty of well-publicized cases of abuse, but abuse is not an excuse for neglect. Fact is, giving is part of your work in the Lord.

How well you understand the glorious theology of chapter 15 will be seen in how well you follow through with your responsibility to give as laid out in chapter 16. The triumphant truths of 15 put on work boots and gloves in 16. “Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord.” Speaking of giving... Fact is, this issue is related to the issue that Paul just dealt with. The opening grammatical construction is the same one that Paul used in 7.1, 25; 8.1; 12.1, here and in 16.12. From his sources, Paul has learned what the issues are that are troubling the church at Corinth. Is there is some scuttle-talk about this offering? Did they hear that Paul was collecting this offering from the Gentile churches and they want to know what’s up with that? Perhaps, but maybe there is just some confusion about it as well? Fact is taking a collection for religious purposes was a regular part of the Corinthian world. However, here is the enormous difference.

Pagan religions tend to divide the “sacred” from the secular, which is seen in the disconnect that they make between the body and the soul. Some of this same idea is carried into the organization itself where the leaders are viewed as having special secrets, special powers and therefore special privileges. You follow their orders, give them money and don’t ask questions. They presumably live on a different level than you do and apparently by a different set of rules. NT Christianity is radically different. We are all part of the body of Christ, whether elders/pastors, teachers, deacons/deaconess, helpers, encouragers, counselors, encouragers, organizers, administrators, mercy-showers or whatever. Every part is a part of the whole and every part is accountable to the whole and the whole in a sense is accountable to the parts. What we will see in this text is mutual responsibility, and corporate accountability.

Giving an offering is practical, earthy stuff. It does not sound lofty and quite as spiritual as perhaps other things...

2. **Giving an offering is personal.**

“each one of you”

A. **It is personal for each of us.**

Your giving is not only a response to God’s grace to you, it is an expression of your commitment to the unity of the local body and your commitment to the needs of the entire church community. You have a responsibility and I trust that before this message is over, that God will help cultivate in your heart a joyful and intense desire to participate in giving. “Well, somebody else will do it.” Maybe. But that is not the point. If we had several people who had deep pockets and who helped carry the ministry on their financial backs, and everyone sort of knew it...that could be a terrible thing for us if the rest of the church assumed that their part was not necessary or needed. Being part of the family means being a giver. That is true in your home, where every person must be taught to

carry his/her own part of the load and that is true in the church family as well. A little baby takes up so much time because he/she is a taker. But, part of the task of a parent is to train their children to live as an adult. Adults give. So, welcome to the big leagues. If you are going to grow and mature as a follower of Christ, then you are going to grow and mature as a giver. It is personal for each of us.

B. It is personal for all of us.

“Do what I told the Galatian churches to do.”

The believers in Corinth were called upon to do what other believers are called upon to do. Each church has to grow up in this area.

3. Giving an offering is planned.

“On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money...saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made.”

A. Planned giving cultivates a life of giving.

This is planned giving. What do you think happened to the people who took this heart? Every Sunday, they set apart a portion of their income in order to participate in this offering. Sunday after Sunday after Sunday, meant that they developed a habit of giving. That is a good habit. Learning to live with open hearts and open hands is a huge issue for any person and for a church family.

By the way, as an aside, this is the first official mention in the NT of the church gathering on Sunday as the day of worship. It is interesting to note that Paul avoids using the actual word, “Sunday” perhaps since the word was originally chosen to commemorate the worship of the sun god.

B. Planned giving helps guard against abuse and manipulation.

The planning of giving by each person helps to eliminate an atmosphere of manipulation and emotionalism. Paul does not want to come and launch a fund-raising campaign because his offering, while very important to him is not about him. He sees the strategic importance of this offering more than perhaps anyone, and yet, he does not want the focus of his visit to be spent on raising the money.

C. Planned giving increases joy.

When you plan to obey and you plan to participate, and you take the steps to do that, then, when the actual event comes (in this case, the collection for the saints in Jerusalem), and you are able to have a substantive part in that, you are so jazzed, not only because of being able to give, but your heart is stretched by the entire process. Your heart is knit

with others who have done the same thing. Your life is not poorer at all. Fact is, your life is far richer.

4. **Giving an offering is proportionate.**

“set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income”

Now, this is not the only text in the NT that mentions how much we should give, but it does not mention a specific amount, or a specific percentage. Why not? Well, one thing is clear; this is not a tax! Wouldn't it have been easier if Paul had just told everyone an amount? Maybe, initially. But giving is one of those issues that was never intended by God to be done like paying a bill. Giving is an act of worship. Clearly, your giving should be regular, but how have you been blessed by God? Even those who are blessed with little, need to be faithful in how they steward that little, and those who are blessed with more have a heavier responsibility. And you do not have to justify the amount that you give to me. First of all, I don't want to know and I don't know. But more importantly, I didn't give it to you in the first place – God did.

The truth is, if we took this to heart, like we claim to believe the Bible, we could be the source of incredible blessings and ministries in the immediate future. How did God bless you this week? What are we doing about it?

5. **Giving an offering is protected.**

Verses 3 and 4 are so refreshing. Instead of being told to just give your money and don't ask any questions, because we are smarter than you, sort of stuff, Paul is very careful to protect, not only the money from being stolen, he is careful to put into a place a system whereby he is protected from accusations. Paul looks to the Corinthian church to approve and send their own representatives to go to Jerusalem with the money. This way, they know who is handling the money. They know that the money is going to go to its intended purpose and these men will come back to report. There is no condescending attitude here, is there? In addition to that, Paul wants to protect the representatives by providing them with letters of introduction so that they will be received well by the leaders of the Jerusalem church in case Paul is not with them. So, the Corinthian church is protected, the representatives are protected, Paul is protected and because of several guys taking this offering, the offering itself is protected. By adopting a process that everyone can know about and be comfortable with ultimately helps to protect the reputation of the gospel. If questions arise about how money is being handled and if the books are out of order, even if someone is not doing anything corrupt, the end result is that the reputation of the gospel suffers.

As a member of the church, you have a right to know how the money is being used and those who are charged with that responsibility have the responsibility to communicate that to you. That task can get a bit tedious, but it is good tediousness.

Concl.

What does this text have to do with Christ? His fingerprints are all over it, aren't they? The world is usually motivated to give based on need, and notoriety. If you give, we'll put your name on our plaque, on our wall, etc. But, Christian giving is based on the economics of gracious abundance. God, through Christ has given us everything. "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich." (2 Cor. 8.9) We follow Christ. Like Christ we give so that others might be enriched by the gospel and in so doing, we all are enriched.

Giving is ultimately about, from and for Jesus.
Train your children to be givers by teaching them to give.
Train yourself to love by being a regular giver.